



Firefighter After Action Review Podcast: The Glen Allen Fire - Altadena, California

Michael Preet
(00:10):

Hello, I'm Michael Preet, a contract project manager for the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation. Welcome to the Firefighter After Action Review, a podcast series discussing line of duty death incidents to honor those heroes who gave their all.

Intro Voiceover
(00:37):

This is where tragedy struck. Dozens of firemen had already dropped from heat exhaustion and smoke inhalation.

MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY

They continued to battle this giant, which now threatened to consume them.

We had a house explosion.

Ambulances were moving in a steady stream.

MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY

I think we have one dead officer of the truck.

Michael Preet
(00:01:24):

This special series of the *Firefighter After Action Review* is dedicated to the two brave Los Angeles County wildland firefighters, Arthur Ruka and Christopher Herman, who made the ultimate sacrifice while battling the Glen Allen Fire in Altadena, California on August the 20, 1993.

Welcome to the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation podcast series, Firefighter After Action Review. Honoring firefighters who were killed in the line of duty. With me is my co-host Tom Harbor, a retired fire chief for the U.S. Forest Service. On behalf of our Director of Fire Service Programs, Danny Kissner, Board Chair Troy Markle and [CEO] Victor Stagnaro. We would like to thank you for joining us.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:02:25):

Thank you, Mike, and welcome to our viewers. We are here today to honor two fallen heroes, Firefighter Arthur Ruka and Firefighter Christopher Herman. These gentlemen lost their lives while battling a fire in the Foothill wildlands just off Glen Allen Lane in Altadena, Southern Los Angeles County, on August 20, 1993.

It is through these tragic losses that we evolve as a fire service, and by keeping these memories alive, it is our goal to keep the lessons learned from these fallen heroes alive as well.

We are honored to have with us today Assistant Chief Gaylor, in charge of the Air and Wildland Division, and United States Forest Service Angeles National Forest Fire Chief Robert Garcia. Thank you, gentlemen, for joining us.

Michael Preet
(00:03:30):

We appreciate you inviting us to Camp Two. We know it's a very active place, with lots going on — training, personnel movement, apparatus movement, and more. And we know your time is valuable, so we truly appreciate you taking the time.

Chief Gaylor, I want to start with you, if I can. Could you give us a brief history of the Los Angeles County Fire Department, and just a little bit of background about where the department is today?

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:04:04):

Sure. Yeah. And I'd like to start just by thanking Mike, Tom, and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, on behalf of Fire Chief Anthony Maroney, for coming out here and taking a look at the Glen Allen Fire. It happened over 30 years ago. And honoring Art and Chris — I mean, this is probably the highest thing we can do to continue to honor them. We always talk about "never forget."

Michael Preet
(00:04:24):

Yeah.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:04:24):

...and to be able to bring it out on this platform, in a podcast, in a different light and look at it—yeah, it's a huge honor for us. So, I'm very appreciative that you reached out to us and that we were able to accommodate.

What you see happening at camp today is the life that Art and Chris lived. Right? This is—we're at ground zero for Camp Crew 22 and being able to see what that lifestyle is like. It really hasn't changed much as far as the daily activities around here. So just for you guys to get to see it and appreciate it, sure is great.

So, our organization—we're a little over a hundred years old. We were established in 1923, and at that time there were multiple districts within Los Angeles County that had various responsibilities. Over time, those morphed into a consolidated fire protection district, known as the County of Los Angeles Fire Department. That happened in 1949.

What you see today is a single, consolidated fire protection district with 177 fire stations spread out among 22 battalions. We serve a population of over 4 million residents within our fire protection district, in the most populous county in the country—Los Angeles County—with more than 10.2 million residents.

And just to give you an idea of what the County of Los Angeles Fire Department's responsibility looks like: from the highest peak of Mount San Antonio, just over 10,000 feet, down to 72 miles of coastline; Catalina Island, 22 miles off the coast, which sees over a million visitors a year; and within that footprint of about 4,300 square miles is Chief Garcia's responsibility—the 700,000-acre Angeles National Forest.

So, there's a lot of complexity in Los Angeles County, and there's a lot of cooperation between our organizations. And it really is amazing. Last year we ran over 455,000 emergency incidents. So, it's a very active place, with one of the most complex mission sets of any organization, without a doubt.

Michael Preet
(00:06:27):

So, wow. Yeah, Chief. Wonderful. Well, thank you for that.

Chief Garcia, you work hand in glove with LA County, and you heard Chief Gayler refer to that. I was wondering if you could describe your interaction with LA County and the other jurisdictions, because I'm sure it's not just LA County that you work with.

Fire Chief Robert Garcia
(00:06:51):

Sure. Yeah. And thanks again for the opportunity to share a little bit of the history and our relationship as organizations, and how it's evolved through the wildland fire service. I think there's a lot of influence that comes from this area, and we'll talk about the dynamics there.

Our interactions as organizations have a really long, rich history of wildland fire development. We have a formal relationship that has transcended decades in terms of local cooperation and agreements, but it's a lot deeper and richer [than] that. In terms of history, we've collaborated well before incidents occur. We're working together in the air and wildland components of our organizations.

We serve a lot of the same people in different ways through our unique missions, and those really come together in alignment. We have a well-defined mutual threat zone where we respond with resources across boundaries automatically, day or night—aircraft, crews, dozers—the volume and frequency of wildland incidents from the desert side of their jurisdiction and our north, national forest-facing, desert-facing areas all the way up to the high country, and down across the more recent front-country activity of Altadena and the Foothill communities. It's pretty diverse.

The tool sets have to be just as diverse. We have fire activity essentially most of the year and unique elements like the Santa Ana event, which bring unique challenges. We've been very adaptive in how our organizations collaborate. I would say that our relationship at all levels is very collaborative and very strong—company-level officers training together, respond to non-wildland incidents up on our commuter routes that travel through the national forest, and so on. Then when we get to large extended attack incidents.

Michael Preet
(00:08:46):

Interesting.

Assistant Chief Robert Gaylor
(00:08:48):

I'm sorry, Mike. If I could just add to that too—I think the relationship between the Angeles National Forest and the Los Angeles County Fire Department should be a national standard. It should be something that other organizations, whether local governments or others, look to in terms of how they operate with the Forest Service, and how the Forest Service operates with local governments. We've really erased that constant—the congressional boundary...

Michael Preet
(00:09:09):

Sure Right.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:09:10):

...on how we operate. A lot of our mindset and approach is, “Hey, you know what? Let’s do what’s right for the community. Let’s do what’s right for the forest, what’s right for LA County.” And then afterwards, we can talk about what went right, what we liked, what we didn’t like, and how we want to address it moving into the future.

We’ve really done a good job of leaning into that, because anything that happens on the Angeles National Forest, whether it’s deep in the forest or outside of our initial action zone...

Michael Preet
(00:09:36):

Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:09:36):

...has the potential to impact the population and the folks of Los Angeles County, which, which Chief Garcia and his team know that they are part of.

Michael Preet
(00:09:44):

Sure.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:09:44):

That community. So...

Michael Preet
(00:09:45):

Absolutely. For our viewers who have never been to California, I can tell you from experience—yesterday, Tom and I hiked up to the memorial, and wow. The environments that you all are forced to engage with are far beyond any realization. I don’t know that I could have imagined the environments that you work in on a daily basis.

To me, it’s just amazing that not only do you function well in that environment, but you put your lives on the line to protect the community, the land, and the citizens. That is just incredible. It’s incredible to see—just some amazing work.

Let’s take a look at our visit to the memorial site high in the mountains above Altadena, California.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:11:23):

It ain't much, but I want you to know we were here.

Thanks for coming with me here today.

Michael Preet
(00:11:34):

What an honor to be able to come up here and see this Just an absolute honor.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:11:38):

Yeah. Thanks for being here.

Michael Preet
(00:11:40):

Yeah. I'm humbled. I truly am.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:11:43):

Thank you. These are really meaningful places for us in the wildland world. If you look down there, you'll see the two crosses—that's where the folks who did the extractions were, where the two bodies were. You can see how difficult the terrain is, and when Gabe and Roy talk about the challenges they faced once they got off the side of the trail, you can understand how hard it was to get back up. We think Gabe was even higher, just below the trail, and yet he talks about the terrible time he had as he saw fire coming up behind him, doing everything he could to reach safety. He was having trouble finding footing—it was terrible.

I'll tell you, in a career, events like this sharpen your focus on why we do what we do with the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation. We have a serious problem in wildland firefighting: we haven't been able to reduce the fundamental fatality rate over the last several years. We work in country like this, facing threats from homes, topography, and fuel.

What we do at the Foundation ensures that those crosses—and this cross—are meaningful to the families of firefighters who do this work all over the nation. As I stand in front of a memorial like this, these are my brothers who have died. These places are sacred. It might not look much like a traditional sacred spot, but it is.

Michael Preet
(00:14:10):

I know this... I know there's a history here for you as well, and I know it's a lot for you to be up here. I really appreciate you bringing me here. It's very special. Thank you very much.

To our viewers, when you're watching this and thinking, why—as structural firefighters, industrial firefighters, city firefighters—why do we care about this? I think the answer is pretty obvious, right? I mean...

**Fire Chief
Robert Garcia**
(00:14:50):

Sure. I'd like to say, it seems that for a long time, the wildland fire problem has been viewed as a Western states issue. I mean, just as late as this morning, I was watching activity in New Jersey—a new 2,000-acre fire—and I saw the FDNY fighting wildland fire in the late summer, early fall.

As our wildland fire environment changes nationally, the scale, scope, and severity impact everybody. Cross-jurisdiction cooperation, as Chief Gaylor talked about with the cross-boundary efforts, becomes critical. We have our usual boundary stations and battalions that we work with, and when a fire exceeds our initial attack capability, we seek cooperation from departments and parts of the Los Angeles County Fire Department that aren't normally engaged in day-to-day wildland operations.

Michael Preet
(00:15:40):

Mm-hmm <affirmative>.

**Fire Chief
Robert Garcia**
(00:15:40):

And so, the level of engagement and the risk exposure for the entire fire service is growing, quite frankly, in wildland fire.

Michael Preet
(00:15:48):

Yeah. Without a doubt.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:15:50):

And I think a lot of it has to do with urban sprawl, right? There used to be a clear delineation between living in the city and living out in the country. But now we're pushing that urban interface further and further out. Sure. You're seeing that a lot, and as we see the conditions change around the world...

Michael Preet
(00:16:06):

Yeah.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:16:07):

Right. It's not just a U.S. problem either—it's an international issue. We're seeing communities being lost out there, and a lot of that has to do with why it's being pushed into those areas. On the structural side, you have to have awareness that, because you live in an area where historically you may not have experienced these conditions, the way fires are burning today definitely makes it a structural issue.

Michael Preet
(00:16:29):

Yeah. And without a doubt—you mentioned New Jersey and 4,000 acres of wildland and structures burning. There are a lot of traditional fire departments that aren't set up for wildland fire. They don't have the right gear or equipment. Learning from your years of experience is paramount to our success in protecting our people. That's what it's all about. At the NFFF, it's about protecting and preventing these catastrophic incidents that are killing firefighters.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:17:08):

Right.

Michael Preet
(00:17:09):

So, you know, without a doubt, it's extremely important for everyone to pay attention. Thank you for that.

Chief Gaylor, I wanted to go back to August 20, 1993. I was wondering if you could take us through that incident from your perspective and what you know about it.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:17:31):

Sure. Yeah. I was a young fireman at the time. I wasn't assigned to the incident; I was working down in the basin on a structural engine company for all practical purposes. But looking at the reports and reading through them, I tried to get an idea of what was happening that day.

On August 20, 1993, the County of Los Angeles and the Angeles National Forest were already engaged in fires. LA County was fighting a fire on Catalina Island, which, which we talked about earlier, is 22 miles off the coast. When you think about the logistical effort to get resources over there and what it would take to fight a fire on Catalina, that's almost a multiplier of effort. Right? There was a lot of effort just to get resources to Catalina. That was the focus. Meanwhile, the Mills Fire was burning on the Angeles National Forest, which was also drawing resources.

That day, from what I can tell reading the reports and looking at the weather, it didn't seem like a significant day in terms of risk. Looking at the temperature, humidity, and weather trends, it wasn't one of those high-risk days that everyone would highlight in a pre-briefing. To me, it seemed like a standard day.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:18:43):

The fire started a little after three o'clock in the afternoon. It came into our dispatch as a vehicle fire, and we sent two engines to it. Upon arrival, they found that the fire had spread into the brush. It was about a two-acre fire, moving upslope in alignment with the slope. It was a southwest-facing aspect at three in the afternoon. When you consider the Campbell Prediction System (CPS) and what the alignment looks like, that slope was in full alignment.

So, what I would anticipate they saw was some pretty active fire behavior making that slope run. They balanced the response to a brush incident, and at the same time, the Angeles National Forest was sending out a first-alarm brush assignment. So effectively, you're adding two alarms' worth of resources to respond to that initial two-acre fire.

Some of the limitations we had—normally, on our responses, we would have three aircraft, three helicopters, assigned. Two of them were already over in Catalina fighting fire, so we actually had only one aircraft available at the time. So obviously, seeing there was a little bit of a resource draw, but it wasn't anything significant, especially for a two-acre fire.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:19:48):

Chief Garcia, why don't you take us through what you can remember or recall, or what you've read about that initial response. What started out as a, a vehicle fire on Glen Allen Lane?

**Fire Chief
Robert Garcia**
(00:20:02):

Sure. Yeah. So, I, you know, I grew up locally and was also a young, young man at that time. And it was one of my first, most vivid experiences in terms of a catastrophic fire and how it affects firefighters and people. And, you know, as a student of fire, studying large-scale incidents, you think about the big blow-up, the big things I was studying at the time, historical, significant fires that changed the way we do business.

Being early in my career, a very formative phase, and being local with Glen Allen, it really honed me into things that hit close to home.

**Fire Chief
Robert Garcia**
(00:20:48):

And, and so I had been just starting out my career, being part of the Are Seko Ranger District in our local youth program. And so, thinking about fuels, weather, and topography—you touched on some of the dynamics here. You know, fire has unique challenges everywhere in the country. I think having spent years traveling and fighting fire, a place like Glen Allen brings some of the dynamics and intensity—the terrain, you saw some of the terrain yesterday, the proximity to life and property, and the high values at risk to protect.

The weather dynamic, although not a high-risk fire day, just the environment here locally with the terrain and the San Gabriel Mountains brings a lot of intensity to all those factors of fuels, weather, and topography. And so, you know, I recognized that at that time—between technological advancements since then and other things that we’ll talk about—we’ve made a lot of advancements since then.

So, there were some challenges in interoperability. There were some challenges in managing multiple incidents. And thinking about how fast fire can blow up in this kind of terrain became very apparent. You know, the things that I had been studying as a young, young firefighter was in full view, essentially at that time.

Michael Preet
(00:22:09):

Wow. And, and Tom, you were actually on the job at the time, listening to your scanner. Can you tell our audience how you reacted and your thoughts about...

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:22:26):

Sure. You bet. The big incident we were worried about on the Angeles National Forest was a large fire. I had Chief Garcia’s job at the time, and I was naturally focused on the big shiny object, which was the big fire. But I kept my scanner on, and multiple times a day, we’d hear LA County get dispatched to a vehicle fire, kind of a nothing deal. The firefighters from LA County would make quick work of these small incidents; I wasn’t even really too worried about some exposure in the brush. I knew that area of Altadena—there’s a lot of roadside vegetation, but there are also good firefighters from LA County, and there are hydrants and water.

And so, I heard the dispatch and noted that it was close to our mutual threat zone.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:23:44):

I didn't think much of it. In fact, I could see the LA County folks arriving on scene, doing a little bit of a hose lay, knocking the fire down. And if the Angeles National Forest had a first-alarm brush, 90% of the time, by the time we got there, maybe we'd help mop up. Maybe LA County would have the fire completely knocked down and wrapped up.

So, while my attention was focused on the big fire, it was with some alarm and concern, half an hour, 45 minutes into the incident, when, in our work, you can tell the tone of voice changes. The intensity, periodicity, and urgency of the radio comms that I could hear were different...

Michael Preet
(00:24:53):

When you talk about the big fire, you're talking about the Catalina...

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:24:56):

Mills Fire, or us LA County, had some fires. And this is a very common occurrence right here in this area, where you have significant incidents—multiple significant incidents—going at the same time. It's kind of business as normal.

So, the point really is that this report of a vehicle fire, followed up by the brush fire with a brush alarm, really was nothing to be concerned about—until that time: half an hour, 45 minutes, an hour into the incident. As I said, for those of us in the business, you hear the difference in the voice, the difference in the tempo, the calm and the urgency of things. And all of a sudden, it attracted my attention.

In summary, in my mind, as I've thought about it over the last 32 years, it went from a run-of-the-mill, nothing-special incident, and within minutes, two firefighters were dead. Two firefighters were burned critically, and everybody who was on scene that day was scarred, taking the events of that day home with them. Since that time, we activated a joint investigative team. I was working with Chief P. Michael Freeman's designated point of contact for me, Chief Bill Leason, the Chief Deputy of LA County Fire Department.

We activated the team and decided—just as Chief Garcia and Chief Gaylor said here—we would do this together. We have processes and procedures, which tend to want to isolate things to make single-agency, jurisdictional investigations or reviews easier. And we said, no, we've been in this together; we're going to do it together. So, we formed an investigative team, and here we are, 32 years after the incident, to talk about the notable things that we learned because of what I initially thought was just a nothing fire, one I wouldn't remember 24 hours later.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:28:05):

And I think part of that speaks a little bit to the complexity of the environment. Right? So, we're in Catalina fighting a fire. Crew 21 flew over to Catalina, right? So Crew 22, which is the one that ended up on the Glen Allen incident, they came in that day as a ground crew. They came in with the mindset of, hey, we're gonna be a ground crew today, we got projects. They actually went out on a project, got called back because of the activity. A helicopter was brought over, put in service here. So it wasn't ad hoc. That crew, the crew members were accustomed to flying. The foreman didn't have the flight experience that he had, but it wasn't uncommon for us, you know, that culture in 1993—let's make things happen. We were comfortable putting together an ad hoc crew or an ad hoc air crew at the time.

But when you start thinking about it, like you had mentioned, this is not a big-deal fire. But if you're looking at it in a larger picture—our communication center, right? They were being inundated. The way we operated with our com plan was on the frequency where we would historically handle the command frequency. Today, they were also handling the day-in, day-out 455,000 EMS calls a year. They're pushing those calls out. So you're having engine companies asking for ambulance ETAs.

One of the things that happened post-incident, after the burnover, when Crew 22 was able to make contact with dispatch, they were confused in their mind's eye. They thought they were talking to the crew in Catalina. So there's a lot of little factors in there when you go, yeah, this is not a big-deal fire. You gotta kind of look globally and see some of the challenges out there in the rest of the organization, what's going on.

And you're not isolated, you know? Yeah. It's not just you.

Michael Preet
(00:29:42):

And so, what happened after that?

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:29:44):

So, the response went out, Crew 22 got on the copter here. And I believe, in looking at the report, their first notification of the fire was another aircraft—I believe it was a Pasadena PD aircraft—that came over on the PA saying, there's a fire just around the corner in Altadena. So the crew here got on the aircraft, deployed out there.

When they show up and the aircraft shows up, they're gonna do one high-level recon of the situation. Right. They read the fire, they take a look at it. From what I can gather in the report, the fire had made its initial run. Right now you're looking at a backing fire. So it didn't look like it was still making that hard run upslope.

It was out of alignment. Uh, they found a place to insert up towards the head of the fire, which is not uncommon for our fly crews to do. What we like to look at are our tactical engagement opportunities. And if I were to look at a fire, I would start at the head of the fire, and I'd draw a line down the middle of it, and I'd go, okay, well, I want to be on the windward side because that's gonna give me the wind at my back. It's gonna give me the lowest flame length, give me the best opportunity for success with the tools I have. I don't want to land on the leeward side, where the fire's moving, you know, it's making its run.

So, I'd cut it in half, I'd pick my one side—left or right. Let's just say it's the right side. And then from there, I would draw a horizontal line in the middle of that. My objective is to land on the top part of the fire, because I'm looking at how long it's gonna take ground resources to get up here. So, you know, these are the things that are going on in that single orbit that the copter is doing. And I'm imagining the conversation going on between Art, the foreman, and the pilot, just kind of coming up with a plan.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:31:15):

And, uh, looking at that opportunity. So, you know, when they landed at the head of the fire, hopefully the first thing that pops in everybody's mind that's listening to this is like, wow, that's a watch-out situation. They're making a frontal assault on a fire. They've got unburned fuel between them and the fire, and, and yes. But we do that regularly. And there are a couple of factors we put in there, right? Do we have safety zones? Where are we going? We need two egresses. Our first priority is to get on the black. And if we don't—and, and also, where can we sidestep?

And when we think of safety zones, I don't want to call it a safety zone, because sometimes it's just a matter of moving a drainage over, letting the fire run through, and then picking it up from there. So it's not necessarily looking for a parking lot or asphalt.

It's just, give me a couple of options on where I can get the crew to where we're outta there. So they land up on top at the head of the fire, um, they engage it from the top. So they come up, they engage it, they do some work checking the fire up there. You've got the ground resources starting from the bottom, coming up with the crews and the handline.

Um, then they move off to the west downslope, doing downhill line construction to the trail, which they end up having a break at. They take the break on the trail, and then they see the opportunity. And, you know, you, you think about some of the things that they were looking at. They could see the road down there. So in their mind's eye, it's like, Hey, you know what, let's pick this piece up. We're gonna tie in the road. We're gonna walk out down there, and we're gonna be back in camp, you know, within the hour.

So they, uh, they decided at that point that they were gonna take a break, talk about it, and then go off the side. And then, uh, you know, they were engaged there for a handful of minutes. Their lookout recognized that they had fire below 'em, and then trying to get out. And that's where we lost Art and Chris, and, uh, and, uh, the burnover occurred.

Michael Preet
(00:32:52):

Wow. Tragic.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:32:53):

So, what happened after that? Chief Gaylor?

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:32:56):

So, after the over occurred, the crew reassembles on the trail. They're starting to initiate the rescue of their partners, their crew members. Communications became a challenge. The IC operations, our crew coordinator at the command post, wasn't exactly sure where the crew was. There was limited communication between the crew and the rest of the incident, so there wasn't a whole lot of clarity on what was going on. Getting the resources to them took time, and it took over an hour to get our first firefighter off the line and started to get to definitive care.

You know, when you look at the things that we learned from there—and we can obviously talk about it more in the conversation—our firefighters have to have confidence in us because we ask a lot of them. When they put themselves in situations, we ask them to manage their risk appropriately, but they have to have confidence in the organization—whether it's the department organization, but more importantly, the organization of the incident. They have to have that confidence that we can get them out. Right. You know, we're asking them to go out there and do some pretty amazing things in some pretty hostile environments. And I think right there, that was one of the areas that we looked at critically—it took an hour to get folks out.

Michael Preet
(00:34:12):

And your post-incident analysis, you know, is very frank about the changes, the errors that occurred. And I mention that because oftentimes when we do these PIAs, we tend to water them down because we don't want to hurt anybody's feelings. And that was not the case here. It was very frank, forthright, and brought about changes, which, yeah, you know, even today, you're realizing...

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:34:43):

And it has to be, right? I mean, because if we're ever gonna truly honor Chris and Art, or anybody else that we lose out there, we have to be honest about what happened and talk about it, because those are the lessons that they paid for.

Michael Preet
(00:34:55):

Absolutely.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:34:56):

Right. So, we don't want to water those down. Yeah. And you know what, anytime you have a fatality fire, a huge causal factor is human behavior, right? I mean, if we weren't there, it wouldn't have happened. So, the bottom line is, what got us into that situation, and were there things, stop signs that we passed that we didn't see or acknowledge or recognize, right, that got us into those situations. So, if we're not talking candidly about it, absolutely, then we're not living that term: never forget. Right. Right. Yeah, without a doubt.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:35:24):

One of the reasons firefighters today ought to keep listening to this podcast and asking themselves questions is that both of you have talked about the difficulties of working in this environment because of the volume and technical nature of the incidents. But it's also an example of how, as the wildland-urban interface, as the WUI has expanded, and fire departments all over America find themselves working together, we see today problems elsewhere that you've been working on for decades, which involve...

**Fire Chief
Robert Garcia**
(00:36:15):

Yeah.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:36:16):

How do you reconcile radio equipment that's oriented toward your specific department? Your two departments operate on different frequencies. Yeah. Yeah. And it was, again, notable, Mike, that just about every incident we were working, we had to be cognizant of and conscious about how we kept the firefighters involved, because the dispatch centers were busy. The frequencies were a challenge. Here in Southern California at the time, there was a great deal of interference from Mexico.

And so these issues associated with just thinking about how do you communicate are extraordinary. And maybe Chief Gayler and Chief Garcia, you could talk about what you do today to make sure that the firefighters on the ground from two different agencies have a sense of the leader's intent, the commander's expression, and, instead of bifurcating efforts at a fire and doing, like we used to do in the olden days—which was, “you guys go take one side...”

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:38:02):

...red on the left, green on the right.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:38:03):

Right. You know...

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:38:04):

And when you look at the incident, they were operating on two separate comm plans. Angeles had their comm plan, and we had our comm plan. And in today's world, we would have a full stop on an incident until we got that reconciled and everybody's on the same comm plan.

So, one of the things that we see in Southern California is we get a robust response in our mutual threat zones, to a point where it becomes inhibitive to actually going out there and meeting our tactical objectives. And I'll give you an example: the 5/14 split, which probably doesn't mean a lot to everybody, but it's a point where Los Angeles City Fire Department has a responsibility area. Angeles National Forest and Los Angeles County all have responsibilities. So, it's not uncommon to get over 60 ground resources assigned to the report of a fire.

And all 60 of those resources are less than 30 minutes away. Right. So, one of the things that we collectively decided to do is that each organization sets up a pre-designated staging area, right?. So, for example, if we get something in the Hanson Dam area, which is kind of in that area, but that, that's an example of all three organizations coming together, Los Angeles County Resources, you're gonna stop at Latuna Canyon. Right. And an or, uh, LA City, you guys are gonna hold it Sunland. And is what we want to do is we want to get that unified command going. We want to identify who's dirt it's on. So who's taking, who's the agency, having jurisdiction over the fire, right? At the end of the day, who's paying for it

And then they're gonna set up their tactics objectives based on what their priorities are. And then the other two agencies become that support, that assisting agency. So then we're working at the, at the pleasure of the incident commander, if we don't have a need to go into Unified command, we come and assist the agency with our resources. So now is what we've done really, is we've created three pools of staging.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:39:53):

With three different agencies, and then we'll pull from that, as opposed to everybody showing up and burying our command frequency, because all resources coming in have the right to speak on command to get that assignment before we roll them over to a tactical frequency and try to clean up command.

And it's funny because we get air attacks, for example—we get a lot of air attacks. It's almost a nomadic profession, right? They start off their day in Arizona and end up in Northern California. But the one thing that you'll collectively hear about air attacks coming to Southern California is, "Man, that is a mess down there."

And I'll get air attacks asking me, "Hey, you know what? You guys need to clean up your command frequency. You guys need to—" and I'm like, "Hey, we've got 60 resources coming in. If you have an idea on how we can do it, dude, we're all ears."

But I mean, it's really a complex environment that's pretty specific to Southern California. But I think by us identifying and slowing everybody down—right? We talked a little about it earlier, about that sense of urgency to rush into a situation—hey, let's slow down. Let's find out whose dirt it is, let's identify the objectives and the priorities, and then let's start bringing our resources in there. So...

**Fire Chief
Robert Garcia**
(00:41:01):

Yeah, I was just gonna add, you know, I mean, Chief Gaylor described that operating ground, if you will—that theater of operations with multiple initial attacks going on—very well, and how we’ve learned from some of these tragedies on how to better organize the unity of effort, right?

There’s always been a unity of effort, with the firefighters on the ground putting hose where it needs to go, putting Pulaskis where they need to go, but the commanders being better enabled to organize that. And I think from the relationships and the organization piece of it, and staging areas to interoperability—you know, Director Harbor and I have shared stories on both the red and the green flanks of the fire, if you will, right?

The Forest Service is gonna go here, but also the technological challenge—the radio, the physical radio technology—we’ve made huge strides in terms of interoperability, situational awareness tools, and resource tracking, and the ability to kind of manage the unity of effort a little bit better.

And there’s been lots of efforts, very localized at a division level, to help bring order to chaos before the alarm goes off—predefined staging areas, MTZ drills where folks are working together. And this incident is something that we recall often as an example of how we need to continue to evolve our technology, our radio operability.

Michael Preet
(00:42:20):

And, and, and I was just getting ready to say that the, the difference is that instead of seeing these as excuses for failure. You, you see them as challenges to Correct. And that, and that's huge. And, you know, oftentimes in the fire service, we make excuses.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:42:37):

Sure, yeah.

Michael Preet
(00:42:37):

As opposed to seeing them as challenges that, that have the ability to be corrected.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:42:42):

And one of the things that the Angelus did or has done is they've partnered with us on com plans.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:42:50):

Meaning that they will allow our dispatch to come up with a communication plan for Angeles to have. So, we have our frequencies that are assigned to us, and we put them in the force because now we know that everybody's gonna be able to speak on that same common frequency.

Because there are still challenges out there with command being on an active frequency that's still dispatching 911 calls. So now we have dedicated command frequencies. We have a dedicated dispatcher on that command frequency who's running the incident and is not being burdened with the other jobs that are going on out there—because we're still operating at a high capacity.

**Fire Chief
Robert Garcia**
(00:43:29):

You know, and some of that—Chief Gaylor mentioned this earlier—the human in the loop, or the human factor, right? So, we have process and procedure, and we have technology and techniques, and then we have the human element.

And we've addressed some of that too, which takes a lot of trust and mutual respect in our relationships, where we recognize that a dispatch could be in error, and we're gonna acknowledge it in the incident and then live with that error.

An example would be a dispatch error about the location. Mm-hmm. And we determine, oh, we thought it was a county fire, but it turns out it's a fed fire. And we'd had the tendency to want to change the comm plan because of that. We've made a decision that our dispatch centers are gonna talk and do their best to get it right. And then we're gonna acknowledge that new information puts us in a different place, and we're gonna stick with that plan in order not to cause further errors in the chain of the aviators coming from different bases.

But that was kind of a cultural piece, not just process and procedure. Right? Yeah, sure. Our folks had to be willing to say, okay, we acknowledge the error, and we're gonna make sure everyone's aware of it—but we're gonna do the best for the incident.

Michael Preet
(00:44:30):

And would you not agree that the cultural changes are probably the more difficult, most difficult?

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:44:34):

Oh, yeah. No, absolutely. And that's one of the things that we really, collectively, between the two agencies—and I'd include LA City and all of our cooperating agencies—the one thing we like to say is, when we show up to an incident that's gonna be unified, or we're gonna be an assisting agency, we want the first question out of the commander's mouth to be, *How are you?*—not *Who are you?* Right?

So, we build that into our folks. It's like we gotta get out there before the fire starts, train together, talk together. Because I know that as an organization, if I'm running an incident and I have players show up from the Angeles National Forest, I will give 'em that high-level position to go out there on that initial attack fire. Mm-hmm. Give 'em a division, give 'em a branch, have 'em get in there and be ops or deputy ops. Right? Sure.

So, we have that trust in each other, because we do have the opportunity to fight a lot of fire together. Yeah. But it really has a lot to do with the relationships before the bell goes off, because it makes it a lot easier when we're talking to each other. It's familiar and not trying to guess, well, what's this person all about? What's he driven by? Because we all know that mission-driven leadership—it transcends the organization.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:45:41):

So, are those your key takeaways? If, uh, if I'm a small department chief in the middle of the country, and I'm facing a wildland-urban interface situation where it's gonna be fairly common, maybe, to have other county fire departments—volunteer, paid—departments coming in, are those some of the key takeaways that you'd offer to those chiefs about the way they've got to prepare for that wildland emergency that's ultimately gonna happen?

**Fire Chief
Robert Garcia**
(00:46:17):

Yeah, I think, I think, um, you know, somebody—and multiple somebodies—really need to be the convener and not let the potential emergency be what convenes folks to come together. Right. Be proactive in the relationships, even in the low-frequency events where, you know, do we have interoperability? And if not, acknowledge it and identify how you're gonna work through that.

Do our commanders on the ground have clear leader's intent, and are they aligned with that intent about the relationships and the trust factors and how to build ICS across jurisdictions?

So, there's, I think, a tendency to kind of focus on the technical things and the acquisition of things, but the relationship piece is so key to all that. There are always going to be gaps to fill and shortfalls.

So that would be my, my takeaway—to really, you know, ask: how are we as leaders tending to the relationships, even when they're good? Don't take them for granted. What made them good, and how do you keep them that way?

You know, we have turnover in organizations, we have succession gaps, we have new up-and-comers—so really keep reinvesting in that relationship. Absolutely. Because that's the key piece.

Michael Preet
(00:47:25):

And you have to plan for that. You have to plan for that big event. Yeah. You can't be, you know, one of those departments that says, "Well, we're small, it's never gonna happen here." That's, you know, that's naive, frankly, because there is no barrier to where bad things happen.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:47:43):

And you need to exploit the strengths of each organization, right, and figure out how you're gonna build that into your incident. And make sure that everybody's aware of, "Hey, you know what? This is your strong suit, so you know what? I'm gonna lean on you when it comes to an incident like this, or a situation where I need your expertise."

Michael Preet
(00:47:58):

Without a doubt.

**Fire Chief
Robert Garcia**
(00:47:59):

You know, I think there are probably so many takeaways from a tragedy like this—from how we collectively manage the incident within the incident, the IWI to how we interact with our partners when those things occur. And it kind of goes back to who's in the position to leverage the strengths on the incident. There are definitely lots of takeaways from an event like that, and the fact that a semi-docile, routine incident can turn in a second. Are we building that into our collective efforts for managing incidents? Right. We're building out our ICS in a way that has some resilience to deal with some of these things that could occur, even if it's not likely because of the nature of the event. And...

Michael Preet
(00:48:43):

You hate to use the word complacency, but unfortunately, it does happen. You know, the more routine these events that we run, the more we feel like we've done this before, that there's not a lot to deal with. Yet we have to be on our A game regardless of the size of the event or the type of event.

**Fire Chief
Robert Garcia**
(00:49:05):

And in the, you know, in the wildland arena, and Chief Gaylor touched on this earlier, you know, it wasn't particularly a high-risk day.

Michael Preet
(00:49:11):

Right.

**Fire Chief Robert
Garcia** (00:49:11):

So, it becomes even more routine. Right. Director Harbor talked about the frequency of initial attack any given day. Once summer conditions occur, we have lots of initial attacks. We're over 98% successful at those initial attacks, so they tend to become routine. And that's the caution, right?

Michael Preet
(00:49:29):

Yeah, absolutely. And that's the, and that's the message. You know, also, there, there is no routine event. You know, never a routine event.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:49:38):

So, I was in Chief Garcia's position at the time, and communications on the Angeles National Forest frequencies were fairly clear. We were both busy—both LA County and the Angeles were busy. But as a chief officer dedicated to the care of your people, I got not only a heads-up because of the tonality and urgency of what I could pick up from LA County, but I really wasn't even sure whether I was hearing something going on at Catalina—there was another incident I think LA County was working. And quickly, our Angeles National Forest folks who were down at the bottom, and who did not have a clear view of what was going on—on the Horse Trail up there...

Michael Preet
(00:50:40):

...couldn't even see from that street level; there's no way to even see that Horse Trail.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:50:46):

Yeah. And so, as a chief officer or a firefighter, you hear there's a problem, and right away you're thinking, well, what kind of problem? A more typical problem would be to have somebody working up those slopes who had lost their footing and fallen, broken an ankle, or rolled onto a saw or a Pulaski or something and cut themselves. And so you're beginning to try to elevate your awareness of what's happening. Within a few minutes, it was obvious we'd had a burnover. Then your awareness goes up one more level. It quickly becomes apparent to me, in my personal situation, that the attention I was focused on for the large fire—the Mills Fire—was proceeding, and I could devote my attention elsewhere. My deputy and I began to try to understand what was happening, where it was happening, and how we could help.

The other complexity we had was now, who was hurt? The Angeles National Forest at the time had very limited BLS/ALS capability. And so, we were going to need paramedics, EMTs, stokes, and maybe a hoist. What were we going to do? And quickly it became apparent, within minutes, mostly based on radio transmissions that Roy was making, and that the local folks could hear and understand, that there had been at least one fatality, at least one very significant injury. Paramedics and extraction were needed. And when you see, as you did yesterday, Mike, and as these two chiefs know, the country is very challenging when you get off the trails and the ridge lines, and you're trying to move anybody anywhere.

Michael Preet
(00:53:31):

Right.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:53:32):

It is just extraordinarily, uh, extraordinarily tough.

Michael Preet
(00:53:37):

Yeah.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:53:38):

And when you stand there at the memorial on the horse trail, those two white crosses give you a sense of where those friends of ours, those firefighters, those folks, were lying. And as we stood there yesterday, it was obvious. We spoke at the site yesterday—how in the world are you going to get those folks out of there? How in the world, as you asked me, Mike, and as I told you from working in this area, Chief Gaylor and Chief Garcia know, once you commit off the side in that decomposed granite, it's real easy to go downhill too quickly. It's very hard to get back.

**Fire Chief
Robert Garcia**
(00:54:37):

Absolutely.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:54:37):

One way trip.

Michael Preet
(00:54:39):

Yeah. I mean, that was even true on the horse trail. That decomposed granite is like sand. It's worse than sand, and it gives way very quickly because you're looking at slopes of 80, 90, a hundred feet, with a trail that's maybe 20 inches wide, and every footing is another slip. Yeah. It's crazy.

**Fire Chief
Robert Garcia**
(00:55:00):

That some of that minimal vegetation is the only thing holding it there. Yeah. And that burns off and this...

Michael Preet
(00:55:05):

And there's nothing left.

**Fire Chief
Robert Garcia**
(00:55:06):

Yeah.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:55:06):

So, you're trying to deal with the fire. Yeah. You're trying to deal with the injuries. You're trying to extricate and get people, give them an option of staying alive off the hill to maintain their vitality. And then, as chief officers, you're obviously, because of our training and experience, trying to think, what are we gonna do? How are we not only going to honor the sacrifice, but what are we gonna do to learn? Because an hour ago, you know, I wasn't even really paying much attention. Sure. I thought it was gonna be in and out. Done. And I would never remember 1886, a report of a vehicle fire at 1886 Glen Allen Lane. You know, why is an old man with all the experiences I've had, why would I remember that? Respond to a vehicle fire, 1886 Glen Allen Lane. Why would I even remember that? Sure. And yet, those few seconds, you get stuck in my brain, as well as the opportunities I've had to crawl up those slopes, talk about what they experienced as firefighters, and why we do these podcasts.

Michael Preet
(00:56:40):

Yeah.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:56:41):

Because things can change so quickly. Yeah. From in the work, we do.

Michael Preet
(00:56:46):

Yep.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:56:46):

We're thinking, as Chief Gaylor said, and I, I talked about yesterday, I could have seen myself—hold on. I've got a call. I'll call you back in a half an hour.

Michael Preet
(00:56:57):

Yeah.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:56:58):

You know, because you just assume everything's gonna be the same as it was, and it's not, it wasn't...

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(00:57:06):

Yeah. You know, make this a training opportunity, and if you pull out your IRPG and listen to their story, their thought process—because we've all been there, and we could all be there again at any time—but if you have an opportunity to sit, look at, pull out your IRPG and go, hey, you know what, that was a watch out situation. That they didn't recognize. Hey, you know what, they didn't have communication with their adjoining forces. They were producing, or they were constructing downhill line with fire below. Right. All those things. And then just look at where the gaps were in their in. And that's, and that's honoring Art and Chris. It's, and being critical on what we did.

Chief Tom Harbor
(00:57:40):

We do face a similar culture as firefighters, with some differences. I was touched many, many years ago when a young captain came up to me, as we had been talking about the IRPG, the [Incident Response Pocket Guide](#) available from the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG)—it's available free on the web. But this young captain came up to me and asked if he could talk to me privately. I said, sure. He was young, but he'd been many years in a structural department. And he said, I gotta ask you a question. He said, how—how'd you get page 19? He hadn't established any contacts. And I'm thinking, what in the world are you talking about? This is some kind of blue shirt code that green shirts use. I don't get it. You know, what are you talking about—page 19? It turns out he was talking about the IRPG and the cultural revolution that he thought that this two-page insert in the IRPG, entitled *How to Properly Refuse Risk*, was so intrigued. For this young captain in his department, if his chief officers told him yes to do something there was no, no question. Page 19.

Was no opportunity to discuss. Yeah. And so, I think in the context, both of you, that both of you have mentioned these wildland best practices of which one is currently page 18 and 19, how do you respectfully engage in this discussion? If Chief Garcia has given me as an assignment in my crew, and I'm not really sure about it, do I one, not question his authority or ability and I just go off and do something? Two, I listen to him carefully, privately, no, I've got real concerns and ignore his order and unilaterally do something different or, or three, the best option. How do I respectfully go back to the chief and say, chief, I, I'm not really clear on what you were talking about and I, I worry about a couple of things. Can we, can we talk about it for just a second?

Chief Tom Harbor
(01:00:30):

And that, to this young captain, was a significant breakthrough. I believe that, at least in the context of contributing to that ability, Glen Allen was one of the incidents that led us in the wildland community to understand we've got to have that ability—so that if Gabe and Roy land with their flight crew, and they take a look and Art gives them an assignment, and they're not really sure, they feel like they have the ability and sanction of Chief Gaylor and others, clear up to the head of the department, to—for just a few moments—say, hold on, I'm not really sure. Let's talk about it.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(01:01:23):

Yeah. And it comes down to leader's intent, right? That refusing risk is because, as a leader at a command post or running operations, I don't have full situational awareness. So, I'm relying on my folks out there on the line.

Michael Preet
(01:01:36):

Absolutely.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(01:01:37):

It's like, hey, here's what I think I need you guys to do. Here's what I—here's from my perspective—but my expectation is that you go out there and you go through your refusing risk. So, if you're refusing risk, you've got to assume that they're using the risk management process, right?

They're developing the situation, they're assessing the risk, coming up with mitigation for the risk, they're at the decision point on whether they can do it, and then they're continuously evaluating that, right? Yeah. So, if I get feedback that somebody can't do something, I have to respect that as a leader, understanding that they know how to use that risk management process, right?

And the one thing I've found successful from my side—if I'm going to refuse risk—is to provide a potential solution:

"Hey, you know what, we can't go down right here, right now, but if we had air support, if we had a hose lay..."

If there's something that you can do, because again, you're helping me build my situational awareness where I'm not at, right? So, you're just telling me, "Hey, if I had more of these tools, I can do it." So, it's not just necessarily saying, "No, we're not going to do it." It's like, "Hey, we can't do it now," because I would tell anybody, there's always a right time to go pick up fire in a drainage, right? And it may be in a few hours when it's out of alignment, when the sun's not on it, when the potential for that fire decreases, or once we get a hose line.

Assistant Chief Robert Gaylor (01:02:51):	Something down in there. So, there's always a way to do something. So, provide that solution back to that operations section chief, to the division, or whoever's running your section, and just offer a solution if there is one.
Michael Preet (01:03:01):	Right.
Assistant Chief Robert Gaylor (01:03:02):	You know, so...
Michael Preet (01:03:02):	And, and sometimes there's more than one way to, to accomplish those goals.
Chief Tom Harbor (01:03:06):	And aren't those lessons that you can carry into the structural world that you, before you enter a home, a structure, Michael?
Michael Preet (01:03:12):	Yeah, absolutely. I mean, in the structural world, it's the same thing. If you get reports from an interior and you can't see everything, and you're listening to that radio traffic and those comments, those should be clues as an IC to think, "Ooh, things aren't going as I thought they would, and maybe we should call a timeout. Maybe we should bring people out and discuss this strategy and see if this strategy is appropriate." And I would say that the reverse of that is equally true. Oftentimes, as company officers or division/group supervisors, you're inside a structure, and what I'm seeing as the IC on the outside is very different from what you're reporting from the inside. And if I'm not communicating that, and when I make a decision—maybe to withdraw, maybe to bring crews out of the structure—it's got to be respected by the interior crews. Because they're seeing their small world; I'm seeing the bigger picture, and maybe they don't match up. So, I think it goes both ways. I mean, it has...
Fire Chief Robert Garcia (01:04:15):	To be, it does, you know, it kind of develops that operational synergy because situations are evolving, right? And so, you're developing and managing the risk side of it, and you're also better realizing opportunities as the situations change by having that kind of open dialogue about the situation as you traverse the terrain or as you move through the incident. So, it's just so essential.

Michael Preet
(01:04:34):

And don't you believe it's important for your subordinate officers and your incident commanders to all be on that same page and understand that it's acceptable? And I'm not talking about blindly disobeying an order.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(01:04:47):

Absolutely not.

Michael Preet
(01:04:47):

It—we're talking about, I see something that just doesn't sit right based on what I was just instructed to do. I need to be able to respectfully bring that to the attention of the IC, and the IC has to understand that I, I've, I've trained you, I've trained you to look out for these things, so I need to—sure—pay attention to what you're saying.

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(01:05:09):

Yeah. And the one thing that I would say, you know, is that the IRPG is a great tool, and what it does is it creates common terminology among forces that maybe have never worked together, right?

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(01:05:20):

So, we always kind of have this mindset that, yeah, you know, the tens and eighteens are far new guys, right? I want them to memorize it. You know, what if they don't get it right? We don't punitively discipline 'em—make them do pushups; we'll do pushups with them. But, you know, it becomes that game of the new guys' responsibility to know. And, as we talked about a little bit yesterday when we were outside, you know, as you progress in your career, you get more experience, and your actions become more intuitive. Yeah. Right. But it's really incumbent upon the leadership to get back into that IRPG and for us to be able to speak that language, because that's what we expect our folks to talk to us in. Yeah. And when you operate intuitively, it becomes very difficult to teach that. Hey, why are you guys doing that?

**Assistant Chief
Robert Gaylor**
(01:06:04):

It's like, nah, you know what, we're fine. Let's just go. Right? But if I have somebody go, "Hey, chief, you know, we're going downhill on fire with fire below us," or "Hey, the terrain's making our escape route to our safety zone difficult," or "Hey, the weather's getting hotter and drier," if they're starting to talk those terms, I've had the opportunity over the last six years to fly our HLCO platform, and when I'm out there talking to my crews, I'm constantly asking them, "Hey, where are you guys going if things go bad?" because I want to know that a) they've addressed the issue, right? Because they become mission-focused and task-oriented, it's like, "Hey," right? It's just that ping on the helmet like, "Hey, stop. Where are you guys gonna go if this thing goes bad?" Right?

Let me know what your plan is, because now I can help you out. And I go, "Hey, you guys are getting a little far away from where you thought you were gonna go if things go bad." Yeah. Or, "Hey, you're diving off the side here. You know what? You do have fire below you, so you may want to address that." Right? But if we're speaking in the same terminology, and that's where that IRPG is not just a tool for new people—it's a tool for everybody. And again, it's that common terminology for folks that don't know each other.

Michael Preet
(01:07:03):

Before we sign off today, we wanted to tell you about a unique learning experience that you may be unaware exists. The National Fallen Firefighters Foundation facilitates a program known as a staff ride. Staff rides provide participants with an immersive experience where they relive an incident by visiting the incident site with subject matter experts and hearing firsthand accounts from people who experienced the event. Staff rides are commonly used by the military and the U.S. Forest Service, but up until recently, this type of teachable event hadn't been used by structural firefighters. My co-host, friend, and colleague John Tippet has been involved with the program from its inception and can tell us more about this unique opportunity.

Chief John Tippet
(01:07:53):

Thanks, Mike. To say the program is unique is an understatement. The benefits of the staff ride provide countless opportunities to improve our overall performance and pay our respects to the fallen. Staff rides are a three-part learning experience that involve pre-work, field study, and an integration experience. In the first two components, the attendee is asked to obtain a working knowledge of the incident particulars, followed by a facilitated visit to the site where the event took place. The third phase is known as the integration experience. After a period of reflection following the field study, attendees gather at a community meal to share their takeaways from the experience. The impact of the immersion and the ability to converse with firefighters involved in the event cannot be overstated. The staff ride fosters collaboration and communication among team members. It is crucial during actual events and enhances the attendees' decision-making process. Finally, and most significantly, the staff ride provides participants with the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and challenges faced by firefighters involved in the incident, enhancing their overall perspective and approach to their next call.

Michael Preet
(01:09:03):

For more information about staff ride programs, please visit our website at firehero.org and search staff rides.

Chief John Tippet
(01:09:13):

And if you're interested in hosting a staff ride at your department, fill out the contact form found under the "Read More" link on the staff ride page, or contact the NFFF Director of Fire Programs, Danny Kisner, at dkisner@firehero.org. Please take advantage of this opportunity to learn from the past, save lives in the future, and, most importantly, honor the fallen.

Chief Tom Harbor
(01:09:36):

Thank you for watching part one of this three-part series detailing the August 20, 1993, Glen Allen Wildfire near Altadena, California, which tragically took the lives of two brave wildland firefighters. Be sure to join us for part two, where we'll hear from two men who were on the fireground that tragic day, so they can tell us about their experience and their two lost brothers.

Michael Preet
(01:10:07):

Please visit the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation website and social media for more episodes honoring those firefighters who lost their lives in service of others. I'm Michael Preet. Please be safe.

Announcer
(21:38):

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