

Travel report Fire Observers Houston, TX 2016

Sunday, May 22nd

7 am, the beginning of a long day. A group of 10 firefighters meet at Brussels Airport to leave for Houston, TX. Host for our 52nd ride-along program.

First leg of the journey took us from Brussels to Chicago. After a smooth passing through customs it was time for our second flight to Houston. 2 minivans were waiting for us and after our first American dinner it was time to head for the hotel.

Monday, May 23

After a short night thanks to the time difference, we had our first meeting at station 8. After some paperwork Chief Jay Evans took us to our assigned stations. After we dropped off the first guys we heard a second alarm on the radio. Smoke showing in a parking tower and over 20 units on scene.



A short-circuit in a utility shaft seemed to be the cause.

We took our time to take a lot of pictures and talk to the crews. A few hours after everybody was dropped off the first calls were already made. Medicals, MVA's,...

Tuesday, May 24

An early rise and shine to meet the new crews.

A little later we met the other Fire Observers at station 8 to start our day of visits. The air was buzzing with stories of last night.

Today's schedule: Fire boat, 911 dispatch, the new station 84 and old station 6, now used as office space.



Late afternoon we got back to the stations to end our day with some more calls. At 8 PM it was still about 82°F with a humidity of 85%. Thank God for the fan in the bunk room.

Wednesday, May 25

Today we have a visit planned at the George Bush International Airport fire stations.

After a tour of the station 2 crashtenders are waiting for us for an airside tour and demonstration.



Time for some lunch and a visit to station 31. They just received a new ladder truck. Back at the stations everybody had their work cut out for them. As always a lot of medical calls, but also some car fires and MVA's

Thursday, May 26

Again a sleepless night. 2nd alarm fire downtown several of our units on Stand-by, a shooting, a delivery,...

But, as always rendezvous at station 8. This time for a visit at the fire academy.



After the fire academy Frazerbilt hosted our next visit. They build ambulances and were one of the first to build a CT-scan in an ambulance.

Later that day chief Evans invited us to his home. After a 40+ years carrier in fire and law enforcement his house became a small museum.



Friday, May 27

No ride along today.

Today we scheduled a visit to the Galveston coast. Of course we also visited one of their fire stations.



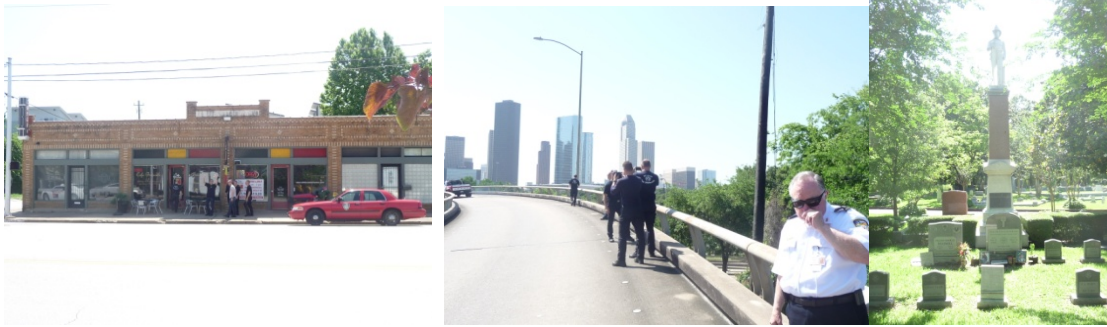
After lunch at Denny's we headed for Johnson Space Center. A very educational tour about America's space program. On our way back to Houston, one of Houston's firefighters arranged a stop at a shooting range. For some, the first time they handled a gun.

At the sound of the first shot rain started pouring, when we got back in Houston lots of streets were closed due to the flash flood.

Back at the stations our night was filled with calls. Fire alarm, floodings, carfires,...

Saturday, May 28

Chief Evans takes us on a tour downtown. First up : Minute Made Park, home of the Houston Astro's Baseball-team. Due to a miscommunication we couldn't get in. But no worry's plenty more to see. Next stop was the firefighter memorial at one of Houston's cemeteries. On our way to the next stop we spotted the "Brussels Cafe". Belgian flags all over and some familiar posters. The manager was Belgian by birth but was in Belgium at the time. A few blocks away we stopped at a bridge to take some pictures of Houston's skyline. Thanks again chief for blocking the road 😊



Sunday, May 29

Last day at the stations. Today we got the opportunity to redo the missed visit to Minute Made Park. But for the rest of day running calls.



Everybody enjoyed their last day with Houston Fire. The last t-shirts were exchanged, some of us cooked a meal for the crew and bought dessert.

Monday, May 30

Today we leave Houston and start our touristic trip. After a final farewell at station 8 and receiving the certificates we head for San Antonio. It's remarkably quiet in the cars. The guys are catching up some missed sleep.

After checking in at the hotel we walk around the city and after dinner and a few drinks its time for a night without tones sounding



Tuesday, May 31

Today we go to Sea World. The day started beautiful, but in the afternoon rain started pouring again and the park was closed early. So we head downtown for dinner with some local friends and get a first glimpse of tomorrows visit.

Wednesday, June 1st

We're guest at Ft Sam Texas. Marla, who we met last night, is the training coordinator of the flight medics of the US military. She gave us a glimpse behind the scenes of their training facilities. Something we can only dream about.



After lunch we visit downtown Austin. The Texas State capitol and Austin fire station 1 are on the menu. Before dinner (around sunset) we go to the Congress Avenue Bridge where every night about 1.5 million bats take flight.



On his way to the restaurant Patrick had a little run-in with another car, but no one was injured so after some paperwork he could join us.

Thursday, June 2nd

Today we make 2 stops. First one is TEEX. One of the biggest fire academy's in the world. Here they can simulate about everything. From every fire imaginable to a whole collapsed city.



After that we head for Baton Rouge, after a short stop downtown we go to Ferrara Fire Apparatus. Where they construct fire trucks and one of the biggest water pumps in the US. We end our day in New Orleans. The last stop in our trip



Friday, June 3

After breakfast we start exploring NoLa by foot. The Pier, French Quarter, farmers market, Bourbon street, the cemeteries,...



For our last night we head for Bourbon Street for a few last drinks.

Zondag 05-06

Time to go home...

First flight from New Orleans to Newark. No issues...

Newark to Brussels with a 2.5 h delay due to thunderstorm....

Monday morning we land safely in Brussels bringing another great program to an end.

Participants (left to right)

In the back:

Sven Van Gaver	Sint-Niklaas
Yves De Vogelaere	Sint-Lievens-Houtem
Wim Lauwers	Stabroek
Luc Maes	Olen
Patrick Vantroyen	Nieuwpoort

Front row:

Erwin Devos	Houthulst
Matthias Mariën	Schilde
Jan Van Cauwenberge	Melle
Philip De Landtsheer	Melle
Danny Billiet	Gistel



Dutch version : Philip De Landstheer
English version : Jan Van Cauwenberghe
Checked by : Tom Curtis