

The SBRETC Training the Best Firefighters

Michael Archer | May 04, 2009

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In the Inland Empire of Southern California, there resides a very unique facility, The San Bernardino Regional Emergency Training Center (SBRETC). This is a state-of-the-art Aircraft Rescue Firefighter (ARFF) training facility that educates fire professionals in Aircraft and Rescue Firefighting. Whereas all firefighting is inherently dangerous, it takes a special breed to tackle fighting fires in an environment where the structure has the potential to explode at any time. So what all is involved in training firefighters in doing this dangerous and unique brand of firefighting?

Variety

"We teach a basic 'Fire Control 5' firefighter class, which is 40 hours long, at SBRETC," explains Chief Gary Provansal, division chief for San Bernardino Fire Department and operations chief at SBRETC. "The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requires firefighters to be a certified structural firefighter before enrolling in the program."

"It's also handy if you're a paramedic because most of the departments are looking for paramedics as well," Provansal adds.

"You manage a small city within the airport grounds with the equivalent of a shopping mall including restaurants and stores, and many of the larger ones have hundreds of thousands of people traverse their terrain per day, so firefighters have all the emergency situations to respond to, in addition to the aircrash rescues where you have tin cans packed with 400 people."

As if that's not enough variety, Provansal points out that at some airports the firefighters don't just do aircrash rescue, but also law enforcement.

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

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"We also have an emergency vehicle training course specifically for the vehicles we use at the airport," says June Yamamoto, program administrator at SBRETC. "Mostly it's for airport firefighters, training them to become familiar with the aircraft rescue equipment. It's considerably different from what we use in municipal firefighting."

International Aspect

Don't let the "regional" portion of the SBRETC title fool you -- this is an international training facility. "We offer the basic course and advanced courses for the Western Region of the U.S., including the four western states, as well as Guam and the Marianas," Provansal explains. "And we're doing a lot of business lately with Canada, which is part of the international standards, so we have to change what we teach a little bit, but it works out very well there, too. I wrote an article when we worked with the French Fire Service about modern translation (English to metric)."

"We do have quite a number of Canadian groups coming in," adds Yamamoto. "We have Vancouver coming in tomorrow, we have Halifax coming in the end of the month, we just had Edmonton and a group from Yellowknife."

"The group from Yellowknife was standing here in the rain wearing their shorts and t-shirts remarking on what a great summer we have," Provansal says with a chuckle. "It was currently -40° at home."

Big Toys

These kids get all the best toys, including a massive 6X6 airport crash tender in addition to a Rosenbauer that's about two years old. "It's got a 3,000 gallon tank and an articulating boom with a snozzle, which has a piercing nozzle that can pierce through the aircraft skin," Provansal states proudly.

And for those video game enthusiasts this unit comes fully equipped. It also has a remote-controlled bumper turret. "It's like a giant video game inside with joysticks and 10 control switches on each stick. They're six-wheel drive and carry 500 lbs of dry chemical, as well as the foam and water (500 gallons of foam)," boasts Provansal.

Aggressive Attack

Different branches of the military take different approaches to fighting aircraft fires, and SBRETC follows the most aggressive version. "There's two methodologies going on with aircraft firefighting and it came from the military originally: to clear a path of escape for those who are on the airplane, and use a large application of foam to create a path for escape," Provansal explains. "We're now treating the inside of the aircraft as a structure, actually doing ventilation and entering the aircraft, doing a lot more handline work. Once you extinguish the main fires with the turrets, the guys get out and lay handlines, maintain the foam blanket, and effect a rescue."

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But what about those trapped passengers? "If you have an interior fire with a lot of smoke, they'll use fans to ventilate it, added Chief Provansal. "With your larger aircraft now they have a truck that lifts a fan up by the door hydraulically."

Military Edge

As you can probably imagine, there aren't a lot of ARFF jobs out there, with a limited number of airports, but veterans who have already trained as an ARFF have an edge over everybody else. Most of the credentials ARFFs earned in the military are transferable and those are the kind of skills departments look for.

But what if you don't have the credentials yet? "If they're starting from ground zero, I'd advise that they go to a junior college that provides basic fire training in the academy and then move on into being certified as a firefighter," said Chief Provansal.

And there may be more help in the future. "I know the ARFF Working Group, which is a professional group for the ARFF firefighters, is looking at offering online classes and are doing some Beta-testing," added Yamamoto. "For more info, go to their website at <http://www.arffwg.org/>

And for more info on this world-class academy, visit them on the web at <http://www.sbretc.org/> to learn more about the unique world of Aircraft Rescue Firefighting!

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