

ORANGE PEEL

BY: ERIC GUIDA

Sacramento Fire Department
Engine 57

OBSERVATIONS OF AN ENGINE GUY

On the morning of September 11th the world was changed forever. Many thousands of people lost their lives when those planes hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. A large number of those people were our brothers. We lost 343 FDNY brother firemen and with them we lost their experience and knowledge. We lost many great teachers whose love for the fire service was evident in how they taught us. One of the best was Andrew Fredericks. A fireman on Squad 18 he was the leader behind the resurgence of the smoothbore nozzle and its proper application in firefighting. Although I only met him a few times he gave me the knowledge and the foundation to some day be a worthy fireman. To honor him I present to you his observations. These bits of information were collected from his various articles written for Fire Engineering, Fire Nuggets and the like. I present them to you without any interpretation or added words. I think that these form a sound beginning to how to fight fire the correct way.

While it may be true that diversification is the key to survival, the fire service must never forget its primary mission, and at the core of that mission is the engine company.

Three elements are required in stretching a handline to an upper floor; preparation, training, and staffing.

1. Always “chase” the kinks once the line is charged.

One important reason solid streams are more effective than straight streams in interior fire attack concerns water droplets. When a solid stream is deflected off the ceiling and walls, it produces droplets of sufficient size and masses to reach the burning fuel without being carried away by thermal currents or vaporized prematurely by the heat of the fire.

2. Check every nozzle, every tour.

Good engine companies are aggressive but are also disciplined. Disciplined engine companies “take time to make time.” They take an extra thirty seconds to properly position the rig and estimate the handline stretch. They chock doors. They chase kinks. They see the big picture.

Using fog inside the fire building doesn’t protect you, it burns you.

3. Communicate what you do and what you see.

Firefighting objectives, in priority order, are to save lives, control the fire and conserve property. The initial attack handline is stretched first and foremost to save lives.

While attacking a fire from the unburned side may seem ideal from a property conservation standpoint, it may not facilitate achieving the first two, more critical objectives.

The most important reason for attacking a fire through the front door is that the front door usually leads directly to the interior stairs, and protection of the stairway is vital to the life safety of occupants trapped above the first floor and any firefighters searching for them.

4. In my experience, “down and dirty” saves the most lives.

Stick to the basics, especially during tough fires, and you will have more successes than failures.

The work was physical and frustrating, and I remembered thinking how bad the smoke was, and I wished I could quit digging. I pushed the notion of quitting into my subconscious and kept working.

Once the door is open, anticipate a dramatic change in fire conditions.

Preparation, or the lack of it, plays a significant role.

After arriving at a fire and dismounting the apparatus, close the cab door.

I can't say it enough, chock all doors.

Fifty years after Layman's “Little Drops of Water” its time to admit that fog streams are not the answer.

Since the safety of both occupants and firefighters at structure fires is directly linked to the speed with which the fire is controlled, the initial attack handline must apply water on the seat of the fire as quickly as possible. Advancing a handline through the front door is the surest means of achieving rapid fire control and ensuring life safety.

Sweep the floor with the stream as you advance the handline.

If using pre-connected lines, double check to ensure you have removed all the hose.

5. Don't crowd the nozzle team.

Disciplined engine companies know that crowding the nozzle team is not just dangerous; it usually means that other important jobs, such as removing kinks, aren't getting done.

Until the first handline is in place, attempts to get other lines in service may be counter productive.

Those are just a few of the important pieces of information that I constantly rely on in trying to be a good engine fireman. Andrew Fredericks is to thank for that, and much, much more, information that has helped get the fire service back to doing the job correctly. Andy, you will be sorely missed. Your insight and instruction has helped guide the fire service back to where it needs to be.

Thank you.