

Military Connection to Firefighting

Michael Archer | January 30, 2009

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When you look at a firefighting operation, particularly in wildland firefighting, you see echoes of military operations. This similarity in philosophies goes more than skin deep. Fire department recruiters will tell you that there are several qualities they look for in new recruits that military veterans have such as, respect for the chain of command; teamwork; integrity; and maturity. Let's take a closer look at how two seemingly different worlds parallel each other.

Chain Of Command

As in military operations, firefighting requires a distinct command structure and it's imperative that firemen work within that chain of command. Even in their earliest training experiences, firefighters are conditioned to follow the chain. For students taking fire science classes, instructors emphasize that trainees have a captain that they communicate through. In fact, an instructor will refuse to speak directly with a student and direct them to channel their questions through their captain. In fire agencies, this same way of doing things is cultivated and encouraged for both new and old members.

Teamwork

Every firefighter works as the member of a team, just like the military. The military adheres to an all-arms approach to warfare, combining artillery, armor, infantry, and air power into an integrated fighting force, just like firefighters who combine people with distinct duties into a force that can tame a fire.

Captains guide the team of firefighters through the operation, and determine the best approach to fight a fire and lead the attack. Engineers drive the apparatus (fire trucks, etc.) and man the pump controls at a fire. A tillerman on large apparatus guides the rear of the rig around corners. Individual firefighters are given tasks to enable the team to achieve its objective, in this case saving lives and property.

In wildland firefighting, there are specialized duties, such as smokejumpers, the folks who parachute into areas adjacent to wildfires, helitack crews, who are the air-mobile troops that helicopter into a fire area, and of course the air-tanker crews, who pilot their firefighting aircraft into the heart of a fire. Everyone knows their job and works to integrate their efforts into a team approach.

Integrity

How many times has a battle depended on the actions of a single Soldier, Sailor or Airman to do his or her job? The same is true in firefighting. Personal accountability for doing their part to the best of their ability is a hallmark of successful firefighters and is the key to the successful resolution of an emergency, no matter how large or small.

ABOUT MICHAEL ARCHER



Michael Archer is a wildfire consultant and writer. He has written articles for *Home and Fire Magazine*, *Wildland Firefighter Magazine*, and other publications, lectured to many groups about fire issues, been quoted by Associated Press and USA Today reporters, and also appeared on cable and network TV discussing wildfire issues. Currently, he is acting as webmaster and technical consultant to Wildfire Research Network (www.wildfireresearch.org), a Los Angeles-based citizens' action group that promotes firefighting issues involving the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI).

His "Firebombers Incorporated" series of novels gives readers an intriguing "what-if" scenario on how 21st century technology could modernize the wildland firefighting force. His novel "Firestorm," received excellent reviews from *Writers Digest*, *The Nashville News*, *The VVA Veteran* (Vietnam Veterans of America's magazine) and firefighting professionals across the United States. His company, Firebomber Publications, donates 50 percent of net profits to organizations that support the families of injured and fallen firefighters.



You can visit his website at: www.firebomberpublications.com

Firestorm can be purchased at Amazon.com

Comments can be sent to: marcher47@firebomberpublications.com

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Maturity

This is an aspect of military life that many people may have never considered, but is of great importance to recruiters in the fire service. When servicemembers are given responsibility for millions of dollars worth of equipment, or have been asked to lead troops into combat situations, or given jurisdiction over a team to accomplish a task, the maturity of the individual grows accordingly.

The Payoff

What are the rewards to a fire service career? As with a military career, the fire service is a public service-oriented job. The public is served by being protected from auto accidents and medical emergencies (80 percent of city firefighter calls), as well as both structure and wildland fires. As a result, lots of towns and cities show their appreciation to firefighters with such things as tax breaks, parades, and general goodwill towards their fire warriors.

And a typical firefighter works only 10 or 12 days a month (24 hours per day, which includes bunking at the fire station overnight), which frees up lots of time for side jobs or projects around the house.

And when it comes to pay, even rookie firefighters can pull in mid-five-figure salaries, as well as earn substantial overtime pay by working extra shifts when they're in the mood. Those who decide to move into command positions can earn even more, typically six-figure incomes.

Firefighters get to retire at a younger age than workers in the corporate world, 55 being typical, opening up all sorts of possibilities for travel and time with family (or possibly starting a third career for some).

If this sounds like a career to look into, contact your local fire agencies (federal, state, county and municipal) to see what they have to offer. As one academy instructor said, in hard times it may just turn out to be your ticket to a better, more fulfilling career.

Looking for a career in the fire service? Check Military.com's [Veteran Job Board](#) to search careers in firefighting or law enforcement.

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