

# TRAVEL REPORT

## NASHVILLE, TN 2013

The original plan was to set up a training program with the Los Angeles City Fire Department. Although the meetings were great and the planning went smooth, LA City FD came back with an offer we weren't happy with. In November 2012, the VZW Fire Observers decided to end meetings on this program.

Thanks to a successful program back in 2010 and the good bond we have with the Nashville Fire Department in Tennessee, we were able to plan and open up a new program within the next two days. The NFD would be a great replacement for LA City and they were more than happy to welcome and host us again.



### **Monday, May 20th 2013:**

The group gathered at Brussels Airport around 0800 AM. Everybody was right on time, so check in followed soon after. We had our last moments together with friends and family before we entered the transit zone on our way to the gate. We had breakfast together and heard Patrick talking about the upcoming program and a lot of stories from previous programs. Patrick is one of the organizers and he'll be guiding us to Nashville. Carl and Jan left last week to make sure everything will be set for the program. Our flight to Atlanta was on time and everything went well. We went through the known routine of Immigrations, security checks, baggage claims, customs, baggage drop off and caught our connecting flight to Nashville where we landed right after 0400 PM. We were welcomed by Carl and Jan and the group was reunited. We got our rental cars and headed to the hotel, the Millennium Maxwell House. After a shower we had a welcomed drink and dinner. Carl did the briefing on the upcoming week and pointed out some special issues. Before heading back to the hotel we went to bar where The Time Jumpers played with Vince Gill. Very good, real, country music and beer...

Yep, everybody was ready for their time here in Music City USA!!!

### **Tuesday, May 21st 2013:**

After a good night of sleep and the morning routine of coffee, shower and getting dressed we had our 0800 AM meeting with the NFD Chief Yates, the man who approved this program. He welcomed us at old Station 8 and invited us for breakfast. He talked about the city, the department and our program after which we took pictures and filled in paperwork. The breakfast meeting was followed by a stop at the Firefighters' Memorial where we saluted and paid tribute to our fallen brothers.



We also went to HQ because some department leaders wanted to meet with us.

Our PM visit, after lunch, we visited the local 911 call center. A huge difference from the ones in Belgium. As we can see, from real close, how far Belgium is on this high standard agency.



It was finally time for some station assignments. Everybody got his/her station and started this ride along program.

Dominic and I were assigned to station 9, The Bottoms. Home to District 9, Engines 9 & 5, Truck 9, Medics 9 & 5. The busiest hall in the city! Within 4 hours we made 6 calls, EMS and fire. Right after dinner the whole crew, from rookie to Chief, hit the dishes and kitchen.

The night is filled with conversations about Belgium, Belgian fire services, our departments, and a few calls. Kind of weird but all fire apparatuses didn't get a single call after midnight. The guys love us!

### **Wednesday, May 22nd 2013:**

An easy and very slow night...we got up around 0600 AM to meet the new crew, along with having some coffee and donuts of course.

First stop today would be NFD Station 13. These guys took us down to a scrap yard where we worked off frustrations on a few cars. First they showed us how to do an extrication and then they get a Belgian demo how we do it in Belgium.





After this demo/drill we made a quick stop at the old Tennessee State Prison. Several movies like The Last Castle and The Green mile were shot here.

Right before lunch we see Engine 9 and Truck 28 in action on some swift water rescue training with the current NFD rookie class at Percy Priest Dam.





We ate lunch at Firehouse Subs and took a detour via the NFD Training Academy. We were back at 9's around 0300 PM to start the ride along program again. Not so long after, we were on our way to an apartment fire. Someone forgot about some food on the stove which set off the alarm. NFD responded with 4 engines, 2 trucks, 2 medic units and 2 chiefs.



The rest of the night was filled with several calls and conversations with the crews.



### **Thursday, May 23rd 2013:**

It was 0700 AM when we all met at 9's. We left Nashville and made the drive to Lynchburg, TN, home of Jack Daniel. We visited the Jack Daniel's Distillery and got a tour around the facility. We were able to meet with a fireman and their own station and some nice rigs. We also attend a sampling...a sampling of no less than 5 glasses of the liquid gold!

CL and Jimbo took us to a local BBQ place for lunch and we also got some time to go to the Lynchburg hardware store before we had to go back to Nashville.



Tonight, Carl took the box and I'll make a tour with an EMS Chief. I got numerous calls and it was fun to see this other type of unit. Carl is working the box tonight. It was a slow night but all "good" calls, calls you need to work on. He started the night with a chest pain call which resulted in a massive heart attack. Strong and fast work by Medic 9, Engine 2 and Baptist ER helped this woman to survive and enjoy her life some more. Other calls were a cardiac arrest with ROSC, a house fire with two cardiac arrests (both were brought to Vanderbilt University alive, the woman died the next morning but the man was able to walk home a couple of days later), a stroke, etc.

### **Friday, May 24th 2013:**

The 4 Rescue companies of NFD also operate as high angle rescue teams. We were invited to attend a drill with Rescue 2 on the Shelby Street Pedestrian Bridge over the Cumberland River. They instructed us on the equipment, the set up and the actual rescue. One of the firefighters climbed over the ridge and rappelled down to act like a worker in distress. He was dangling 50 feet under the bridge waiting for one of his colleagues to come rescue him.



We left the drill around 1130 AM because Chief Yates wanted to have a midterm-evaluation with us on our visit. He welcomed us again with some salad and a pizza buffet.

We also drove to Centennial Park to see a unique piece of apparatus.





Before heading back to the halls we stopped at the Country Music Hall of Fame & Museum for a visit to get educated in the history of country music.

Dominic was looking at another night with an EMS Chief and Carl would be riding Medic 9 again. We started off right away with a pin in/roll over call. Five patients with injuries but it wasn't too bad. The next call was a shooting. Carl responded to several trauma calls involving pin in/roll over's, some pretty bad and others not so bad.

### **Saturday, May 25th 2013:**

There are quite a few waterways in and around Nashville so the NFD has several boats on the apparatus list as well. Engine 22 operates one of those boats and launched theirs to show. The boat can carry up to 10 people and runs by two 150 HP engines. There is also a monitor at the tip of the bow which can be operated manually. The Captain and his crew took us on the Cumberland River behind the Opryland Hotel for a ride.

Then we went to Lebanon, Wilson County to visit one of the Vanderbilt Life Flight bases. Vanderbilt University runs an agency of air ambulances, located at Nashville International Airport and several other airports. The pilot and flight medic are eager to tell us about the agency, their work, the helicopter and the equipment.



The way back to the halls took about one hour. The rest of the afternoon was filled with more calls and much needed rest. Tonight the whole crew is going out with some of Nashville's bravest firemen and medics. It was a fun night with good food, drinks, music, laughter, dancing and overall good times.



**Sunday, May 26th 2013:**

1030 AM, Station 13...it is tough but we are up and ready to continue our training. The training will be for HazMat today. We are welcomed by Engine and Rescue 13's members and they start with the walkthrough, present the equipment and set up a decon field to perform a drill with us. Jan and I were suited up but the tones go out and everybody leaves the station for a call. Approximately one hour later, everybody is back at the station and ready to finish the drill.





The owner of the Alley Pub offered us lunch at Station 13.

Some of us went straight back to their stations and a few others made a stop at Baptist ER to get a free tour of the facility by Jody Vann.

Back in the stations it is time for some calls and a short afternoon nap. Right after dinner and clean up District 9 gets a call for an apartment fire. Chief Byers tells us to jump in! On scene we notice a 3 story apartment building fully involved. All first alarms units were dumping their monitors on the building and they were also operating a few hand lines for exposure protection. A 2<sup>nd</sup> alarm has been struck and by the end of the operations, 9 engines, 4 trucks, 2 rescues, 5 chiefs, an air truck, the shift commander, the Fire Marshall, an EMS Chief, 3 medic units and rehab were on scene and working. After counting approximately 76 firemen and 6 Belgians were on scene.

### **Monday, May 27th 2013:**

Memorial Day...slow day. Full day at the halls for everybody and adding more calls. Nothing extreme, several medical calls, some grass fires, dumpster fires, etc. Dinner was BBQ by the crew and dessert by Dominic and myself.

**Tuesday, May 28th 2013:**

It was our last full day in Nashville so time to say goodbye to Chief Yates. He invited us for lunch and apparently Channel 5 was also present. They saw us working at an incident earlier this week and they were interested by those crazy Belgians. Chief Yates gave a farewell speech like you have never heard before and we were also called up front, as crew and everyone individually, to get our training certificates and some more goodies. We were also decorated with a NFD Unit Citation.

Jan, Patrick and I presented some presents to Chief Yates, Jimbo and CL in return, also accompanied by a speech of course. Jimbo and CL brought some personal presents to us as well!

Next stop was NFD Station 9 where Channel 5 wanted to have an interview and some shots with the Belgian Fire Observers. This report aired the same night.



Dominic and I went to the store for groceries since we were cooking that night. We thought it was the least we could do for everyone at 9's. They made it a place where we were always welcome and everyone was so hospitable and warm to us. Dinner must have been awesome since nothing was left over! We are talking about 30 pounds of spaghetti sauce for 18 hungry firefighters! After dinner and clean up it was time for some crew pictures and more conversations and laughter. Yeah...leaving this place will be hard!



### **Wednesday, May 29th 2013:**

Hard times since it was time to leave. Chief Yates, Jimbo, CL, as well as a few other firemen and medics, all came out to Station 9 where we all gathered. It was very emotional. First we had a brunch in a restaurant somewhere in Nashville and then it was time to set course to Memphis.

We stopped at the National Civil Rights Museum, the place where Dr. King was shot, to get our tickets for the next day's visit. Then it was straight to the hotel for some downtime with a couple of beers and moonshine at the pool. At night we went downtown to Beale Street for dinner, drinks and music. Around midnight everybody was back in the hotel for a good night of sleep. Something that was very welcome after a week of Nashville nights!

### **Thursday, May 30th 2013:**

Breakfast was in our Holiday Inn hotel and we were on our way to Graceland around 0900 AM. Even though it was pretty busy here we still time enough to enjoy the King's life. We visited his mansion, trophy room, we saw his cars, airplanes, etc.



We ate lunch at Taco Bell and got back on the road right after. The next visit was the old Lorraine Motel. There was construction so a part of the museum was closed but we were still able to walk up to his room and also to the house across the street where the shooter was standing.

To end our day visits we went to Sun Studio for a tour.



We made a quick stop at a market to get some drinks and appetizers to enjoy at the hotel's pool. Around 0700 PM we all went back to Beale Street for some nice dinner and music at BB King's Blues Club, Hooters and many more places...

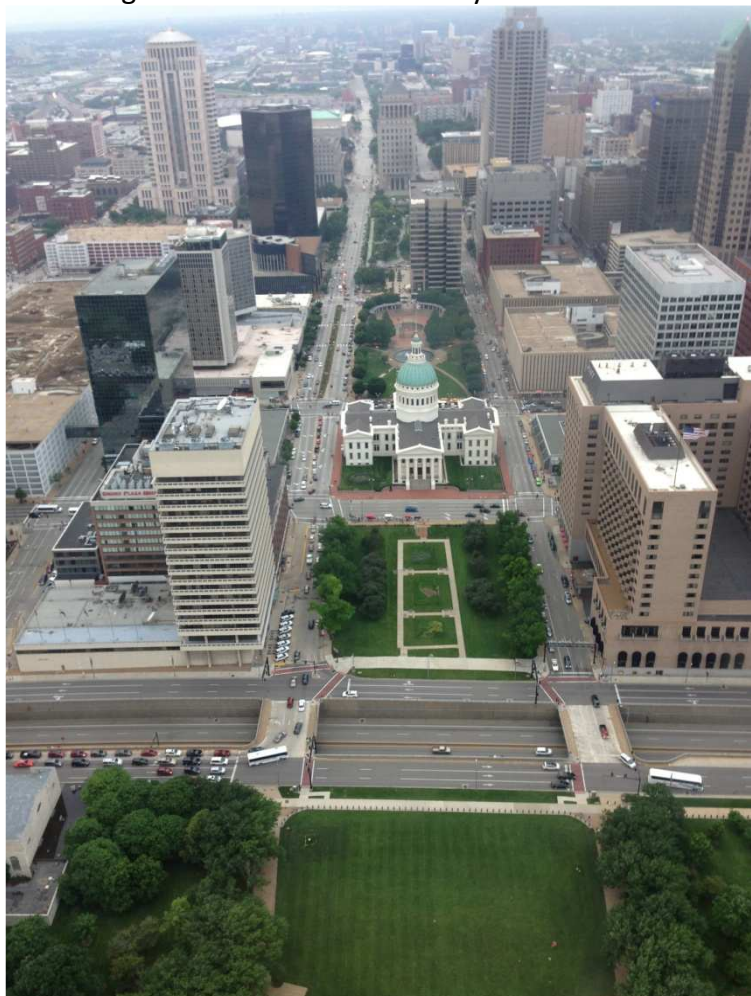


**Friday, August 31st 2013:**

We left Memphis today... Breakfast at the hotel, loading up the vans and off we went on our way to St Louis, MO. We will drive thru 3 states on our 4 hour trip. Shortly after noon, we made a stop at a Belgian brewery in St. Louis for a tour...Budweiser. We toured the facility, saw the famous Clydesdale's and were able to taste a few beers.



After the visit we drove to our hotel which was the Hyatt Regency this time. We checked in, left our luggage in the rooms and walked up to The Gateway Arch. We also took the tram upstairs where we had magnificent views over the city!





We planned to have a night out in town but right before we entered a Mexican restaurant for dinner, we heard tornado sirens. Shortly thereafter it started to rain, thunderstorms, lightning...so we ended the night at the bar of our hotel.

### **Saturday, June 1st 2013:**

Last transfer, the one to Chicago. We left the hotel around 0900 AM since this ride would take about 6 hours. On the way to the Windy City we saw the path of a tornado and the destruction of the thunderstorms the evening before.

We drove 1 hour before having breakfast at Denny's.

We checked in at the Clarion Hotel in Chicago, only 5 minutes away from Midway. A quick shower and off to a tremendous shopping center in the area where everyone was able to buy extra stuff to put in their suitcases.

The whole crew offered Patrick, Jan and myself dinner at a Japanese buffet to thank us for the magnificent two weeks they have had.

Right before heading back to bed we had a few more drinks at the bar in the hotel.

### **Sunday, June 2nd 2013:**

Lots of walking today but the weather looked pretty bad. It was cloudy, windy and pretty cold. Long pants and a sweater...nothing will stop us! We took the shuttle towards Midway Airport where we boarded the train to downtown.

First stop was Willis Tower but since it was so clouded we weren't able to see anything at the top. We decided to postpone this visit and walked through downtown enjoying the skyscrapers as well as a CFD high rise exercise.

It started to rain but thank God there was a fire station so we walked right in for a chat with the crew, a soda and some t-shirts. When it cleared up a bit we continued our walk to Navy Pier. It started to rain again so we walked in a bar for some drinks and appetizers.

All of the sudden, the sky cleared so we took the L towards Willis Tower again. This time we were able to get up and enjoy the view over the City and Lake Michigan.



The group split up after this visit. Some went back towards the hotel and stopped at a Best Buy for some more shopping. The other half of us made a rendezvous with Mike and Mindy, an Engineer and Medic from NFD who were in town this weekend.

A couple of hours later we all met again at the hotel bar, took a nightcap and talked over the past two weeks before going to bed.

### **Monday, June 3rd 2013:**

It was a beautiful morning...blue skies, sun was shining...a beautiful day to fly back to Belgium. NOT!!!! Nobody in the group wanted to return home. Apparently they all enjoyed it here so much.

Shower, breakfast, suitcases, check out and we were on our way to the airport around 1100 AM. We had two more hours to kill so everybody had some drinks or a Chicago hotdog at the airport.

Our Delta flight to Atlanta went pretty smooth but we needed to run at our arrival in Atlanta to get our connecting flight to Brussels. We caught it and right after we boarded, the crew closed the gate and we were airborne 15 minutes later. There was a whole night of drinks, dinner, coffee, movies, sleep, coffee, breakfast and then landing in Brussels.

**Tuesday, June 4th 2013:**

Touch down at Brussels Airport, a little earlier as foreseen. Quick through customs, baggage claim and border control before we were welcomed by friends and family.

We took some last drinks and group pictures before heading home.

Nashville, TN 2013 was a fact!

VERSTREPEN Carl