

TRAVEL REPORT NASHVILLE, TN 2010

Sunday, October 3, 2010:

12 Firefighters team up at Brussels Airport. They'll head to Nashville, Tennessee for a training/ride along program with the Nashville fire department. It's the third program this year, after Macon (Georgia) and Colorado Springs (Colorado).

11 Candidates count on Eric to bring them over. Everything goes smooth, from first check in to the landing in Nashville, where they're welcomed by Carl and Fred.

Carl and Fred flew over a couple of days earlier. They decided to come over earlier to do some recon of the city and to work out last program issues with the NFD. They arrived on Friday, claimed a car and checked in at the Millennium Maxwell House on Rosa L. Parks Blvd. In the evening, they grabbed dinner and some beers downtown.

Since Carl is a huge Johnny Cash fan, and since this area is...Cashland, they visited his graveyard on Hendersonville Memory Gardens in Hendersonville, a 30 minute drive from Nashville. They met with 4 Belgians who were on a road trip from Atlanta to Austin. One of them lives only 15 minutes from Carl's. A couple of minutes later, approx. 20 people gather round the gravesite and start to play the guitar and sing some songs of the Man in Black. They start talking to us and shortly thereafter we're invited for a "Cash Night" in a hotel downtown. On the way back to the hotel, we stop at the Rivergate Mall for some shopping and some chicken wings at a nearby Hooters.

Around 0400 pm, we're picked up by Larry "CL" McCown, our assigned NFD chaperon. CL is a good guy, we get a warm welcome, it's like we've known each other for years now... We get a private tour throughout the city and we notice CL is a walking encyclopedia of fire service history, Nashville history, Tennessee history, U.S. history... He brings us down to Station 9, his fire hall, where we meet with some firefighters and paramedics. Later, we stop at stations 2, 13 and 19 where we get tours in each and every one of them.

He invites us for dinner at a Red Lobster, where we discuss some points at our itinerary for the next coming week. It all looks good and there's no doubt about it...CL is THE perfect guy for this program!

Back to Sunday...while our 12 Fire Observers are flying Brussels – Chicago – Nashville...

After having breakfast, we both decide to make a tour to all of our assigned fire stations, to point them out on a map and to get to know our way around town. We start with Station 13, followed by stations 26, 28, 29, 2 and 9. It's pretty easy, so our tour is wrapped up pretty quick. We stopped at the Hard Rock Café for lunch, and spent some time at Broadway.

So it's around 0800 pm when Carl and Fred welcome their 12 fellow firefighters. They're right on time and everybody is happy to be re-united. We get our luggage back, rent two extra minivans and direct ourselves to the hotel.

It takes about an hour to get installed and to shower for dinner. Carl and Fred drove the gang to an Outback Steakhouse on West End. Everybody is tired but is chatting, eating, laughing...the whole evening. It's now 1030 pm when we're back at the hotel for a good night of sleep.



Monday, October 4th, 2010:

The whole group was up and running pretty early. Some go for the breakfast buffet at the hotel, others grabbed a coffee at Starbucks. At 0800 am, all 14 reported in the lobby in their shiny class A uniform. Everybody was introduced to CL prior of loading up the vans to go down to NFD HQ.

We were welcomed by Chief Yates, Deputy Chief of Department. The man who gave us permission to come over for this program. However there's a Director above him, Chief Yates runs the show. He's like the boss of the department and is respected by many of his personnel. We start with some introductions, followed by some stories of the flooding.

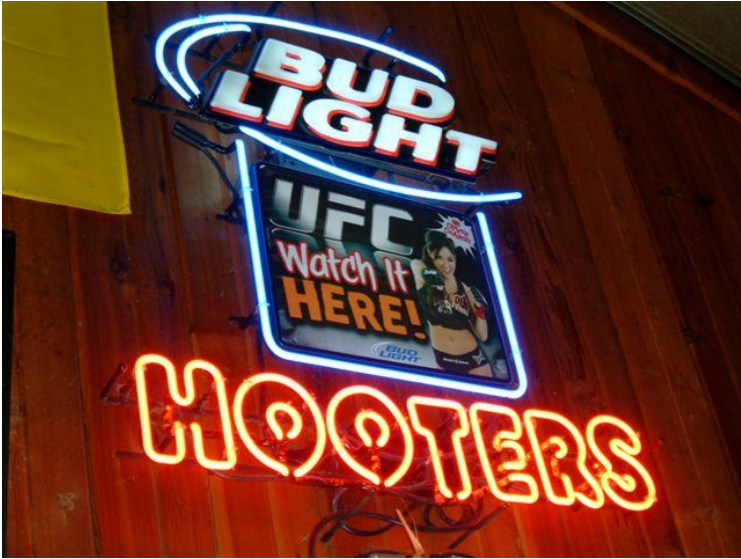
Heavy rainfall on May 1st and 2nd caused flooding in the states of Tennessee, Kentucky and Mississippi. Nashville was hit hard as well, the crest was at more than 50 ft. at some places. Streets were blank, highways became rivers...the fireboat navigated on the Interstate and docked at some time up on Broadway...! 10 People were killed, the last body was found only 10 days prior to our arrival in Nashville...almost 5 months after the flooding.

The Chief toured us thru the facility, we also met with Director Chief Halford.

After the tour, we went to a small city North of Nashville. It's a small but rich city and they have their own fire department. Goodlettsville FD has one fire hall and...10 pieces of apparatus...like a Belgian firehouse. We were welcomed by the Captain and the Chief and got a tour of the station and apparatus.



First burgers, wings and group pictures for lunch...



On the way back, we stopped by NFD Station 14. A single engine station, the oldest fire hall in operation, built in 1912. A really nice hall, I like it. The crew welcomes us but needs to roll out soon thereafter for a house fire.



We meet up with the members of Engine, Tower and Rescue 2 at the Shelby Street Bridge, near LP Field. They were setting up when we arrived, after a little while they can begin their high angle training. Several scenarios are trained, all in a way of "rescue the rescuer". It's some serious training but it seems like it's nothing but fun!



It's about time for the station assignments so we all go to Station 2 where we get some linen and towels. We leave Erwin, Bram and Wesley because station 2 is their assigned hall. We move over to Station 9, the new home for the next coming week for Edward, David and myself. Eric and Eric-Jan go to Station 28, Antoine and Wim to 29's, Kris and Philip to 26's, Fred and...Fred to Station 13. Everybody gets a warm welcome by the crews and we all feel like being home. The first calls come out; small outside fires, fire alarms, MVA's, medicals...

I'm housed at Station 9, along with David and Edward. Station 9 houses a District Chief, two engines, a tiller truck and a medic unit. I also notice two funny looking pieces... "Gators". The hall is located downtown, SW off of Broadway. It has a large territory with a diversity of industry, waterways, railways, highways, residential areas, commercial buildings and...the projects.



Station 9 (2007) is located on Lea Ave. between 2nd and 3rd and is being called "The Bottoms", regarding the areas where the crews have to respond to sometimes. The station runs well over 10 000 calls a year.

The crews take us in and it's like we've known each other for years. They all want to know what made us decide to come to Nashville, they want to know what we do for a living, they want to know everything about our departments, our apparatus, our helmets... They give us a tour of the station, they show us the trucks and they give us some bedding. They've also prepared a wonderful bbq! Southern hospitality at its best! After dinner, we start washing the dishes, we grab some towels and mops but we get some evil eyes and words coming from the crew. We're guests and we may not clean, work or whatsoever. Screw them...we're indebted so we don't listen to what they say. The night is a chain of good conversations and laughter till we hit the sheets around 0100 am.

We also got our first calls; first one was an MVA with Engine and Truck 9 and Medic 12. That one was followed by 15 other calls, all medical except for two fire alarms and an apartment fire in...Little Mexico.

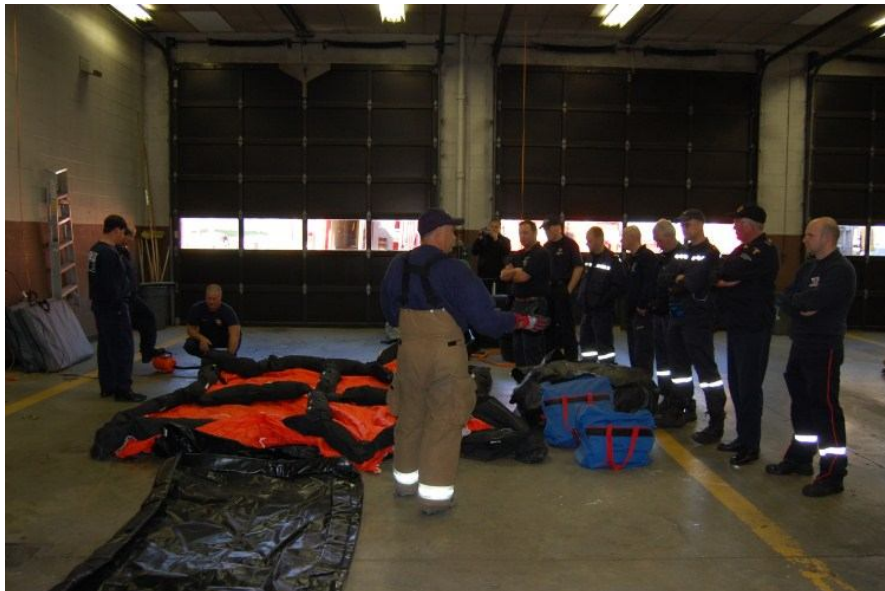


Tuesday, October 5th, 2010:

In our first night, Station 9 responds to 18 emergencies! And according to the men...it's been slow. Well...this hall sounds like my hall!

Shifts change at 0600 AM so we meet some new members, B-shift. After having breakfast, we pick up the guys at Station 2 and drive down to Station 13 where we team up with our fellow Belgian firefighters.

Station 13 houses an Engine, a Rescue and HazMat 13, one of two HazMat teams within the NFD. We get a tour of the hall, the apparatus and the equipment. They set up decon and show us some meters, suits...

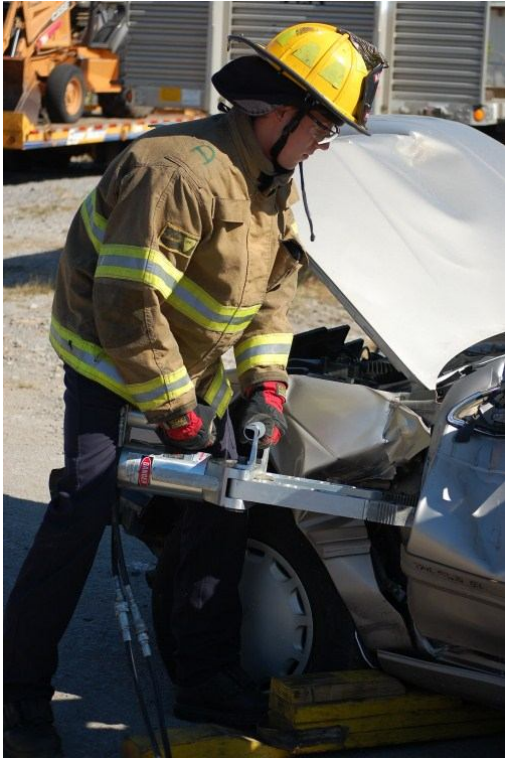




Just when everything was said, the tones go out for a house fire, which later turned out to be nothing. We've been offered lunch by...well, we still don't know who offered it. We went to Firehouse Subs.



In the afternoon, Station 13 takes us out to a junkyard for some extrication training. First, they show us how they do it, the Belgian demo follows. We assign our men to functions and start to work the SAVER-procedure, something they've never heard of here in Music City USA. CL was our trapped victim, we took out two doors and the B post in only three cuts, popped the roof, evacuated him with a KED and a board. He said it was a unique experience and he never had any harm of sudden movements or shaking or discomfort thru the whole demo.





Wednesday, October 6th, 2010:

After another night with many calls and less sleep, we showed up at Station 2 around 0830 AM. We jumped into our finest costume since we were expected at the Flood Recognition Ceremony at the Nashville Municipal Auditorium. A Chief picks us up and leads us to some reserved seating, third row, in the center. So much for being incognito...

This ceremony was set up to thank the NFD members for their work during the Nashville flooding. Among the NFD firefighters, some brothers of other fire departments, law enforcement officers and civilians got medals too.

The ceremony started with the honor guard, the raising of the flag, the singing of the National Anthem and speeches by the Mayor, Director Halford and Chief Yates. Halford puts us in the spotlights when he asked us to stand up while he introduced us to the crowd. They thanked us for choosing Nashville for this program, and he thanked us for the work we've been doing at home as well, followed by an applause of course. After the ceremony, numerous people came to shake hands, to get in pictures and even the press pulled me in front of a camera.



We end the morning with a visit to the State Capitol.





We had lunch at the Hard Rock on Broadway. Nashville is THE city since famous artists show up like nothing. While he was walking towards the bathroom, Carl walked into Martina McBride! One hour later, while we were sitting in front of a red light, Alan Jackson crossed the street...

We drove by the Ryman and went to the museum that probably holds the longest name...The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum. The building looks like a piano, a radio antenna, cd's, a Cadillac... It's the place where country heroes are honored with a permanent spot in the museum.

They preserve the history of country music, they tell the stories... It's a museum with studios and archives which walk you thru the music's history which once was made by "farmers", to the multi Million \$ business what made Nashville Music City USA.

I can spend days in this museum with expositions, cd's magazines, memorabilia, cars, pictures...stories 'bout Tammy Wynette, Hank Williams, Johnny Cash,...



After a couple of hours in the museum, and before heading back to all stations, we get a Command Van class at Station 2. They set up the Comvan for us and we're informed over this truck, the functions and the state-of-the-art equipment that it carries.



Computers, a meteo station, tv's with satellite connection, a camera on the roof, a TIC, phones, radios, fax machines,...you name it, they have it! The truck is divided in three parts; the front cabin, a central cabin and a meeting room in the back.

We're all back at our stations around 0400 pm. A very tasty meal, fun moments and lots of calls at The Bottoms. David chose to ride with the medic unit, Carl and Edward responded all night long with the engines, the truck and the Chief. A long and busy but awesome night with the people of the EMS red and C shift.

Thursday, October 7th 2010:

It's hard to get up at 0600 am. Chatting and responding 'til 0400 am...Hard times at 9! All Fire Observers rendezvoused at Station 9 around 0700 am. We leave pretty early today since we've to drive to Lynchburg, Tennessee. Breakfast en route to.

Thanks to Capt. Clymer, we get a special tour of the Jack Daniel's distillery. JD started to make his divine liquid in 1875, in Lynchburg, Moore County, Tennessee. Moor County is a dry county by the way...go figure! Some differences to the other whiskey...the pure water that's used comes from their own well, they use corn instead of cereals and the mellowing process is also kind of unique. At some point, the product takes its time to flow thru maple charcoal, which gives it a special taste.

Visitors can have tours throughout the facility but thanks to our contacts we get a special tour! We get to see more as other visitors and at the end of our tour, we were directed to a small cabin. We enter the cabin and we see tables, chairs and full glasses on those tables. They've arranged a special degustation session for us. We get to degustate 5 types of JD, all with the much needed explanations. At the end of the degustation, a man walks up front who apparantly is the Fire Chief of the JDFD.



The Chief takes us to the store and the bar. I was thinking 'bout ordering myself a shot but..."I'm sorry Sir, this is a dry county. We don't serve whisky...but we do have great lemonade..." Bought a Gentleman's Jack and a Single Barrel in the store and went to another JD site and pulled over at the firehouse. Some smaller trucks, an engine and one hell of a ladder truck...all in JD colors. There's also a large foam trailer, the Chief told us JD has the largest foam quantity in the US, East of the Mississippi.





The Chief is the Fire Chief of the local fire department as well, so make a short stop at that firehouse as well. Just before lunch, we visit the Lynchburg square for some shopping. Lunch was offered by the Fire Chief in a typical Southern restaurant. I've had glazed ham, coleslaw, pinto beans and corn bread...loved it...BIG TIME!

On the way back to Nashville, we made a stop somewhere in Bedford County, at the Tennessee Fire Service and Codes Enforcement Academy, which is the State Fire Academy. They show us the large facility and lead us towards the fire building. We drive by the administrative building, the restaurant, the fire station, the hotel...towards the fire building where they give us a "warm" welcome.

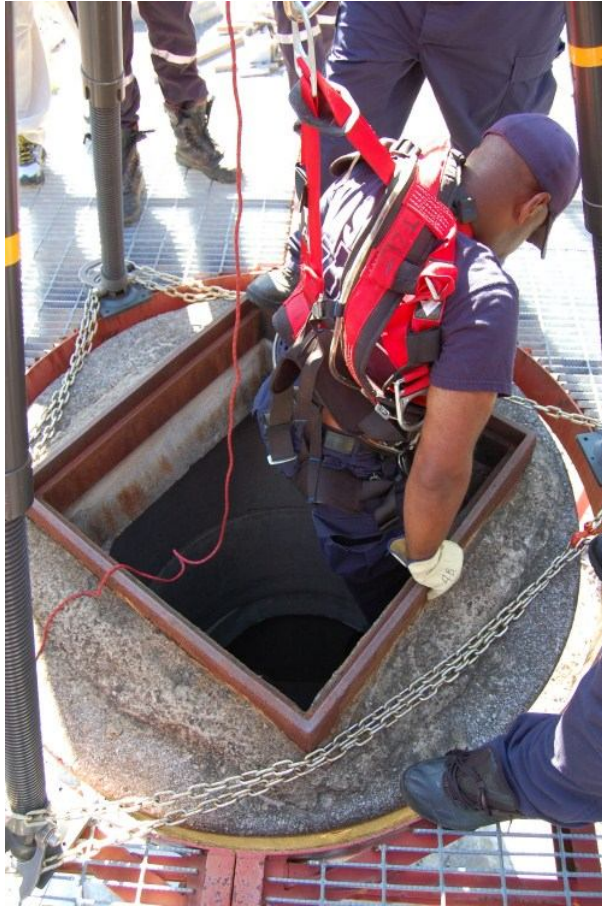
We're back at Station 2 around 0600 pm, where the crew cooked us some prime rib...delicious!



Station 9 brings another evening and night with many runs. Chief Ford takes us downtown for some..."fire inspections", the engines take us to many other places for medical and fire related emergencies, the medic unit brings us to my favorite place in Nashville..."Broad and 2nd".

Friday, October 8th 2010:

Rendezvoused at the NFD Fire Academy at 0900 AM for some demonstrations and exercises with the USAR team. The State of Tennessee has two USAR teams, USAR TF1 is in Memphis, TN USAR TF2 in Nashville. It operates under the command of the Office of Emergency Management, it's a group of approx. 200 firefighters, construction specialists, medical personnel, rescue dogs, cops... They respond to several emergencies like tornadoes, flooding, earthquakes, hurricanes...within the state of Tennessee, but they operated out of the state as well. Back in 2001 they operated at the Pentagon, they deployed to tornadoes in Kentucky and Oklahoma in 2008, they also went to Haiti in 2010 and worked a long time during the flooding of May 2010 in their own region.



After our time at the training facility, we all report at First Ave, downtown Nashville, on the banks of the Cumberland River. The group is split up and one part boards the fireboat, operated by members of Station 9. Two powerful engines and pumps draught more than 6000 GPM and give enough power to navigate at a speed of 25 MPH, both at the same time. The crew of Engine 9 / Fireboat 9 takes us down the river for a nice ride. They show us the equipment on board, we can talk with each other... When we arrive at Broadway, the crew gives us and spectators a nice water display. When the boat returns, it's time to change crews.





After the boat ride, all Fire Observers report back to their stations. Prior to that, the guys assigned to the downtown stations have lunch at Hooters.

The afternoon is quite calm at The Bottoms. We get our calls but nothing fancy. Everybody tried to get in some extra sleep. The brothers tell us to do the same thing since we won't get any tonight.

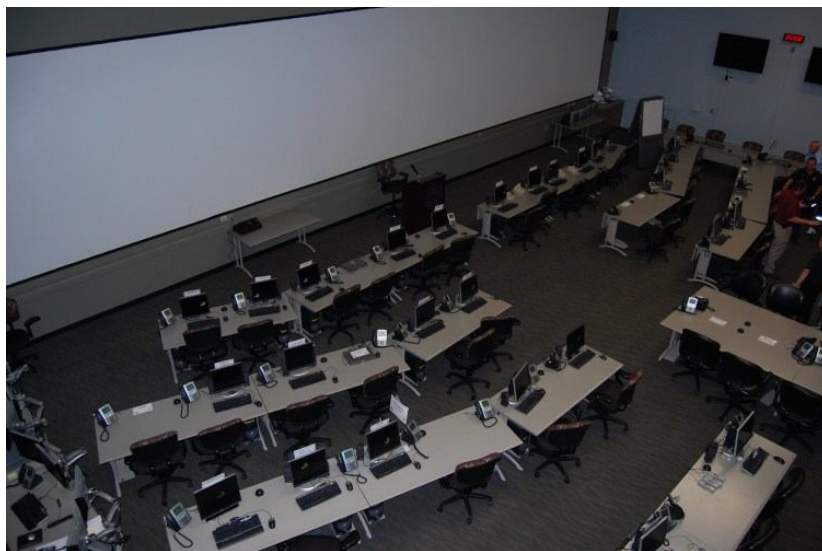
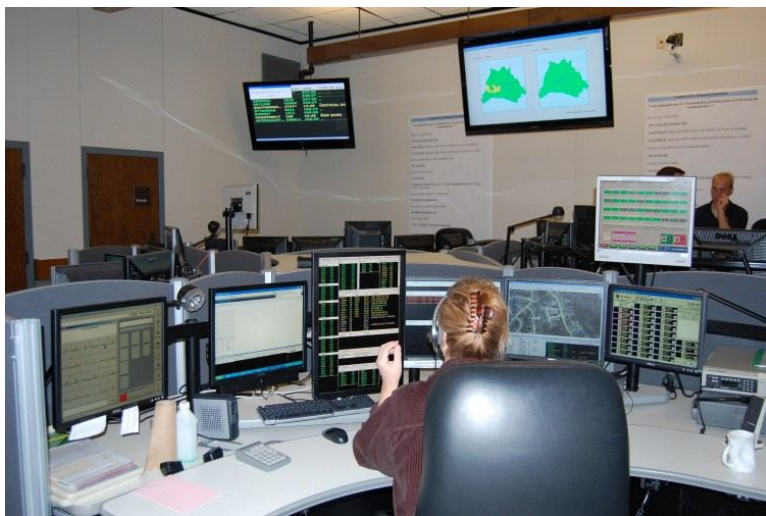
After another wonderful meal, all hell breaks loose! In only a couple of minutes, all units respond to several emergencies. The hall is empty and it stays that way long after midnight.

Saturday, October 9th 2010:

Last night, all Fire Observers were busy. At Station 9, both engines and the truck responded to 19 calls between midnight and 0600 AM! And since we're Belgians, and one guy in ancient history once said Belgians were the bravest of all, we responded with our NFD brothers to every single call!

Around 0900 AM, we all visit the Emergency Communications Center. This agency receives, dispatches and coordinates all fire calls, medical calls and police emergencies. They also operate a special assistance line for the people of Nashville. We count approx. 24 call takers and dispatchers, divided in three entities; police, fire and EMS. There's one supervisor per shift.

We also get to see the "war room", some sort of a emergency command center where all agencies like fire, EMS, police, city, county, army, law enforcement agencies, constructions,...have their representatives during a disaster.



After our ECC visit, we stay in the West End area and direct ourselves towards one of the largest hospitals in the nation, Vanderbilt University. We go to the top floor, where Vanderbilt Life flight is housed.



This agency delivers primary and secondary medical transportation within the states of Tennessee, parts of Kentucky and Alabama. They have 5 helicopters, 1 fixed wing aircraft and several ambulances. All units operate with a pilot, a doctor, a nurse and/or paramedic. They fly to all kind of life threatening emergencies and mass casualty accidents.

Since they moved all their helicopters to other airports around the city, only a couple of months ago, the helipad sits empty. But an empty helipad is good enough to shoot some beautiful Nashville skyline pictures. All of the sudden, a flight dispatcher comes running to us and instruct us to clear the pad, since a helicopter is coming in. They requested a helicopter only for us, to show the aircraft! We get to see the helicopter and the equipment on board, we can talk with the crew... 15 minutes later, a private air ambulance lands to deliver a patient. This helicopter gets our attention as well. At the end of the visit, Carl donates some patches, pins and t shirts of Belgian and Luxembourg air rescue services, which gives us some goodies in return.







Before heading back to the stations, we grab a Subway for lunch.

Another calm afternoon at Station 9. We ask for some runs but the crew tells us to watch out what we wish for. The crew of Truck 9 takes us down to the parking lot of LP Field. We all get to ride in the back...it takes some time but by the time we leave, we operate like real tiller men!



As expected, the night brings nothing but calls and no sleep. No sleep at all! Medical emergencies, MVA's, small fires...we get it all.

Sunday, October 10th 2010:

Last day has broken.

It's a tradition for us to offer a farewell dinner to the hosting fire department but due to a full lit, we offered a breakfast this time and we choose for a Cracker Barrel, a typical country restaurant where you can order some good food. Several NFD members are present, like Chief Yates, CL, Jimbo,... It was a very nice morning, we've enjoyed our time together. Some presents were exchanged with Chief Yates and CL. Chief Yates also donated some gift bags, filled with goodies, to all Fire Observers. Each bag carried an NFD patch, shirt, pins....books, CD's, DVD's related to the American fire history, the NFD or Nashville.

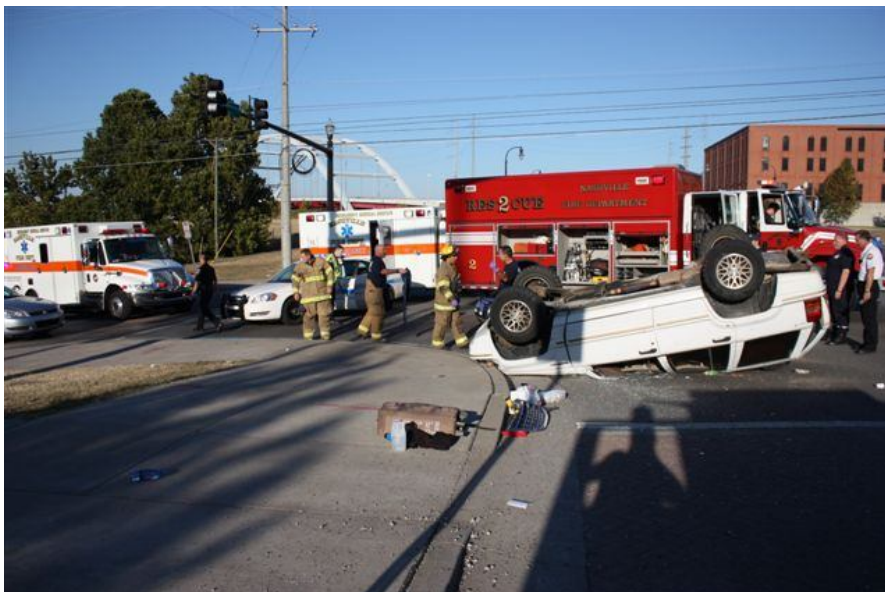




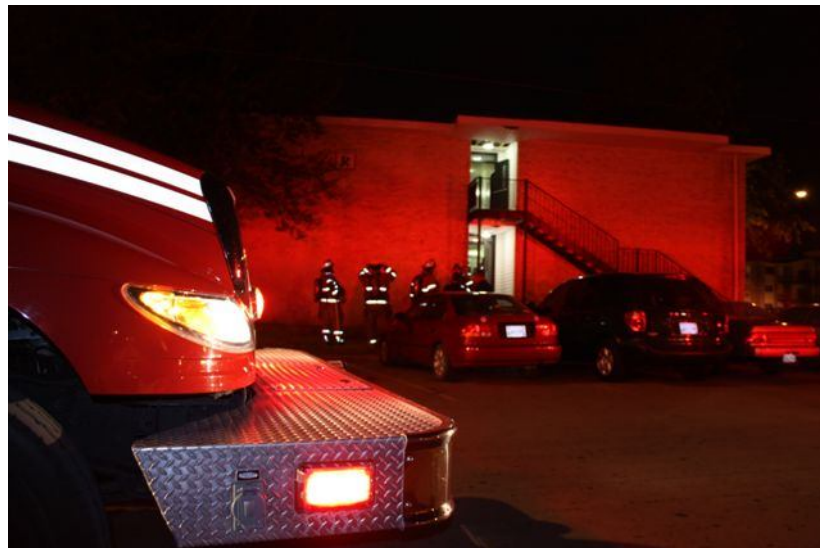
We ended the breakfast meeting with some group pictures and then everybody returned to their stations.

The crew of Station 9 was out for some drafting and fireboat procedures. So, the hall was empty, we decided to hit the stores to get groceries for dinner. The guys at The Bottoms were so good to us last week, they received us like guests/family, nothing was asked too much, they served great food...they made us feel like home. Southern hospitality...I'm sure it's invented by the members of Station 9!

In between several runs, we re-arranged our luggage, laughed with the crew, exchanged shirts, patches, caps, sweaters...and we cooked dinner.







We got into chow pretty late due to the many runs we've made in the afternoon and evening. It still was a good night with lots of laughter!

Monday, October 11th 2010:

0600 am, wake up call. Last night, David stayed in his bunk, Edward took all calls, Carl only non-medical calls, good for another 5 after midnight.

A shower, saying goodbye to the shift that has finished, breakfast and loading up our vehicle. The last group picture with the on duty shift and then it's really time to say goodbye. Handshakes, hugs, eyes get a little blurry...friendships were made here last week!

It's 0830 AM when we drive off the ramp of Station 9, "The Bottoms". Another last look over our shoulders and that's it... We pick up our guys at Station 2 where also Fred and Fred assembled. We all go to the station of Wim and Antoine where everybody is waiting for us. CL is also present and I notice he isn't happy seeing us leaving. He did a tremendous job last week and it was an honor to work with him and to make this program happen. I hate leaving this place and these people but I think I'm gonna be back soon...

Training program is done. We can start our touristic trip. First stop, Bass Pro Shop. Since we don't have a store like this in Belgium, it's quite unique to visit.

After a lunch and a trip of approx. 3 hours via battlefields and several points of interest regarding the Civil War, we enter Memphis...in traffic. We get off of the Interstate and opt for the back roads to the National Civil Rights Museum at Mulberry Street. The museum was formerly known as the Lorraine Motel, the place where MLK was killed, back in April 1968. Inside the museum, there's a beautiful exhibit about the assassination, MLK's life, racism, slavery, the civil rights movement, Rosa L Parks...





After the museum visit, we check into our hotel and claim our rooms. Around 0700 pm we set course for Beale Street, THE street for all blues fans. Beer and blues flow freely out of taps. The group splits up, some of us go for dinner at the Hard Rock, others go to the BB King Blues Club where we eat some bbq, near Lucille, all swallowed with numerous beers, whisky and...blues.





Tuesday, October 12th 2010:

Some bagels, orange juice and coffee get us going. First stop will be at the 2nd most famous house of the US after the White House... At the tones of "Welcome To My World", we enter the Graceland mansion. Elvis was only 22 when he bought this place. He bought it for \$100.000 and paid cash. Today, Graceland receives approx. 1 million visitors each year.

We open the door and walk into his crib. We take a look in the salon and the dining room, don't walk upstairs since this is still private area. We walk by the kitchen, go downstairs to the game room and the TV room. We leave the house via the Jungle room, walk thru his studio, by his carport, his office, the pool...towards his gravesite. We not only find his grave but those of his parents and grandmother as well.

At the Visitors Center, we go see some other exhibits and we also enter his two planes.



We get lunch and head towards Sun Studios on Union Avenue. Back in the days, in '57, when Presley brought his legendary "That's Alright Mama" for the also legendary Sam Philips, the studios were called the Memphis Recording Service. We really may call this place the birthplace of rock 'n roll. All famous names recorded here; Elvis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Jerry Lee Lewis, Roy Orbison, BB King,...even U2 played here.

We start the tour and our tour guide drowns us in the musical history. Once we get into the famous studio, which is still in use and packed with instruments, microphones,...I see a large picture with Cash, Presley, Perkins and Lewis hanging at the wall...I hear a song of Cash...I get goosebumps...!





Another museum, last one for today, the Memphis Fire Museum. Two buildings house this beautiful museum. We get a special and warm welcome, and a special tour guide. We see a part of the museum has a large section for kids, they have some sort of a flashover simulator, a labyrinth... One the way back to the hotel, we walk into a firehouse on Front Street and have a little chat with the guys.

Dinner and drinks for the evening are found at Beale Street.

Wednesday, October 13th 2010:

We leave the hotel around 0830 am, and shortly thereafter Memphis and Tennessee. Next stop will be St. Louis, Missouri. We grab breakfast one hour after departure.

We enter St. Louis around noon and decide to visit a brewery...a Belgian brewery, Anheuser-Bush. The brewery was bought by Inbev a couple of years ago which made it a Belgian brewery. We get a tour of the facility and we're enlightened with the brewery's history. However, we don't hear anything about Belgium... During the visit, we walk by the stables of the famous Budweiser horses, the Clydesdales, and we walk by various points of the brewing

and bottling process. We end our visit with a free beer. We choose for a typical Belgian beer, a Stella Artois, which was perfectly tapped!



The hotel we claim is one of the Millennium chain. The hotel has a main building and two big towers, we claim our rooms at a high floor with a magnificent view at The Gateway Arch. We go for a dip in the pool and assemble again in the lobby around 0630 pm for sunset at the Arch. When we walk by, we see it's closed due to...well, it's closed. We take a few pictures at ground level, walk by the Historic Courthouse District towards Laclede's Landing. We end the night with a steak, some of choose for a dinner at the Old Spaghetti factory, and some drinks.





Thursday, October 14th 2010:

A donut, a coffee and we're up and running. We leave the hotel pretty early since we've a long way to go to our final destination, Chicago...The Windy City. We don't go to Chicago directly, we make a little detour via Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

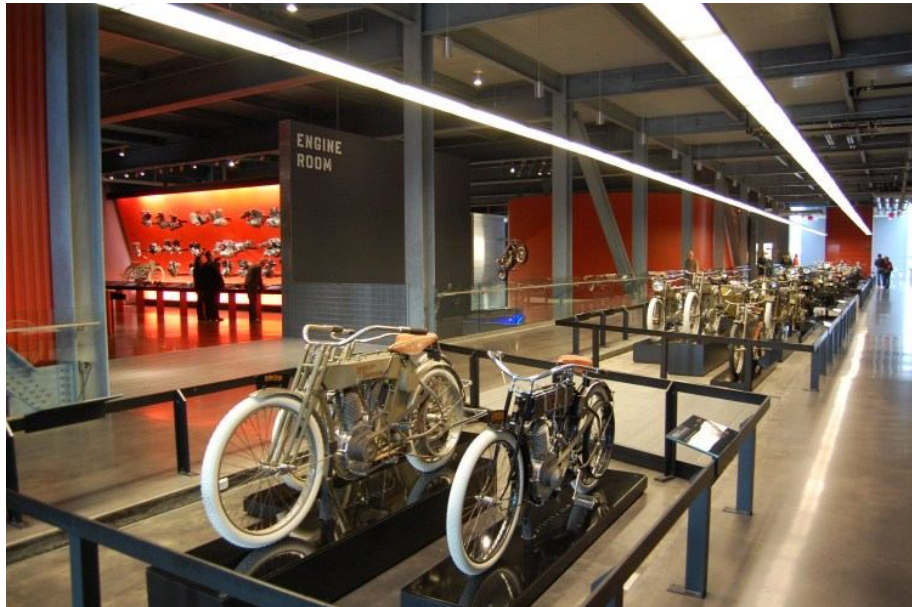
The road is long but doable. The foreseen 4 hours become 5 due to traffic works. We stop twice along the way to get fuel and drinks. Milwaukee is like the capital of a real American product, Harley Davidson. Two years ago, the company set up some buildings along the Menomonee River. The buildings house a store, a restaurant, a bar, and a museum...



It's Firefighter Appreciation Month, we're welcomed by the new 2011 version of a Harley Davidson Fire/Rescue Road King. We get a discount to enter the museum and we start our

visit. We walk thru the history and life of the most famous bike in the world. We can admire numerous bikes, tanks, engines...we visit several exhibits, see movies, get to ride a bike...

When you're in the neighborhood, you really should visit this museum! Before heading to Chicago, we hit the store and get a few drinks.



We get in a traffic jam and all three vehicles loose each other. We get re-united at the hotel, last one for this trip. We choose for the Radisson 'O Hare in Des Plaines. We check in, take a shower and report at the nearby Longhorn Steakhouse for drinks and dinner.

Friday, October 15th 2010:

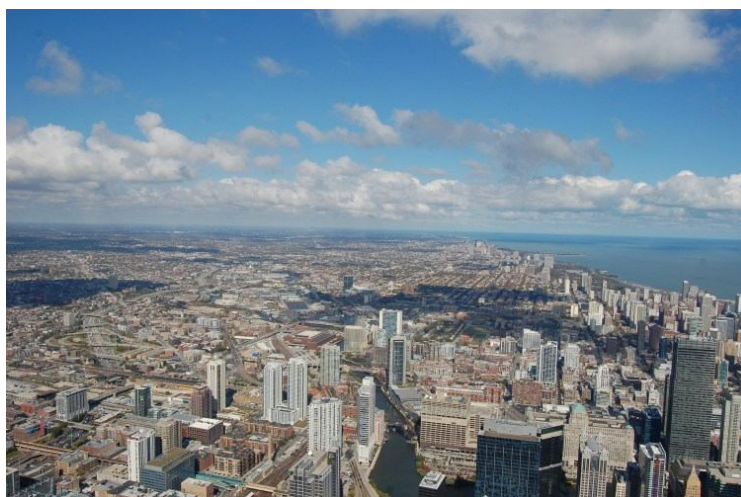
It's around 0900 am when we board the free shuttle to the airport. At the airport, we take the blue line subway towards downtown Chicago. We get to see Chicago from another view...the fellow travelers are also worth looking at them.



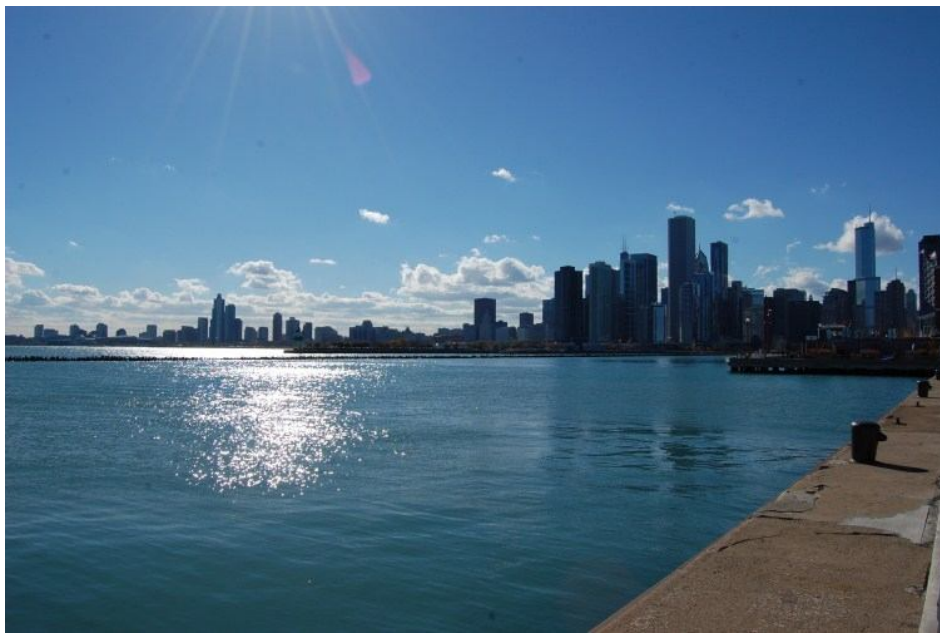
We get out at Jackson and walk to our first visit of the day: Willis Tower, formerly known as Sears Tower. It has 108 floors and is one of the 5 tallest buildings in the World. It takes a while to get in due to some big crowd, tickets purchase and security checks. First we see a movie and we get to know more 'bout the building. The elevator takes us up high, towards the 103rd floor, in 60 seconds!

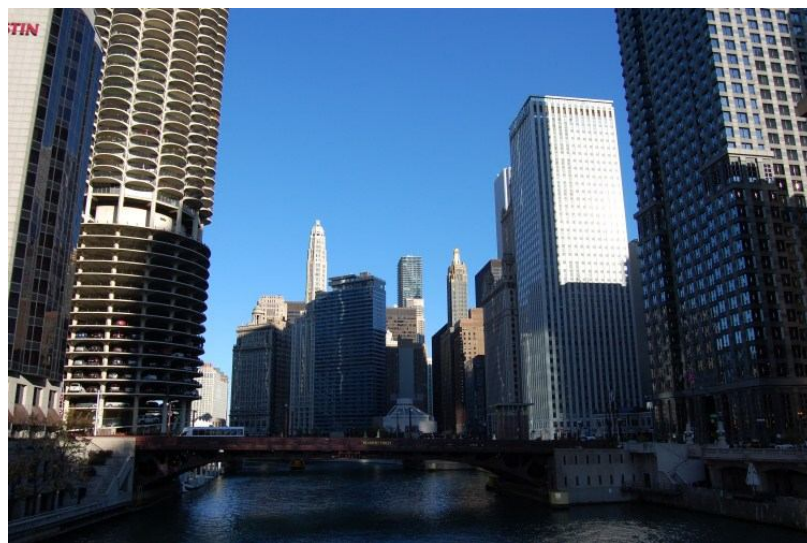


As soon as we walk onto the observation deck we get astonishing views! We got the perfect day with sunny and clear blue skies. We've a terrific panorama over Chicago, Lake Michigan, Chicago 'O Hare. At the four corners of the observation deck, you can see as far as Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan and Indiana. On one side of the building, 4 glass boxes jump out of the Willis Tower walls. A couple of inches of glass, 1353 feet above ground with nothing but air just around you...



After our visit, we walk via the Chicago River towards Dusable Harbor Park, Navy Pier Park and the Navy Pier. The group splits up. Carl, Eric, Fred, Antoine, David, Wim and Edward have lunch at the terrace of the Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. After having lunch, we walk over the pier and get back to Michigan Avenue, or know as The Magnificent Mile. All kind of stores like Boss, Guess, Armani.... stores who don't except our credit cards, just a Starbucks does... We walk by a firehouse on the corner of Illinois and Dearhorn. The ambulance just returns, which make it back to a full house. A full house means a Chief, a Fire Marshall, an engine, a truck, a comvan, an ambulance, a squad and a snorkel. We start to chat with the firefighters, they show us their house and t shirts are bought.





Time to return to the hotel. We hop on the Blue Line at the Clark/Lake station and head back towards Chicago 'O Hare, followed by the shuttle direction hotel.

We take a little nap, have a shower and meet up in the lobby. Last supper will be held at a nearby Chili's. After dinner, Fred De Vos offers a few nightcaps for his birthday.

Saturday, October 16th 2010:

Breakfast on this last day at IHOP. Since we leave by plane this evening, we still have some time to kill so we decide to go the Woodfield Shopping Center to spend our last Dollars and hours. We're back at the hotel around 0100 pm, take another shower, get our luggage together and check out around 0200 pm. Returned the rental cars and checked in for our flight to Brussels. There was a long line but as soon as they saw we were firefighters, they opened up extra check in desks, only for the Belgian firemen.

Before boarding our flight, some of us ate, drank...bought at the duty free shops. Wheels up right on time.



Sunday, October 17th 2010:

A smooth flight with dinner, drinks, movies, sleep and breakfast to Brussels, where we arrived pretty early. Border control, luggage claim, customs...and we were welcomed by the Fire Observers President, family and friends. We'll have a last group picture and a couple of beers before we head home. Nashville, TN 2010 is a fact!



VERSTREPEN Carl

