

USFS -- Vets Battle Blazes, Part 2

Michael Archer | February 24, 2010

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In our second installment of the [U.S. Forest Service \(USFS\) series](#), we examine Fire and Aviation Management. The USFS folks manage a fleet of helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft attacking wildfires across the U.S. Of the 34,250 USFS employees, less than 200 are in the Fire and Aviation group. This small, elite group of people coordinates what is probably the highest-profile aspect of wildland firefighting: air attack.

Diversified Duties

"We have about 122 positions in Aviation," explained Larry Brosnan, assistant director, USFS Fire and Aviation Management.

"There are about 40-50 pilot positions, we have a fleet of 12-14 lead planes that go out and direct air-tankers, directing traffic over the fires, they do reconnaissance flights, and coordinate fire activities from the air. And we have 20-30 aircraft inspector positions that go out and inspect contract aircraft [and] make sure the maintenance is done."

"We have forest aviation officers who actually work in the national forests who are responsible for the aviation operations on that forest," said Brosnan. "They will put together operation plans, safety plans, and monitor the aviation activities to make sure that they follow all the protocols and so forth."

"We also have a large number of management positions, including nine regional aviation officers that basically manage the aviation programs in each of the regions," he added. "We have the same number of regional aviation safety managers, who are all GS-13 or -14."

Entrance Requirements

As you would expect for an aviation job, certain minimum standards need to be met. In fact, prospective pilots will need to have their military certificates transferred over to FAA equivalent ratings. This is done by presenting a log book to the FAA.

"They will need about 1,500 hours of flight time and a 'Report of Transfer or Discharge' (DD-214) form to receive military preference when applying for these programs," explained Brosnan.

"There are a few positions that require a college education, but for the most part I don't know that we require a degree," he continued. "You'll need some safety training, such as a military safety training course, for safety positions."

Veterans' Edge

USFS hiring practices reflect their appreciation of vets, including the ability to directly appoint a new hire to a job without going through the competitive process typically required by other agencies.

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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"Two other programs are worth noting here: If you're a veteran with a 30 percent disability, you can be directly appointed. And the [Veterans Employment Opportunity Act](#) gives preference to eligible veterans that would only be available to employees of the Forest Service," Brosnan explained. "You may also get credit for your military time, so any time on active duty adds to your USFS retirement."

"Countless veterans found that the Fire and Aviation Management program offers a wide variety of employment opportunities that enable them to apply the skills that they developed and the experience that they gained through serving in the military to the challenging and critically important work of protecting lives, property, and natural resources as well as restoring fire to its natural role in the environment," said Tom Harbour, director of USFS Fire and Aviation Management.

"Veterans do very well in the program, in part because there are many similarities between the military and wildland fire environments and missions."

"Both environments are dynamic, fast paced, and multi-faceted and missions include safely transporting personnel, equipment, and supplies in hazardous terrain," Harbour continued. "In addition, veterans often have leadership qualities, skills, and experience that is highly valued and that enables them to succeed in all types of positions. For these reasons, we strongly encourage veterans to consider a career with our program."

Veterans' Success Stories

A number of vets thrived at USFS Aviation, including Brosnan, a Vietnam-era Army helicopter pilot.

"We have one in Region 6 who came directly from the military and has done very well in the position, and we have a Regional Aviation Officer in the Northwest, Dan Zimmerman -- who is a two-star general in the Army Reserves, who I believe is deployed right now -- who is a good example of people who have come from the military, and done well," Brosnan confirmed.

"Since I'm a former Marine helicopter pilot, they could use my help in the Fire Aviation office," added Ralph Dorn, Director of the USFS Office of Safety and Occupational Health. "I was in Fire Aviation for two years, where I worked on policy and I've been in the Forest Service for a little more than six years."

For more information on available jobs with USFS, go to <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/employment/rrst.php> or to [Military.com's Veteran Job](#) board to search for jobs in law enforcement or fire fighting.

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