

Jacksonville 2017 report

Tuesday 28/02

The alarm clock goes off at 4.45am. We are expected at 7:00 am at the airport in Zaventem, under the big sign in the departure hall. Everyone is well on time, check-in went reasonably smooth and everyone gives the "correct" answers to the customs. At the gate some of them manage to be put aside for checking. Now this obstacle is also taken smoothly and passed. Is this a forecaste on what will come in America?



Brussels → New York: +/- 8h

Arriving in New York we had 1h40min to catch our next flight to our final destination Jacksonville. And as if the tension of homeland security and all other controls was not enough, Rudy thought: "What if I forget my camera on the plane?". You can guess what happened? . After searching for some time, we finally found someone from Delta to search for the camera that Rudy left behind. Rudy can regain his preciousness! And we are still on time for our connection.

New York → Jacksonville: +/- 2h

At the airport, Papa John and his wife Sweetie were already waiting for us with their truck to load all of our bags. John is a retired volunteer firefighter who also worked for (what we can compare with) the youth fire service. Meanwhile he has become a good friend of Paul and Eric.

We drive to our first hotel. After unloading our luggage, we went for the first American food on American soil. We end up in a restaurant where we find a 40m long buffet under the all you can eat formula.



After consuming the American snacks it was time to retreat to the room to continue preparing for the meeting with Jacksonville Fire department



Wednesday 1/03 27 ° C

Despite the great fatigue, some were already awake at 5.30 am. We are expected to be in full swing at the lobby of our hotel to head to the headquarter. There we were met by Tom, the PR responsible of JFRD (Jacksonville fire and rescue department). Not much later the great chief also appeared. What stands out is that we are received very warmly everywhere and that was no different here either.

Soon badges and even helmets were exchanged. We got a tour from Tom through the building. The command center was impressively organized. It is a space where every department (from public transport to fund raising about the press,) Has its place in the event of a disaster or major incident. Everyone can manage his department from behind his computer screen. A little further we ended up in the 911 center (what we know as HC112). We were lucky enough to experience a call live ☑ a 64-year-old lady who was pregnant and had contractions. The dispatcher could hardly keep serious. It was pretty funny too. This incident is the first of all sorts of absurd stories / moments that we will experience here. After this acquaintance, we decided to have lunch first before splitting us up at the stations. To continue in the atmosphere, we went for lunch at a sandwich shop called 'Fire House Sub's'. Apparently, this business was founded by 2 sons of a captain and has now grown into a real chain that is about to break through internationally. It was pretty nice.




Thursday 2/03 20 ° C

Today the 2nd full ridealong day, and after reading all WhatsApp messages everyone has experienced everything and everyone is having a good time. Today it is unfortunately a bit rainy but good in temperature.



Friday 3/03 17 ° C

Today there was a group tour on the program. As said, today we get the official tour in the fire academy. What strikes me is that they really invest a lot of time and help yourself and your colleagues if you're in trouble.

We have introduced the recruitment class to our helmets . The big chief is a big fan and has asked us to promote them.



After visiting the training compound we left for lunch at the beach en returned to our stations .

Saturday 4/3 17° C

This Saturday was a complete day at the station , so it was a 24 hour ride-along experience where we have seen a lot of different situations



We even had a dutch cuisine at station 30



Sunday 5/03 20 ° C

Today we visited the Budweiser factory (Inbev so ☒). Unfortunately, the machines were quiet today and we did not see any beer bottles fall into the trays.



In station 38 we visited the "marine base". We stepped onto the fireboat., and we made a great tour on the waters surrounding Jacksonville

A super nice boat, 4600pk. A nice experience and again super friendly people.



Afterwards we were invited at the home of Papa John and Sweety for a great BBQ. We received a warm welcome, ate some delicious ribs and delicious desserts. John had also invited a number of (ex) firefighters. We all received an authentic license plate with us.

Papa John invited also a friend who has his own store of firedepartment related stuff in his truck. It was a really funny sight. We ended our meeting with a cool group photo together with John's Family. These people we will never forget.



Monday, March 6

Today again a full day at the stations and they are being used again. See the next report from Evelien and Robby. Last night we had a medical call for breathing difficulties. In retrospect, the lady was very familiar with the emergency services. She had already been transported 22 times since December. Apparently this lady is doing hotel and hospital care. She sneaks into the lobby of a hotel looking for a place to sleep. Here she was caught by the hotel staff and started to tell her story ☹️ 2 days ago she had undergone a cardiac catheterization where they could not place the stent and now she had respiratory problems, even if she was still a tongue. Do these things really have to be at 1 a.m. ??

!! This morning around 7 am awake by the following call: there was a cable on the job. Arriving it turned out to be a distribution cable. How do we deal with this in America? We take the cable with our bare hands, take the wire cutter and cut the wire through ☹️ problem solved, someone is still going to watch television today. The men enjoyed it. And from then on, it came one after the other:-
Seizure: 93-year-old man somewhat syncopally- Hazmat call: gas leak when working in a Mercedes garage. By the time our Hazmat train arrived there, the problem had already been solved by the nearest post

We had not been back in the barracks yet for 5 minutes, not breakfast yet:- Headache: an 18-year-old rugby player was battled Saturday and still suffered from a concussion. He had to be transferred to a hospital where he could be admitted, because he had ended up at a pediatric first aid post. We just had our breakfast inside

- Fallen: 77-year-old lady had fallen over the curb of a shop with her teeth first. She too was taken to the hospital for further inspection.

- Chestpain- MVA: canceled- Breathing problems: same lady from Friday, fortunately not as bad as then. She recuperated with an aerosol and did not have to work on the CPAP.

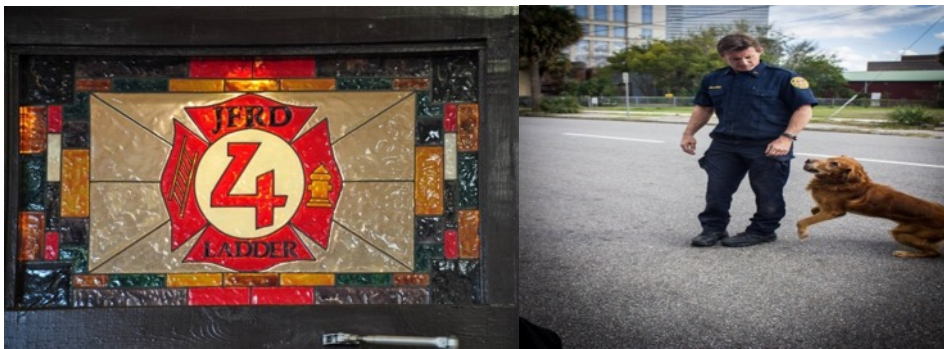
- Psychological problems: the only one has only dealt with this together with the police. The victim was under the influence and was tackled rather harshly. If he had no breaks, chances are that he will have something now.

Note to myself: you do not want to fight with the police, but rather do well what they ask.

Tonight, last night with A-shift. We received T-shirts and badges, exchanged information, and ate pie together. You get so much friendship from these people while you barely know them! It was amazing. We got the chance to see Jacksonville by night from the top of the ladder of the ladder truck (100ft).

Tuesday 7/03 24 ° C

Today we visit the fire department of the Jacksonville airport. After a nice tour and a small demonstration a short visit to station 4, this is a station for special Operations including a rescue dog.



Wednesday 8/03 25 ° C

Today we said goodbye to an exciting week at the Jacksonville Firedepartment

We made a final stop at station 31 for the official farewell. John and Sweetie were also present.

We were served a nice breakfast. The chief handed another certificate of participation. Some more protocol photos were taken and we could start our road trip. Or not ... now that we are talking about photos ... we missed another camera ... rarara.

Rudy's camera was left in station 18, as if one time had not been enough. From now on, we double-check if all his appliances are still with him before we leave for Kennedy Space Center



Just before the arrival we saw the guards in the canalscrocodiles.

The visit was great. We saw rockets on real large, space shuttles, all sorts of interactive information. We even sat in a simulator that mimicked the launch of a space shuttle. It was all brought super nice.



From there we drove to our sleeping place in Orlando. We ate another snack in Tilted Kilt (the competitor of Hooters) at the general request of the men. Let us say that they had a good time and gave their eyes a living.



On the way back to the hotel we passed a spectacular attraction that you shot high in the sky. Fré and Wesley took the challenge and saw Orlando (even 2x) by night from the air. It really looked spectacular.

Thursday 9/03 26 ° C

A new adventure day breaks. It's time to try out the world famous Orlando theme parks.



The park consists of 2 parts. We stood for the choice:- a day of rollercoasters- a day of movieworldBecause you could not go from one to the other park.

Most chose to explore Universal Studios and the daredevils went to the extreme rollercoasters. The first attraction was already a bull's eye ☹️ The Simpsons.

So prettily done.

We ended up in the worlds of The man in Black, Harry Potter, The revenge of the mummy, The Minions, Shrek, The Terminator, ... Often we had to set up our 3D glasses.

We ended the day with a rollercoaster of size, real with all the trimmings. Nice for 1 time, but not for a whole day.

Well chosen.



We drove on to our next hotel in Daytona. We are on the eve of Bike Week. The sound of the engines rages us around the ears.

Knowing that spring break has started today, some of us could not wait for the night live to begin .



Friday 10/03 26 ° C

We leave early from the hotel, but that is not possible before first making a beach walk and enjoying the morning sunbeams blissful. After checking out we want to explore Main Street where the first motorbikes gather for Bike Week. The atmosphere that now prevails is of course peanuts with that of tonight when everyone wants to show their engine to the rest. We see some specialleks driving around, passing all sorts of stalls and can get an impression of the atmosphere that will be there tonight. If the motards notice that there are passers-by who want a photo of it



their showpiece, they willingly stop posing



Our walk continues towards the Harley Davidson shop, which has been transformed into a real village with hundreds of engines, accessories, eateries and merchandising. All the way there is in the sign of Bike Week.

Everywhere along the road initiatives have been developed where enthusiasts can come together and even find a place to sleep.

After this motorcycle festival we continue our journey to Delray for the Saint Patrick's parade of tomorrow

A number of other Belgian Fire Observers have dropped to Delray to take part in the parade. We meet them on a small square that has been completely transformed into the green Irish atmosphere. We meet at the food truck (!) Of the Miami Dade fire brigade. We are amazed at the faucet which we find on the outside of the car and where we can keep our cups eagerly filled. Here one is apparently not awake from consuming alcoholic beverages in public. We also meet Irish colleagues from Galway and Limerick who have gone to Delray for the occasion. We slide at the window of the food truck and are served a hot dog. A little later the drums and pipes make their appearance on the square to immerse us even more in Irish culture. It was super, chicken meat moment !! Afterwards they do another pub crawl through the center (comparable to our Barbara party). We follow them



Saturday 11/03 28 ° C

We're literally up for the Saint Patrick's parade, where they expect us at noon. Parking was not easy, since it is already busy in Delray. We walk a short distance towards the meeting place.

Along the way, the ladder cars of various fire brigades are busy flying flags across the street. On the way we can decorate a lift and we crawl as 14 sardines in an auto click ☹️. Our men are still doing a meritorious attempt to put a smile on the faces of the occupants. Arriving in the meeting hall, dozens of veterans in the same green T-shirt are waiting in a wheelchair for a companion.

We all become acquainted with "our" veteran. There was even one who spoke to me in French. He had fought in Wallonia. We do not think enough about it, but my respect for these people grows by the minute. We take another water supply with us before setting ourselves up in line. The drums and pipes blow and beat themselves warm (although not much is needed because of the beautiful weather) and are at the forefront. Even before the parade starts, many participants will shake hands and thank the veterans for their service.

This is not a compulsory number, but we see here a sincere respect to the old warriors. This beautiful gesture instantly conjures a smile on my face. The first tones sound and the first steps are taken. Even before we turn the corner, there is a cheering, cheering and clapping. This is just swallow ... There are a few catchy minutes. I have never experienced this kind of respect and I am proud to push this man. After stepping into the list, we quickly deviate towards the nadar fences, behind which the people are still clapping and the veterans call a thank you. In this way the spectators can shake hands with the veterans. You notice that this is good for both parties.

We stop at the American flag for a greeting during the national anthem. The spectators remain in large numbers throughout the course.

This is really a wonderful initiative.



Afterwards we gather in the fire station for a group photo



Around 4 pm we return to the hotel where we were looking for cooling in the swimming pool.

It was good, although I can not say that it was a refreshing dive (never had such hot water in a pool).

In the evening we finally had the chance to eat real American steak. It was not easy to get into the "Outback steakhouse".

There was a whole queue that also made sense in steak. After an hour of patient waiting we can sit down and enjoy a real steak, preceded by a blooming onion ring (only available here).



Sunday 12/03 28 ° C

The group is split up today. Rudy, Johnny, Fré and Paul go on a boat trip. The rest of the party leaves for Miami beach.



If you go to Florida, you have to be able to say that you walked on the beach of Miami.

On arrival it was cloudy, so the scantily clad ladies (and gentlemen) were in the minority today. There are police cars at each entrance to the beach to increase the sense of safety among beachgoers.

We pass the typical baywatch cabins from which the bathers are looked over. Afterwards we walk along Ocean Drive (a street parallel to the water line). It is clearly seen around here: beautiful cars, beautiful women, beautiful men, ... Suddenly we hear music, clapping, cheering and ... from a terrace across the street. a transvestite show . It is amusing to see the people busy!

We continue until noon and then return to take a short dive into the sea. The water is pleasantly warm and in the meantime the sun has broken through the clouds.

Our Miami trip continues to the Little Havana district. Without knowing it, one of the biggest festivals in the world is being held here today. Calle Ocho Festival attracts 1,000,000 visitors and is the host for music genres from Latin America and the Caribbean.

The sun is now also full of the party, which only benefits the atmosphere. Wesley, Lex, Wouter, Robby and I go through the crowded streets and sniff the atmosphere.

Everywhere there are stalls selling egg specialties. At each intersection is a stage where all kinds of genres are sung and danced. Everyone is happy and the atmosphere can not be broken. After two hours it gets darker and soon the first raindrops fall out of the sky.

At first we do not let this come to our heart, but not much later it rains so hard that the sewers can not swallow the water anywhere and we find our way to our taxi. Fortunately, the rest of the group was watching the bad weather and they were already waiting for us.

Soaking wet we get in the car, but this could not spoil our fantastic afternoon! Back in Miami we are invited to the Fire boat. We get an expert explanation about all their possible tasks and the equipment they have with them.

At the moment that our cruise would start we hear on the radio a report of "multiple boat fire". We all had to leave the boat quickly so that the crew could leave for the location of the incident, which turned out not to be far, as a huge black smoke plume from behind the buildings rose. Have we really missed 5 minutes after a giant fire ?? !! We are a bit annoyed when we are navigating the water with another and smaller fire boat and leaving the plume of smoke behind us ☹.

The boat drops us off at our eatery for tonight. It's something else ... taxi in style !! After some time, "the real" fire boat crew will join us

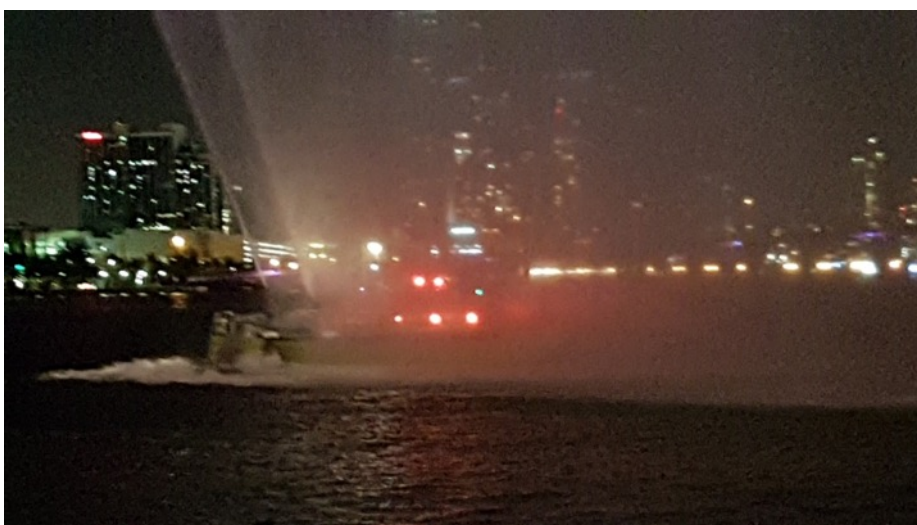
they were not yet down or their next intervention came in again.



From the terrace of this eatery we could experience a beautiful sunset again. It was already dark when our taxi boat came to pick us up.

This gave a whole different dimension to Miami from the water. The illuminated buildings were beautiful and everyone was impressed.

After mooring, the crew gave us a show with their water cannons. Another evening never to forget !!



Monday 13/03 24 ° C

We leave Boca Raton in the early morning, because there is a ride of more than 300km on the program.

According to the route planner, we should arrive in Key West, the southernmost point of the United States, around noon. Along the way there are some intermediate stops. The first was at Robbie's in Islamorada.

This is a company where you can plan all sorts of water activities. You had a beautiful view here. Some bought a bucket of fish so that they could feed the tarpons. This was not so easy because of the large amount of pelicans that naturally also aces on the tasty fish.



We also stopped at a beautiful vantage point from where we could photograph the gigantic long bridge. The last stop was at our final destination. We drove to the buoy symbolizing the southernmost point of the United States. Cuba is barely 90 miles from here.

There was a queue to take a photo with this buoy. Afterwards it was high time to record our jet ski tour for this afternoon.



You had to be 28 years (!) To ride a jet ski, which was disappointing for four members of our group. But we would not be firefighters if we did not come up with an inventive solution for this. We first received some instructions from our companions before being allowed to explore the area. It took some getting used to, but soon the 40 miles / h was exceeded. We stopped on a sandbank where we discovered two starfishes at our feet. After a trip of 2 hours we had to moor back ☹️.



Afterwards we looked for a spot on the pier to enjoy the beautiful sunset, accompanied by a delicious cocktail.

This phenomenon is celebrated here daily and is called Sunset Celebration.

On the dike are a number of street artists who show their skills and in this way entertain tourists and enthusiasts. The sunset produced a lot of beautiful, unforgettable photos.

After the disappearance of the sun and the rising of the evening, we returned to the hotel to refresh ourselves for the evening meal.

For this we returned to the picturesque center of Key West and found a cozy place with a super friendly service.



Tuesday 14/03 22 ° C

We want to take full advantage of every minute we have here, so we return to the center of Key West in the morning to take a stroll around. Of course we could not leave without having tasted the famous Key Lime pie.

We sniffed the atmosphere in this romantic village for another two hours, while another part of the group opted for a snorkeling trip. Unfortunately for them it had rained during the night, so the visibility under water was rather cloudy.

But everyone enjoyed this morning and that is the main thing.



Wednesday 15/03 22 ° C

Even before our departure this afternoon there was a visit to the Everglades with an airboat planned. Less than 2 minutes after departure we already saw an alligator lying in the reeds.

On our tour, we see a lot of birds that were startled by the sound of our engine, rising from the reeds.



After our air boat ride, an employee shows us a snake and gives some explanation. Afterwards he comes up with a small alligator. He continues to lead us to a number of crocodiles who enjoy the sun (behind wire).



Our journey is here officially in order.

With a double feeling we drive to the airport where we check in our valise. Some of the vanes were overloaded, but after some reorganization work, this obstacle is also overcome and all suitcases are placed on the luggage case. We have a lot of turbulence and after 2 hours we land in white New York.

Outside a small delay (and therefore a shorter transfer time) we arrive as planned at JFK. Fortunately, this time we do not have to check back our suitcases and we walk at a good pace to the terminal where our next plane is already boarding.

At the bargain ? we are still dependent on a bus that has to drive us there. There is no one left at the terminal and we are stepping on one of the last on the plane that takes us back to Zaventem.

The group is split into two, but everyone is so tired that it does not really bother us.

Even now, the turbulence is affecting the pilot, but he manages to safely steer the plane through the airspace and put it on the ground. Upon arrival it appears that our luggage has been able to make the switch in time and can return home with us.

A group photo will be made in the arrival hall. Afterwards, each separately continues his way to his home port.

Tired but satisfied!

A lot of beautiful memories

Experiences you will never forget

Met wonderful people