

Ride Along SHREVEPORT, LA 2018

It's March the 4th 08AM and a group of Belgian and Dutch firefighters gather at Brussels Airport to catch the plane heading to the States. It's the start of the first Ride Along program of the year of the Fireobservers Belgium. The Shreveport Fire Dpt will host us for one week and take us in inn their firehouses like family. The first leg of our trip today will take us to Chicago, afterwards we'll fly to Dallas.

After almost 20 hours of travelling we arrive in Dallas and after picking up the rental cars we are heading to Canton, TX, for our first night in the US.



After a short sleep, a lot of the group are awake early because of the jetlag, our first day of the ride along program starts. After taking a real Texan breakfast in Canton we take the road to Shreveport. Entering Louisiana, we have a stop at the visitor center. It want take long and a lady asks us to help her. Her 2 kids locked here car from the inside. After 15 minutes our group can open the card without breaking something. First job well done. It's time to be on the road again because at 10 AM we have a meeting with Ass Chief Fred Sanders and the Fire Chief Scott Wolverton.

The welcome at the Shreveport Fire Dpt is overwhelming. After a short meeting we can arrange the final station assignments and in the afternoon we have a second meeting with the Fire Chief and the local press. After a long day everyone is dropped in their assigned stations and we are ready for our first call's. It want take long and the first bells are ringing.



The second day of our program starts at the academy. All of our crews have to go to classes so we are able to catch up with them. Two classes are on the program, rope training and transitional attack. After the training everyone is heading back to the stations for some more calls. A few members of the group are reassigned to some other stations because of the call-volume. After some re-arrangements everyone is settled again and ready for the night.

After a busy night we have an appointment at the local airport to visit ARFF division. After a nice chat with the ARFF-chief we have the possibility to sit in the drivers seat of a real crash tender and we are allowed to push the pedal and drive this huge machine ourselves, a ones in a lifetime experience!



Just before lunch we have a stop at the uniform shop so everyone can fill up their luggage with some local uniform stuff.

In the afternoon we are heading back to the Fire Academy because the Bomb Squad, part of the Shreveport Fire Dpt, prepared a demo for us. During this demo we are allowed to ignite bombs ourselves and we are able to work and exercise with the bomb robot. After this great visit we have one more visit to go before heading back to stations. We meet the chief of Fire Prevention. A very

remarkable lady. She was the first lady in the Dpt. with a high-ranked position many years ago.

Thursday morning. Today we have a full day at the station and we can be part of the daily leaving of a Shreveport firefighter. Doing calls, training, maintenance and cleaning...



In the evening it's time to get in our uniforms because the Fire Chief invited us for the annual Fire Dpt. banquet. It's a great honor to be part of this evening. During the banquet, filled with great Cajun food, several first responders

receive a medal or certificate of achievement for what they did during the past year.

Friday morning we have some more time to spend in the stations. Just after lunch we gather to visit the Life Air Rescue service. They are stationed at the back of one of the local hospitals and with their aircrafts, heli's and fixed wings, they do calls in the whole Louisiana area.

Afterwards we have a stop at the Caddo Parish 911 Center. At this place all 911-calls come in for the whole Caddo parish area.



Because it is our last day with B-shift, the guys of B-shift station 1 invite our group for a farewell diner. With great Cajun BBQ food we are able to meet new friends. Afterwards there is some time to play local firehouse games.

Saturday morning we can have a lazy morning. The group members can chose today. Or they stay in the stations or they are able to go to Smokey's swamp to do some real Louisiana things like hunting and shooting. Smokey, officially John Austin James, is a retired Battalion Chief at the Dpt. Peter met him in 2011 during the first ride along in Shreveport. They became really good friends. In the evening Smokey cooks us a fabulous Crawl Fish meal at station 1. You can't go more local then this one.



Sunday, our last day of our stay with the Shreveport Fire Dpt. At 3PM it's shift change. We say farewell to our brothers and sisters of C-shift and the A-shift takes over. It's only the second time we see them this week because they just had their 6 days off. In the afternoon, Signal 51, invites us for a farewell diner at station 1. Signal 51 is a group of retired firefighters and other volunteers and they provide rehab to the Shreveport firefighters during call's. A noble and well appreciated job!



After this meal it's time to say goodbye because tomorrow morning we will be up early to start our second part of the trip, the tourist part.



Monday morning, with hard feelings we say goodbye and we are leaving Shreveport. As our brothers and sisters of the Shreveport Fire Dpt. say, the first time you come over, you are friends, the second time you become family. And so it's how it feels. We are leaving our family here but we will definitely come back!

It's time to set course to New Orleans, our first stop. But before that we have the possibility to visit the Ferrara Company, one of the biggest manufacturers of fire trucks in de US. One of the truck's build at this moment is the new ladder for

the Shreveport Fire Dpt. station 1.

During the evening we check in in our hotel in NOLA and we can have a first beer in a week. Also sleeping in a hotel bed without bell's and sirens going is a relieving thing.

After a good night filled with sleep it's time so set course to Mobile, AL. We will visit the USS Alabama, one of the biggest battleships of it's age. When you visit one of the landmarks of the Navy you have to visit the airside of it to. So in the afternoon we enter the Pensacola Naval Air Station, home of the Blue Angels. Here you can visit a huge variety of airplane's, you can try your flying skills in a simulator and much more.

Wednesday is one is a day filled with miles. The only thing we have to do today is to drive to Ocala,



FL. So no big deal today and for almost everyone the day is filled with sleeping, reading and singing during the roadtrip.

Thursday will be fun all day. After a small breakfast we are heading to Orlando. After parking the cars at the hotel we walk to the Universal Studio's. To be honest, when you walk in you become a child again. A lot to do and a lot of fun. Ending this day in the local Hard Rock Café is the only good option.

Friday morning. Time to buy us some things in the local outlet shop's. After some shopping hours we set course to Delray Beach. It's time to meet some other Belgians and friends at the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Delray Beach.

After checking in we have some beers and food during the preparade. Time to get in the mood for the 50th St. Patrick's Day Parade tomorrow.

Saturday, time to get dressed in our uniforms. Thousands and thousands of people gather in Delray to be part of the parade. Firefighters from around the world flew in to march up during this parade. It's an honor to be part of this and marching up under the Belgian flag, raised by 2 aerial ladders, is a great feeling! Also Papa John, Sweety and their daughter and son-in-law are present.



Sunday morning, time to leave the Delray Beach area. After packing the cars we are heading to the Everglades. On the program today a trip with an airboat on the Everglades, a road trip through Miami, Coral Gables with highlights like the Biltmore Hotel, the Venetian Pool and Little Havana.

When checking in in the hotel the concierge tells us he knows a very good restaurant at the promenade so the

place where we can have the last dinner of our trip is chosen very quickly. And exactly, it's a very good restaurant, right in the middle of the night fever of Miami Beach.

Monday, time to fly home. After a beautiful sunrise at the beach we are packing the cars for the last time. After killing the spare time in Little Havana it's time for dropping off our rental cars and flying home to Brussels via Frankfurt.

End of a beautiful trip and ride along program!

