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SEE PAGE 45

Alive!

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LAFD Air Power

Checking in with the Fire Dept.'s Air Operations.

SEE PAGE 7

Battalion Chief Joseph Foley inside the LAFD Air Operations headquarters at Fire Station 114, Van Nuys Airport.

Alive! photo by Angel Gomez.



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Air *LAFD Air Operations* **Power**



At the top are Firefighter/Paramedic Greg Sanderson (in helicopter) talking to The Club's Angel Gomez. Below, from left: Capt. Dan Mattera, helitac operations; Battalion Chief Joseph Foley, Commander of Air Operations; Capt. Wendell Smith, Station Commander, FS 114; and John Hawkins, Club CEO.

Alive! Feature**LAFD Air Operations****Air Power**

Through its unique and powerful rescue, air ambulance and firefighting abilities, LAFD's Air Operations safeguards the City.

Photos by Angel Gomez, Club Member Services Director; Club staff; and courtesy the LAFD

The LAFD operates its impressive Air Operations Unit at Fire Station 114 adjacent to Van Nuys Airport. The flight line typically has six multi-mission helicopters ready for deployment primarily as an air ambulance, air rescue and a fire suppression resource (water dropper) for brush and grass fires.

The City Fire Department's Air Operations Section has been on duty since 1962. The Section began with a one piston-engine Bell 47 and has grown to a fleet of six jet-turbine-powered helicopters. Four of the six are Bells, and two are state-of-the-art AgustaWestlands (AW 139), designed in Italy and built in Philadelphia.

The most important assets of the Section are the pilots, firefighter/paramedics, helitac (ground support) crewmembers and Department of

General Services helicopter mechanics. There are five pilots assigned to each of three 24-hour shifts. The five pilots consist of:

- Pilot IV, the Lead Pilot, who assumes the role of Helicopter Coordinator (HELCO) when assigned to brush/grass fires. The HELCO pilot is like the "Air Traffic Controller" over a brush/grass fire. He supervises all the aircraft assigned to the incident. (However, the incident commander on the ground remains in control of all firefighting efforts, including those in the air);
- Three Pilot IIIs, who fly the medium aircraft; and
- One crew chief, a pilot trainee (already a licensed helicopter pilot undergoing rigorous additional training for firefighting and air rescue). Currently, Air Operations has two trainees, one on Administrative Detail due to an accelerated program to replace pilots lost to attrition.



Capt. Wendell Smith, Station Commander (right), explains a feature of the Bell 412 to John Hawkins, Club CEO.



Air Operations: Top row, from left: Capt. I Dan Mattera; Battalion Chief Joe Foley; Pilot IV Rick Wheeler; Firefighter/Paramedic Greg Sanderson; Firefighter/Paramedic Al Naeole; Capt. II Wendell Smith; and Pilot II Jorge Arevalo. Front: Pilot I Trainee Chris Justus; Pilot I Trainee Dane Jackson; Pilot III Scot Davison; Pilot III Scott Bowman; and Pilot III Phil Clark.

A Tough Assignment

Pilots

The pilots at Air Operations undergo a rigorous screening and training regimen before they are certified to fly for the Fire Department. The initial training program consists of 200 hours of instruction in basic operations, mountain terrain, heavy load operations, confined-space landing and aircraft emergencies.

"They come in already licensed as pilots," explained Captain II Wendell Smith, Station Commander. "They are already pilots, having spent anywhere from \$70,000 to \$100,000 of their own money before they can even come to us. A few have previous flight experience with the military. So these are special guys."

"Once they're here, we begin their special flight training, [which is] very different from the civilian world. We teach them to operate in the most extreme environments. Pilots are normally trained to get from point A to point B as directly as possible. But we have to teach them night flying, flying with their water tanks fully loaded (gross weight), flying in smoke and near high tension power lines, etc."

During the initial training phase, the pilots are continually tested through "check rides," which measure their skill and proficiency in all phases of helicopter operations. The success rate for the basic training phase (200 hours) is approximately 60 percent. Once the initial training is completed, the pilot must fly an additional 300 hours to build advanced skills and proficiency. The pilot will eventually transition into the bigger

helicopters (water droppers) as their skill, experience and proficiency increase.

Once certified in all ships, Department pilots are arguably the most proficient and well-trained pilots in public service. The Department's helicopters are staffed 24 hours a day and stand ready to respond to any emergency throughout the City.

Helitac Crews

The helitac crews – mostly ground support, although they can perform some duties while in the air – are stationed at Fire Station 90 across the Van Nuys airport from the Air Operations facility. The helitac crews consist of Captains, Engineers, Apparatus Operators and Firefighters, all trained in helitac duties. Their training takes six to 12 months to complete and encompasses areas including knowledge of helispots, fueling operations, water-filling operations, hoist operations and a thorough knowledge of the use and maintenance of all associated equipment. These crewmembers are vital to the safe and effective operation of the helicopters.

Maintenance

Maintenance of the Department helicopters is performed by General Services mechanics in their new facility next door to FS 114. Many of the mechanics have military background and extensive training and experience as civilian mechanics. Their hard work and attention to detail makes our fleet the best maintained anywhere in the country



Maintenance: General Services maintains the airships for the LAFD. Here, Fire 4 is undergoing maintenance in the General Service hangar at Van Nuys Airport.



Firefighter / Paramedics: Greg Sanderson, Firefighter/Paramedic, displays the medical evacuation equipment aboard the LAFD's Bell 412 helicopters.



Pilots: Jorge Arevalo, Fire Helicopter Pilot, in the pilot seat of a LAFD Air Operations airship.



Helitac Crews: Ground support crews are based at FS 90 across the runways from FS 114 at Van Nuys Airport. Here, Jim Como, Engineer (left), holds onto the hoist, and Jorge Espinosa, Firefighter (right), removes equipment from the tail boom.



THE ALIVE! INTERVIEW

Smoke and Other Challenges

Battalion Chief Joseph Foley talks about his department, LAFD Air Operations, and the tough missions it takes on to keep us safe.

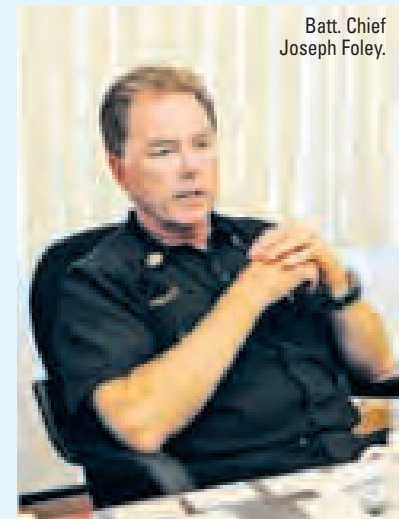
On Oct. 14, Club CEO John Hawkins and Alive! editor John Burnes sat down to talk to Eagle Rock native Battalion Chief Joseph Foley, 33 years of City service, Commander of LAFD Air Operations. The interview took place in his office at Fire Station 114 at the Van Nuys Airport. —Ed.

Alive! Chief Foley, thanks for showing us around today. Was your first job with the City working for the LAFD?

Battalion Chief Joseph Foley: Yes. Prior to joining the LAFD, I worked briefly for the California Department of Forestry as a seasonal firefighter. I drove an ambulance for about eight months, with Professional Ambulance, out in Glendale. I was hired by the City after that.

Of all the things to do in the City, this has got to be a pretty exciting place to work. The way you see it, is it just an everyday kind of an existence by now, or is it still exciting?

Joseph: This is a very exciting position. They call it a special-duty position. Meaning, I'm not on a 24-hour shift. I'm on administrative duty. This is one of the more revered special duty positions to be in. As mentioned, it's not only administrative, but we have a tactical/operational component, too.



Batt. Chief Joseph Foley.

What made you want to apply for this position?

Joseph: [This is] a very sought-after position for special duty. Not only is it challenging administratively but there is a very unique tactical/operational side to it. You are in a helicopter. Primarily, providing aerial command support at brush and grass fires. That was a very motivating factor for me to want to apply for this position. It's not strictly paperwork and reports. This had a combination.

Eye in the Sky

How often do you actually get into the command helicopter [helco] up there during an actual fire? Is it sort of like a quarterback calling the shots?

Joseph: I wouldn't say "calling the shots" or "the quarterback." That always rests with the Incident Commander on the ground at a command post. When I jump into the small helicopter with the helco pilot, I'm more or less his eyes in the sky. We have direct radio communication with the command post and with the Division and Group Supervisors on the ground, and give them an aerial view of what the fire's doing. Where is it going? What's in its way? I may give recommendations on placing companies and recommendations on, maybe, the progression of the fire and the next area of concern for the incident commander. When you're at a command post, sometimes all you see is just a big column of smoke. You don't know what's going on behind that smoke. So when I'm up 500 to 1,000 feet in the air, I get a very good view of what the fire's doing.

To give you an idea, as mentioned, I'm at 500 feet, typically, or 1,000 feet. The water droppers [fly] in and typically drop their water about 50 to 75 feet off the ground. So I also have a very good view of what they're doing and where they're placing their water drops.

What's the longest shift you've ever spent doing that?

Joseph: In 2008, we had a series of fires – the Sayre fire, the Marek fire and the Sesnon fire. Each time, I was here four,

Alive! Feature

The Fleet

Here's a rundown of Air Operations' current lineup of equipment. The helicopters are augmented with equipment designed for given operations, whether it be air ambulance, air rescue or fire suppression.

The four Bell helicopters take off, land and are parked on wheeled platforms, which are pulled out (and back in) by specialized tugs. That way, they can be "garaged" under shelter and out of the weather, which significantly reduces wear and tear on the expensive machines. The two newest in the fleet, the AgustaWestlands (AW 139), feature wheeled landing gear and do not need wheeled platforms, although they are towed.

Captain Smith says that each helicopter can reach the air less than five minutes after the pilot enters the cockpit inside the shed. The helicopters can begin their start-up sequence while they are being towed to the departure pad.

The department manages an 18-year airship replacement schedule.

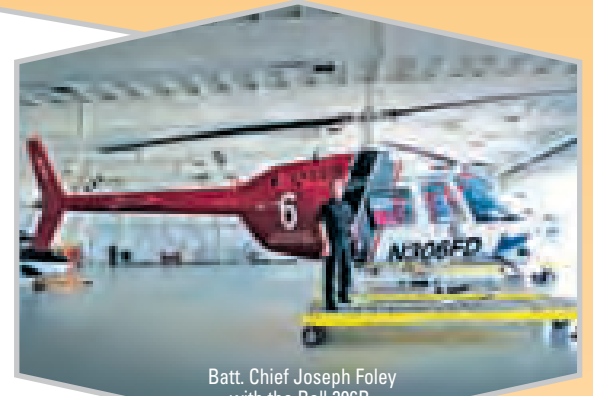
Bell 412

The workhorse veterans of the fleet are three Bell 412s. They are twin-engine helicopters whose primary mission is air ambulance, hoist and water dropping. The twin engines give an added margin of safety during extended hovering operations such as hoist rescues.



Bell 206B-III

The Bell 206B-III Jet Ranger is the smallest ship in the fleet; Air Operations has one of them. Its primary use is training, but it is also used for HELCO, command and control, and observation at incidents. It's also equipped with a 30 million candlepower "night sun" spotlight for illumination of nighttime incidents and searches.

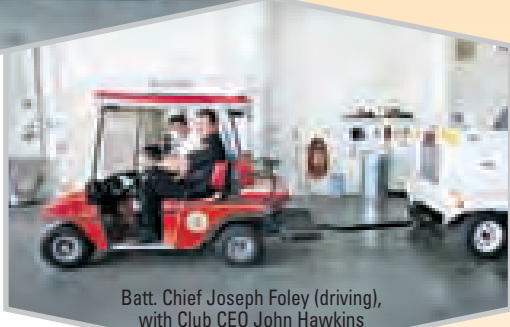


Batt. Chief Joseph Foley with the Bell 206B.



Western SE Cart

This Western SE cart helps Air Operations service and maintain its fleet of airships. Attached to the back of the cart is an APU, or auxiliary power unit, which allows the airships to power up their internal operations without having to start the turbine.



Batt. Chief Joseph Foley (driving), with Club CEO John Hawkins



AgustaWestland 139

The two newest and most impressive in the fleet are AgustaWestland 139s – the LAFD is the only firefighting department in the country employing these state-of-the-art helicopters, according to Capt. II Wendell Smith. Rated at 1,531 horsepower per turbine, each 139 has nearly twice the horsepower of the next in line, the Bell 412s. A third AgustaWestland 139 is on the way to replace a retiring Bell 412s, expected to take place in the first quarter of 2011.

Bell 47

This shell of a Bell 47 is the same model, although not the same craft, as the Department's very first craft, a 1962 Bell 47. This frame – it has no engine or rotors – was originally a DWP aircraft and was saved from the City's salvage yard by the Los Angeles Firefighters Historical Society, repainted and parked at FS 114. Eventually, it will be on display at the Firefighters Historical Museum.



Fire Station 114

LAFD Air Operations operates out of beautiful and spacious (57,000 square feet) Fire Station 114 at Van Nuys Airport. Groundbreaking took place in 2004, and the facility was formally dedicated May 31, 2008.

The new LAFD Air Operations and Airport Fire/Rescue facility, also known as Fire Station 114, replaces cramped and inefficient buildings that were used for more than three decades, and deemed deficient in operational and safety issues affecting Air Operations including; takeoff and landing clearances, helicopter parking and hanger space, clearance between helicopters, parts storage capabilities, emergency response efficiencies, and noise affecting the neighborhood.

The new facility rectifies all those deficiencies. It also incorporates FS 114's Crash and Foam operation, which serves the general firefighting needs of the overall Van Nuys Airport (airfield emergency response).

FS 114 was funded through Proposition F, passed in 2000.

LAFD Air Operations

Air Power



Five-Rotor Setup
• 45 ft., 3 in. each

Digital Avionics

Tow Vehicle

Defibrillator
• inside

Hoist (opposite side)
• 600 lb. lifting capacity

(2) Pratt & Whitney Turboshaft Jet Engines
• 1531 hp. each

Fuel Tank • 414 gallons

LAFD Fire Helicopter Pilot
• Jorge Arevalo

Medic Bay

Sliding Bay Door

Patient Cage
• stretcher

Night Sun Searchlight
• 30 million candlepower

Water Tank
• 420 gallons

Retractable Landing Gear

LAFD Airship 3: AgustaWestland 139

This schematic describes all the extra equipment on an LAFD Air Operations airship.

General characteristics

Length: 145 feet, two inches
Main rotor diameter: 45 feet, three inches each
Width: 10 feet
Height: 12 feet, two inches
Empty weight: 7,985 pounds

Gross weight: 1,4110 pounds, not including water tank
Powerplant: 2 Pratt & Whitney Canada PT6C-67C free turbine turboshaft engines, 1,531 horsepower each

Performance

Maximum speed: 193 mph, empty
Range: 573 miles, empty
Service ceiling: 20,000 feet
Rate of climb: 2,140 feet per minute, maximum

THE ALIVE! INTERVIEW

—continued from page 9

five, six days in a row. I had to go out for a number of hours in the helicopter, usually six to eight hours. I'd come in for maybe a two-hour break and then, go back out again for six or eight hours. That lasted for four or five days at a time.

Can you give us a brief overview or the stated mission of LAFD's Air Operations?

Joseph: In the most basic sense, we are here to provide the safest, most professional, highest quality emergency helicopter service to the Los Angeles community. Yes, we drop water on brush fires, but probably 80 percent of our emergency responses are in the aeromedical (air ambulance) area.

Really, 80 percent is medical?

Joseph: Yes. The reason being is that, until Oct. 4, just a few days back, there was no pediatric trauma center in the San Fernando Valley. Anytime we had a critically injured or sick child who required transportation to a pediatric center, they either were ground transported or air transported. The criterion is a 30-minute transport time. If that patient could not get there within 30 minutes by ground transport – with the traffic in LA, typically, you can't make it – we would fly. The closest facilities to the Valley we had were the UCLA Medical Center and Children's Hospital in Hollywood. Sometimes we also would transport to [Los Angeles County] USC Medical Center. Now we have the option of taking pediatric patients to the Northridge Hospital Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU).

Who calls you, the LAPD Communications 911 Center?

Joseph: All calls go into 911 with the LAPD first. And then, if it's a medical call, a fire call, or a rescue call, it gets transferred over to [the LAFD] dispatch center. Then we're dispatched out of what we call our Operation Control Division, or OCD, located beneath City Hall East.

And they make the determination whether to send a copter out?

Joseph: Yes. It all depends on established dispatch criteria.

Fire Station 114

Is the Van Nuys location favorable to fight these fires?

Joseph: Oh yes, clearly. I would say probably 90 percent of our brush incidents are in the San Fernando Valley [here]. We do have some activity over in East Los Angeles, Pacific Palisades, and some minor activity down in San Pedro. But typically, 90 per-

Tell us about this new building. And you came on when it was three-quarters built [it opened in 2008 – Ed.]. Tell us about what this building allows the City to do better.

Joseph: Sure. Number one, this is a great facility for maintaining our aircraft for longevity. Before, all the aircraft were kept outdoors, subject to the sun, the rain and the weather. Now, they're all kept indoors. From the aircraft's upholstery, to the avionics, to the paint, and any other affected components, are going to be much more reliable and have a longer lifespan. That's from the aircraft standpoint.

From an administrative standpoint, we have all the administrative offices in one area, which was not the case in the old facility. We were [in different locations]. It wasn't really conducive to a good administrative environment. But here, we have my office and offices for the Command Pilot, the Lead Pilot, the Station Commander (Captain II) and the Crash [and Foam – the Van Nuys Airport's fire service] Captain. We're all one office away from each other. Administratively, it's much more functional and efficient.

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'We kept asking them, "Are you guys okay?" And we'd hear, "Yeah, we're okay." I kept thinking, we're going to lose somebody tonight.'

— Batt. Chief Joseph Foley

cent of our brush calls are right here in the Valley. What's great about this facility from the old one is that we have a water valve right at each one of our landing sites out here on our helipad. We can go out to the incident with water in the belly of the aircraft in the tank, as opposed to having to land at a designated helispot, fill the water tank and then go to the fire. That's a big advantage of this new facility.



Batt. Chief Joseph Foley.

Alive! Feature

the helicopter. If the patient is at an inaccessible area, we have to do a hoist operation and lower down our paramedics. And then, we either fly them to a landing zone to be transported by a ground resource, or just fly them directly to the hospital.

Do you bill people for those services? How does that work?

Joseph: A helicopter transport is really no different than a transport in a rescue ambulance. There's a charge associated with it, but it's not dramatic like you would think. If you have a private ambulance company provide an air ambulance, it's very expensive – upwards of \$10,000 in a private helicopter. The public agencies like LA City Fire and LA County Fire are not really permitted to make a profit, so we are not obligated to charge those kind of fees. But I know we're looking into programs like a "cost recovery" for the use of the aircraft, which would be a little more of a fee than we're charging now. But again, it basically would be to cover the costs of putting the aircraft in the air and flying to the hospital. That's a program we're looking at but have not implemented.

Who do you partner with? If someone in San Bernardino County, they've got a fire out there, and they call you in, how far will you go in to help?

Joseph: We don't go anywhere past the City boundaries very often. We do have mutual aid with some of the agencies around here, meaning that if Ventura County calls and says, "Hey, I've got a fire out in Thousand Oaks, I need helicopter support," the approval would have to come down from headquarters. [The decision] is based on a lot of things – how many aircraft do we have in the City right now, how many are out of service, what's the weather/are we pre-deployed – a lot of factors. Normally we agree to provide the aircraft, pilot and flight crew, but again, it's not a blanket yes. And for that, there's normally a cost associated to the requesting agency. Same thing for the other contingent cities bordering Los Angeles, we'd almost always provide assistance if we did not feel it would dramatically compromise the service to the community of LA.

History

So Air Operations started in 1962, right?

Joseph: Yes. I think LA County Fire and LA City Fire started right about the same time. We all started just after the Bel Air fire of '61. I think the Bel Air fire was not the actual reason why we bought helicopters. It just so happens that was when one of the LAFD's firefighters - Bud Nelson ... saw that there was a value to having helicopters for not only rescue, but for dropping water on brush fires. Firefighter Nelson was a former military pilot. He's the one who more or less started the whole thing. He got the fire chief on his side, and then went to Council and the mayor, etc. It started through his efforts. I believe the first helicopter arrived here in 1962. It was one of the Bell 47s, and it had a little 90-gallon aluminum tank on the bottom. And I believe history says that the first run was not actually a fire, but a rescue run.

THE ALIVE! INTERVIEW

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And a view of the hangar from your office ...

Joseph: Yes, and we have a view of the hangar, right. And it's all climate controlled, which is obviously very nice for the members.

We have our Crash Rescue [airport fire operations] in the same building. Before, they were in a separate facility. Now, they're under the same roof. So there's much more cohesiveness, as mentioned, much more efficiency. .

That is a big deal.

Joseph: Yes.

But before, with the aircraft outdoors, you could just start it up and take off. Here you have to tow it outside first.

Joseph: Right.

Has that made much of a difference?

Joseph: No. Even if the aircraft was outdoors, it still takes about five minutes before the pilot can effect a start in the aircraft and get it warmed up before he can get clearance from the tower and lift off. With the aircraft in the hangar, the pilot gets in the aircraft and starts to engage all the switches and buttons to start the aircraft up, we have our ground support pulling the aircraft out. There's no delay at all.

A Big Task

What are the challenges to running Air Operations?

Joseph: Well, like anything else, money. This is a very expensive operation to maintain. Aircraft are very expensive to service. They're very expensive to operate per hour. They're expensive to run. But compared to the service they provide, they're a bargain. One aircraft is worth probably 40 firefighters on the ground pulling hose up a hill at a brush fire. Additionally, we can arrive on scene in remote areas, and start an aggressive attack on the fire well before the ground fire resources arrive. Tactically, that is a tremendous advantage/service in providing fire suppression service to the community. Air Operations makes up a lot in the amount of people down on the ground.

But again, trying to maintain the updated equipment, trying to get new equipment, trying to get more advanced and updated aircraft, trying to maintain our staffing with pilot trainings – all that is very costly. So that's the challenge – to constantly keep this place moving forward with the best equipment and with the staff to replace our pending pilot vacancies. Keeping those mechanisms going is the biggest challenge.

How has the budget crunch affected you?

Joseph: Because we're in such a specialized unit, we get pretty much what we want. So I have to give kudos to our administration and to the City, because they really do watch out for this Section. They know the value we provide to the community with rescues and firefighting. The challenge is working through the process. Also challenging sometimes is getting people outside the Fire Department to understand how important it is to get new pilot candidates in here and start training them to fly our helicopters. It normally takes about four years for one of our candidates to complete his/her pilot training. Filling vacancies in the pilot training program continues to be my biggest challenge. They don't come as fast as I want them to come, but it's the process.

Why are there vacancies?

Joseph: Attrition happens in two ways – either voluntarily through retirement (predictable), or involuntarily, the ones you don't know about. Involuntary retirements occur when the person has a medical condition that precludes them from flying. Those are the tough ones, because you can't see them coming. As mentioned, it takes about four years to get our guys trained to fly in the multi-mission helicopters – the water droppers. I can't just pull a pilot out of my pocket somewhere. It's a challenge to try and identify the known vacancies we're going to have and project them out in the future.

Talk about rescues for a second. I'm noticing that there are more rescues of people who have been doing extreme things outside. Are you noticing more rescues, more people doing things that maybe they shouldn't be doing or they're overtaxing themselves?

Joseph: Not since I've been here. This is a great area for outdoor activities. We've got the great weather and the mountains. So, typically, on the weekends, people are out hiking or mountain biking or rock climbing. But sometimes they get in trouble. And the next thing you know, they're flying over the handlebars. They're hiking up the rocks and they twist an ankle, and they roll down 30 feet, and they break a leg. Those are the kind of things that we do on almost a regular basis on the weekend. We're always flying out into the Santa Monicas, the Palisades area, and performing air ambulance service from a landing site after the ground firefighters have secured the patient and brought them to



Batt. Chief
Joseph Foley.

Tales From the Air

What are some of your favorite stories? What are some of the things that are seared in your memory?

Joseph: Well, most memorable is being out and operating over the fires. The one that really comes to my mind was the Sayre fire, the one that destroyed those 500 mobile homes up in the north San Fernando Valley. I was in the small helicopter; we were doing *helco* [helicopter command] at night, and the Santa Ana winds were coming over the top of the mountain at like 60 or 70 miles an hour. The small helicopter was moving probably ten feet up and down for a couple of hours straight.

The job our guys did at that fire was amazing. The bulk of the fire was at the base of the mountain, above the freeway. The smoke was pitch black, and all you could see was a little red glow underneath this black, black smoke that went 300 feet in the air. I saw our guys diving in through the black smoke, and then I didn't see them anymore. Then I saw them coming out the other side of the black smoke. That was the most amazing [thing] I've ever seen. Additionally, there were high-tension wires that ran along the base of the mountain, so our pilots were coming into the smoke, with 70 mile-per-hour Santa Ana winds, dropping the water and banking out. They probably missed the high-tension wires by no more than 100 feet at a time. We kept asking them, "Are you guys okay?" And we'd hear, "Yeah, we're okay. It's a little hairy, but we're okay." I kept thinking, we're going to lose somebody tonight. That was my thought. I said, "This is not good." But I'm not a pilot, so I leave it up to them to say if they're comfortable doing that or not.

That's the one that sticks in my mind the most, watching the guy disappear into the smoke and coming out the other side, not knowing if they were going to come out or not.

Can the water drops injure people?

Joseph: Absolutely. You've got three to four hundred gallons of water coming at you at 60 miles an hour from 60 feet in the air.

—continued next page

LAFD Air Operations

Air Power

So they have to be careful about the people as well.

Joseph: Yes, right. We try to never drop on personnel. It can really hurt you.

Sometimes when we're working later in the fire, and it's hot outside, we'll do what we call a cooling drop. We'll get up maybe 100 feet and go a little faster on the airspeed so the water drops as a much more fine particle; it kind of drifts over them like a nice mist.

Dedicated Staff

Talk a little bit about the dedication of your staff.

Joseph: Well, it starts really with the cost factor. Just to get a chance to get into the pilot-training program, our firefighters will spend nearly \$100,000 out of their own pocket between flight lessons, helicopter lessons and fixed-wing lessons and getting their certifications and their ratings. Can you imagine going home to your wife at night and saying, "Hey, honey, I want to be a helicopter pilot for the Fire Department, and by the way, we have to mortgage our house for \$100,000." That's the kind of dedication the guys start with.

Because the program is so difficult, we lose probably 40 or 50 percent of our guys through the training program on the first time through. Most of the guys who are not successful the first time, will go out and fly for another couple of years, either instructing, or getting more helicopter time, to enhance their skills. Again, I can't even tell how much money they would spend doing that, and then come back in to try it again. Most guys who don't make it the first time will make it the second time. So now we're at \$150,000 before you actually get a chance to operate the LAFD helicopter.

Has the department ever thought about their own training program, where they foot the bill?

Joseph: No, not at this time. Whether we'll do that in the future, I don't know, but at this time, no. It's hard enough now; we have only one training aircraft. We used to have two. We have only one, and we're spinning the blades off that thing with our current program. We are normally flight training three or four hours a day out of the daylight hours.

And no reimbursement programs or anything like that.

Joseph: No. So that's the dedication the guys come in with and then every day, they learn something new here every single day. The air rescue world is always evolving with new equipment, new procedures and new techniques. They're always studying and trying to keep sharp. We have a mandated amount of flight hours. They have to fly every single month on all the aircraft, so they're sharp on all the aircraft. We don't want them climbing in an aircraft at two o'clock in the morning and say, "Oh, God, what am I in now? Am I in Fire One, or Fire Four?" It has to be instantaneous. So, that speaks to their dedication of knowing their equipment and keeping their skills sharp.

And then the actual missions they fly – I described the Sayre fire, where I had a bad feeling into my stomach every time they would dip into the smoke. That those guys would go into that type of environment, knowing there is absolutely no room for a single error, speaks volumes to what they do, their professionalism, dedication, and the service they provide the community.

The Future

Right, what are the challenges of the future?

Joseph: Well, the future in the short term is to try and fill my current vacancies.

In the future, I would like to see more aircraft, both in a training model and in the *helco* [command] model. And when things go bad, you can never have too many water droppers. For right now, our complement is five to one, five water droppers and one training command ship. In the not too distant future, I'd like



Batt. Chief Joseph Foley (left) is interviewed by Club CEO John Hawkins.

'That those [pilots] would go into the [Sayre fire] environment speaks volumes to what they do and the service they provide the community.'
 — Batt. Chief Joseph Foley

emergency nighttime operations/capabilities, provide a much safer platform for our pilots and crewmembers to work in, and of course, the end result is a higher level of service to the community.

That Queasy Feeling

What do you love about this job?

Joseph: I think just the duality of it. Part of me likes the administrative side, because it's a challenge to do. But I really do like the other side because it's something I'd never done before. I've never done this helicopter thing – the operational side of it.

Do you get air sick?

Joseph: No.

Never been a problem.

Joseph: No. Never happened.

You spend six hours ...

Joseph: ... when basically all you're doing in the *helco* [command] ship is just doing a big circle the whole time above the fire. Where it gets a little queasy is when you're doing a circle and you're bouncing up and down ten feet at a time.

I'd be jumping out. Well, anyway, Chief Foley, thanks again for your time.

Joseph: You're welcome. My pleasure.

to increase that to a second small aircraft to keep our guys training around the clock.

One thing we're going to be getting into in the very near future is what they call interfacility transports. An interfacility transport is a medical transport from one hospital to another with a critically sick or injured patient who cannot reasonably go in a rescue ambulance. We've ordered additional high-level medical equipment and medical storage racks and whatnot for the aircraft. We're going to have our firefighter paramedics trained to a higher level to operate that equipment, and we'll be going online with that pretty quickly.

Additionally, the Air Operations Section will be converting/enhancing our helicopters to Night Vision Goggle technology. This is a very exciting and long-overdue program that will increase our

LAFD AIR OPERATIONS Mission Statement

Air Operations provides emergency helicopter support for the Fire Department's fire suppression, rescue, and air-medical transport responses. Additionally, Air Operations provides non-emergency support for training, fire prevention, public/community relations, and will assist other City Departments when requested.

To accomplish this, the following types of missions are conducted:

- Brush/grass fire responses
- Air ambulance responses
- Search and rescue
- High-rise responses
- Hoist rescue operations
- Animal rescue
- Swift water/river rescues
- Evacuation
- Shipboard emergencies and rescues in the Harbor
- Aerial command post
- Night incident illumination
- Equipment movement
- Personnel transport
- Training
- City agency transports
- Public demonstrations

