



THIS WEEK IN TRAINING

445 BILTMORE AVE LODD

Jay Bettencourt is a firefighter in the Ashville North Carolina Fire Department, Rescue Company 3 and is an instructor at FDTN in Indianapolis. He teaches in the firefighter survival container which some of us have been very lucky to have been a part of. The following is a play by play of the worst day of his career.

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About Five years ago I was at a parade and a “kid” had the balls to say to me I don’t trust you because I’ve never seen you train or at any drills. He had about 3 years in the department at the time and I thought you little shithead, I’m here 25 years or so and you have the balls to say that to me? Who the F does this kid think he is to say that to me? I been in more fires than you’ve taken dumps! I was in burning buildings while you were still breast feeding... I have seen more...BLAH BLAH BLAH. We all know the lines that us “Senior” guys spout out from time to time.

Two weeks later we had a job, I was doing a search on the 2nd floor when I realized just how bad a job I was doing. Slow, knocking stuff over a little disoriented. When it was over and I had time to reflect I realized I hadn’t had a pack on in an IDLH environment in at least 6 months and that was at Yaphank and another 6 months prior to that. Worst of all, that kid was right. Not necessarily in the words that he chose but he was right in his reasoning...I was out of practice. I felt it and it showed...

As senior men in the fire service we tend to get complacent. We feel we’ve been down the hallway a hundred times and we have nothing to prove. But with the lack of work in the last few years now, training has become so important to keep sharp, live fire training especially. As a senior man on the live burn committee said, “I can’t believe how uncomfortable I felt in the mask when I first started doing this training and how quickly I got to my old self after just a couple drills. This building is the best thing to EVER happen to this fire department. These guys have no idea how lucky they are!”

If you think, and I don’t care if you have 5,10,15, or 20 plus years in the fire service, if you think at the next fire you’re going to just get on the rig, go to the scene put your mask on and everything else is just going to fall in line like you just did it yesterday you’re in for a good kick in the chicklets. It doesn’t work like that and that lesson has not been lost on me since that day.

445
BILTMORE
LODD

“WE DON’T RISE
TO THE LEVEL
OF OUR
EXPECTATIONS
, WE FALL TO
THE LEVEL OF
OUR TRAINING”

“Let No
Mans Ghost
Say His
Training Let
Him Down”

If you're not planning on entering a burning building next time we have a job, so be it. Don't train, but if you are, you owe it to yourself and the brothers around you to be the best you can possibly be. Oh and let us not forget about the public who needs you.

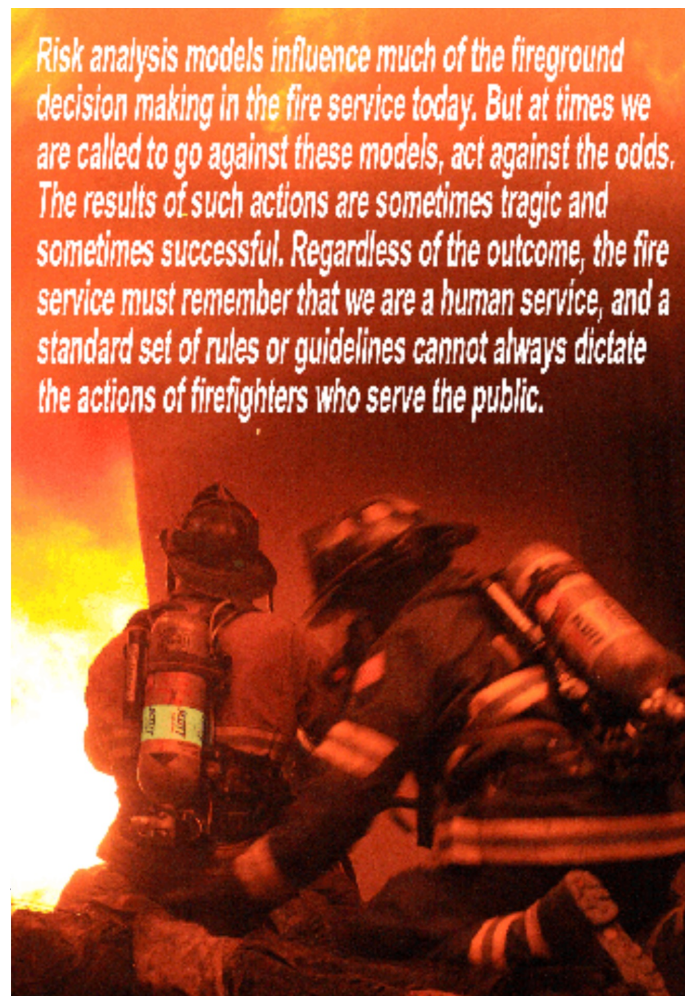
They need you to have your best day on their worst day...

The following article is fairly long. I hope you read it through to the end. I hope that it makes you think about what could happen every time we go out those doors. But mainly I hope it changes your mindset and the misconception of how good you think you are...

It sure as shit did for me...

Thanks for reading...

Digiore



FIRE



TRAINING

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FIREGROUND OPERATIONS

445 BILTMORE YOUR NEXT FIRE?

Jay Bettencourt, Asheville Fire Department

The morning of July 28 started like most shifts. We checked in with the crew working off, went over the truck and started cleaning. Before breakfast Rescue 3 responded to a HAZMAT call where we served as the RIT for Engine 11 (one of Asheville's HAZMAT Company's). We chuckled and joked through the call unaware of the tragedy that would soon unfold.

Upon returning to Station 3, I went to Ladder 10 for driver training. After driving Ladder 10 for the morning, Larry Morrow told me my truck had been dispatched to a structure fire at 445 Biltmore Ave.

I loaded my gear into my truck and started driving to the fire. I called Jeff, Clint and Brad on the way to get a size-up

or real time report about our truck assignment. I got no answer from anyone. I later found out that they were interior on their first bottle. I considered running hot, but thought it better to go routine. I drove past 3 and briefly considered going there; I dismissed this thought and went on to the fire.

It was a hot, clear day as I made my way through the city on to Charlotte St. and then Biltmore Ave. At one point I wanted to speed up, but got a feeling that I was "right on time." As I approached 445 traffic was stopped on Biltmore, and I could see some cars turning around and coming back down the hill. I pulled out of the traffic line into the oncoming lane. I

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TRAINING SAVES LIVES
FIREFIGHTERS

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went through the line of cones blocking the road and parked in a parking lot on the corner of Biltmore Ave and Brooklet. When I pulled up, I saw 3 at the NE corner, and smoke and fire on the NW side of the top floor.

A cop was walking toward me, but stopped when he saw me getting into my turnout gear. Just as I finished dressing, Josh Walton backed down Biltmore to the hydrant on the corner where I was parked. He pulled his LDH. I walked up and told him I would catch the hydrant. Josh grabbed the Hydro assist and hydrant bag for me then drove off. He turned in on the north side of the building where Ladder 1 was operating.

I was without a radio so I stood in the street waiting for a signal of some kind. I saw a guy in an RTS (a local convalescent ambulance service) uniform standing between me and Josh who seemed to know what was happening. I nodded my head to indicate we were working together and a moment later he swung his hand around in the air in a circular motion which meant Josh was ready for whatever. I charged the line.

Rescue 3 was parked on the NE corner of 445 Biltmore Ave. I jogged up the hill about a block to my truck and noticed L1 booming up as I passed the north parking lot access road. I got to 3 and pulled a radio, air pack and axe. I turned on my radio but did not select a fire channel.

I walked in front of the north side of the building and saw smoke and fire coming out of a vented window. Weezy and Josh were doing engineer stuff and Mike Russell was on the first floor of the parking deck functioning as safety. I heard him yelling to the drivers to put their helmets on. The ladder was on ground floor 1 – below the first. I went up to Russell thinking he was at staging command and asked him what I should do. He told me Rescue was inside and that I should wait for my crew to come out and join them. As he said that, Chief Burnett walked up in full turnout gear and helmet! I knew this was big at that point. Just then I saw Caption Bowen walk out of the building. I was struck to see him alone, but ran over to join him.

I yelled, "Captain, are you tryin' to burn something without me?"

Then he replied, "Well you're the one that wanted to drive."

"That will never happen again."

I followed him over to staging just on the south side of the west ground floor entrance. I saw Clint and Brad there



getting hot swaps and went to help. Paul Walker and I put a new bottle on Brad. I looked up from that to see EJ and Larry and CO standing behind E2. Chief Marzella assigned Larry RIT and EJ said his crew was in rehab and wanted to join rescue. EJ was told to report this to command, which he did, then grabbed an axe off of E2.

Now we were going in. We walked quickly down the hall to the stairwell and headed up. The stairs were very smoky and I clipped in my regulator immediately. I was surprised at how thick the smoke was so far down the line. When I hooked up I looked up and down the line to see everyone else on air as well. We moved up the stairs and I thought about the elevators, and remembered the SOG I had recently read which stated high rise fires that were on the 5th floor or below would be fought from the stairs, not elevators. At that point I put the elevator out of my mind.

We took a long time going up the stairs not wanting to breath hard and waste our precious air. I realized, as I am sure everyone else did, that we were going to have limited time to operate on the fire floor due to our dwindling air supply.

At no point had I received a situation report about the fire or conditions or our assignment or even a radio channel, which would bite me later.

We moved up the stairs in a line. Jeff in the lead followed by Clint, myself, Brad and then EJ. On the fourth floor landing we started to encounter dry hose, which I assumed was a high-rise pack. It was attached to the stand pipe and sort-of stretched. Jeff tripped (on the hose I assumed) and Clint stopped to ask if he was okay. Jeff said he was fine and kept moving. We encountered more spaghetti hoses on the 5th floor landing and I noticed there were a lot of hoses around, but NO WATER!

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TRAINING SAVES LIVES

We entered the 5th floor into very smoky conditions, but not much heat. This has been a point of contention with other companies and firefighters. Some firefighters came out reporting extremely high heat; however, due to the leap frogging of crews on this fire every company saw this fire in a different state. The smoke was grayish and diffused my light. There was about 2-3 feet of visibility. Our team moved through the thick haze fast, following a hose line and darting around corners. As we circled our way around the building I knew I was becoming disoriented, but felt it was important to keep up with the man in front of me. I assumed he had a good idea of where we were going.

The smoke seemed to be lighter as we traveled along the line. I saw a clamp that belonged to Brad holding a door open. I was glad to see he had used one of his new clamps, and that it seemed to be working well. We went through the chocked doorway into a room where the hose ended. Our company formed a circle around the nozzle and squatted down. We stayed there for quite some time in a circle.

We waited there for a couple of minutes while Jeff called for water and we all burned our air supply. I noticed everyone checking their air, and I thought we would be ineffective due to our low air and lack of water. I thought we should be searching for victims or fire extension, but there we sat waiting for water. Jeff called for water. Then Chief Denning told us to come out if we had no task. Jeff said we would stay and wait for water or stand by in case another crew needed us. Captain Eddie Wyatt called on the radio and said we needed to open the stand pipe valve. The valve was open. Later Russell called to E6 and told

them the ladder was their method of egress. I had no idea where that would be or where the fire was, or how to get back to the stairs other than following the hose.

Around this time 6 gets water and calls it into command. Jeff gets on the radio and asks 6 if they could use our help. They said yes and we were off swerving through the dark and smoky abyss. We made our way into a hallway that had an alcove off of it containing six small rooms. We stopped there while Jeff did god knows what. It was very hard for the 5 of us to communicate well since our crew was too large for everyone to take part in interactions. I trust my company and my officer. I knew Captain Bowen would lead us in the right direction. I told Brad I was going to search the small rooms even though I thought they had already been searched. We didn't have anything else to do at the time. Due to our lack of water I felt ineffectual throughout the operation.

After that I poked my head into a room across the hall from the alcove. This room was full of files that were burning in the decay stage. There were little camp fires on top of every box. It was a room with an exterior wall lined with windows. Talk began about breaking the windows. Someone checked in with Jeff and he gave the all clear. EJ radioed down to command to have the ladder operator stand clear while we took the windows. After we took them I looked out and the ladder was nowhere to be seen. We were on the west side of the building and had mistakenly thought we were on the north side, where the ladder was. I saw how truly lost I was. At about this time Brad's low air alarms started going off. He told Jeff and, after some, delay we started making our way out.

continued next month...



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APRIL 23-25, 2017



FIREGROUND OPERATIONS

445 BILTMORE
YOUR NEXT FIRE?

PART TWO

Jay Bettencourt, Asheville Fire Department

Continued from last month...

I thought that this was collectively the best decision we had made. As we worked our way out along the hose line, I saw a helmet and a light pop out from around a corner. I asked who it was and if they were okay. They said they were good and we moved on. There was a lot of starting and stopping as we made our way out. I was too far back in the line and it was too dark for me to be clued in.

The order heading out was Jeff, Clint, Brad, me and EJ. We rounded a couple of corners and ran across Mike Branon flaking out a high rise pack. I asked who it was and by his cursing I could tell it was Mike!

“Oh f#ck this f#ckin’ hose. F#ck Man. God Damn it.”

Our overabundance of limp useless hose was very clear to me. Again we stood around for a while then started moving out. At some point the order of our line changed. As we got to the stairs I saw Clint go down followed by Brad, then Jeff blew by the stairs and started heading down an unfamiliar hallway.

In hind sight it was clear where we were, but at the time I was very confused. I looked back at EJ in shock and said, “We gotta get him.” So off we went chasing after Jeff. I was yelling, “Jeff, Jeff, we have to go down, there is no one here. We have to go down. Let’s go.” But every time I got close to him he would dart off and go deeper into the fire area. I could not imagine why Jeff was doing this; his low air alarm had started soon after Brad’s. Mine started just as Jeff darted away, and I knew we were

in a bad way. Around this point I thought to myself, “I bet they will give us the rest of the shift off for this bullshit.”

Jeff made his way back into the alcove where we finally caught him. He looked surprised as if he was expecting something to be there that was not, maybe a downed firefighter, maybe a charged hose line. At this point I grabbed Jeff by the pack straps and yelled, “We are leaving!”

I was taking control. EJ was behind pushing Jeff on. We made it a few steps and I realized I had no idea where to go. I yelled to EJ, “You keep pushing him. I am going ahead to find our way.” I turned and took maybe 3 steps around a corner and realized what a bad plan that was. The smoke had intensified and was getting darker. I turned to go back and Jeff was right there as I turned around. He said, “I am out of air. I need to buddy breathe” in a frantic voice. My heart fell to my boot. Though I was scared, Captain Bowen seemed to be back in the game and that gave me some comfort.

As Jeff and I started moving, a mist of steam and hot water hit EJ on the side of his face. He turned to see where it was coming from; knowing it meant the nozzle company was operating in that direction. When EJ turned back to face Jeff & me, we were gone. He stood there for what must have seemed like an eternity looking for us. EJ was sure we would pop out of one of those doors of the alcove. He felt confident we were still there, he just couldn’t see us. He noticed his low air alarm had stopped going off, which meant he must be dangerously low on air, and

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he considered calling a Mayday. As he considered his situation in that smoky dark hell, he decided to walk ten steps in the direction the mist had come from. When he got there he saw Jake Long manning a nozzle and he knew where to go from there.

EJ hurdled Jake and made a beeline for the door running along the hose line. He followed the hose through a breached wall to a broken window and jumped out onto Ladder 1's bucket. Just as EJ landed on the bucket he heard our Mayday go out. He wondered if we had called a Mayday for him, alerting command that we had lost a firefighter. So he told Captain Hendricks who was acting as division command, to call IC and tell them "I'm OK." While this radio traffic is going on another Mayday comes in. And EJ realized that Jeff and I were in grave danger.

It is my great regret that I lost track of EJ during that scenario. I was overwhelmed and didn't have the mental capacity to keep track of him. I am very grateful that he had the wherewithal to save his own life. It should be noted that after this incredible ordeal that he went through — on his second working bottle — EJ saw that there was still fire to fight and went back in for two more bottles.

Meanwhile, I had been buzzing for a considerable time and I knew I had little air for one, much less two. I yelled back to Jeff, "Call a Mayday!" and started pulling my buddy hose. My buddy hose was attached to my pack with a quarter turn latch and I had some trouble accessing it. I think at this point I took off my gloves for better dexterity. I dropped to my knees to pull Jeff's hoses and within a few seconds I hooked up to him.

And, oh how my heart broke when I heard his regulator vibrating and free flowing down by his waist. It only took a couple of seconds before I was sucking rubber and had to unclip. I had listened to Jeff call the Mayday as I was hooking up to him, but I wanted to call my own. Jeff dropped down to his knees and we started crawling out. He was standing up in the smoke when he unclipped from his regulator due to running out of air. I can't help but wonder if this could have made the difference between living and dying.

We made it to the next doorway when I stopped Jeff and told him we needed to unclip our buddy hoses for ease of movement. That went fast, just a couple of seconds. Then we made our way out the door

to the center of the floor where the elevators were. I called a Mayday, and then told Jeff I was going to find a way out. He was on his hands and knees over his radio. I could hear radio traffic and I assumed Jeff was calling in the cavalry. I later found out that Jeff was vomiting in his mask.

I crawled a short distance and ran into the elevator bank. The smoke was banked down below the buttons, and I was confused because I had not seen the elevators on my way in due to the heavy smoke. This made me feel even more disoriented. I considered hitting the buttons if I could find them, but I didn't want to take the time to look for them, and then wait for the car, if it came at all. The idea of dying while waiting for an elevator was unappealing to me, so I moved on. I later found out that the elevator was blocked open at the bottom floor and would not have come up. I started sleeping easier when I found out the elevator would not have saved us.

I left the elevator and found a limp hose. I started to follow it just like we were all taught. It did not take long for me to remember the mile of limp hose all over the floor and realize this fucking hose could be a road to nowhere. When it's all limp there is no way to tell what's what.

At that moment I became a little angry. I thought of all those frantic people outside, no doubt scrambling to do something to help. But what could they do? Jeff and I were all alone up here. I remembered watching Cool Hand Luke with Jeff at the station. The line, "We in here diggin' and dying and they out there livin'" came to me and really



hit hard.

A moment before I left the hose line I had a vision of my family. Not a thought or a memory, but a clear vision. Just their faces right in front of me. And without words my dear, sweet son's face said to me, "Daddy come home, are you going to come home?" I shrugged my reply and said "I don't know, but I'm not going without Jeff."

Then I had my turning moment. I saw Jeff in a vision just like my son lying there suffering and in pain, and I decided I would rather he live and I die. I wanted to take all of Jeff's pain and give him all the loving kindness in the world.

I abandoned the hose line and called my next Mayday, "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday, Come fucking get us!" As I was talking on the radio I looked up and saw a window on the west side of the building. I thought about Lowering Captain Bowen out the window then bailing out but I didn't think I could throw him out the window and then catch him on my rope. I wondered if that tiny corner of sunlight shining through the vertical blinds of that window would be the last time I would see the sunshine. I had an overwhelming feeling that no one was coming so I ditched my mask, helmet, and radio. I did not want to take the time to put my radio back in my pocket. Every breath of that thick poison was one closer to death. Everything I did was a tradeoff for the breath it took to do it. Now that I was on my own I wanted to be light and fast. I felt sure that what ever happened to Jeff and me was up to me. I had to get us out. It was time to go.

Just by instinct I started down a hallway doing a left handed search in a rapid crawl. I kept my axe and ran into one locked door, then another locked door. Then I came to a dead end and yet another locked door. It had a sign on it saying something to the effect of employee's only, no admittance. I shook my head and prepared myself for death.

I kept my left hand search going working my way back up the other side of the same hallway. I came to a corner and a door. I reached up and opened it and there before me was a clear lit stairwell. This stairway seemed like a stairway to heaven. I threw my axe in the threshold of the door and did a crawl back to Jeff. He had not moved and was making some groggy noises, kind of mumbling (Jay?) I grabbed him by the shoulder straps. I considered for a second doing a thigh conversion, but decided to just go. I would do it if I needed to, but lucky I didn't. Jeff and I moved easily to the stairs and I started to drag him down. We got down to the fourth floor landing and I thought it

best to call command and let them know where we were. I rolled Jeff over to get to his radio pocket, but when I got to it, his radio was gone. Now I regretted ditching mine. Ah fuck it, we both called 5th floor Maydays, those fuckers can come find us.



Captain Jeff Bowen

So I started pulling Jeff again and I was getting so tired my legs burned. I thought of doing the Filthy Fifty (a CrossFit work out) with Rick, the regular back man I work with on Rescue 3 and I was so glad I had done that. I was getting CO dumb, but I had to keep going one flight after the next. On the flight above the third floor a little bungee loop from Jeff's gear caught on mine. It took me a moment to make sense of it. When I did, I went for the knife Clint gave me for Christmas, but could not find it. As I was jostling around looking for it, the loop fell off and I was free. I realized how bad off I was at that point. As I was pulling Jeff down the next flight of stairs, I saw his face for the first time since I had left my truck to go drive 10. I thought of how peaceful and exposed he was. Sliding my hand under his right cheek, I cradled his head as I dragged him down the stairs. He landed funny on the next landing and his legs flopped over and lodged him in place. One at a time I moved his legs out of the way, and just as I was doing this I heard a voice from above yelling down to us. I yelled back, "HELP ME! HELP ME! HELP! HELP!"

Finally they were here. The help has finally arrived. I did not mean to, but hearing that voice made me let my guard down, and for a moment I felt like I might pass out. Jeff was set to go, and even though the troops had arrived I still went for one more flight. I was too tired to drag him

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like before. So I put my feet up high near Jeff, grabbed him with both hands and fell back. I dropped my ass and pulled Jeff down on to me. (DO NOT BELIEVE THE VOICE!!) I have asked everyone in the building at that time and no one called to me. It was a hallucination that caused me to let my guard down and nearly lose my life.

The next thing I remember is Paul Monrow over me trying to put his mask in my face. My airway was too damaged from the smoke and soot. I had to push it away. I tried to say, "Give it to Jeff", but I don't know if it ever came out. Paul asked me if I could walk and I said, "No". Somehow Jeff got in front of Paul and me with his rescuers. I tried to stand and fell down. Paul got me up again and we staggered toward the elevator on the second floor. Paul and I started going the wrong way and Kenny Radford called to us to follow him.

We made it to the elevator and I collapsed in the corner under the buttons. The car was packed. I felt like a little kid looking at everyone's pants. The door opened just after it closed and I heard people groaning and saying something, but I could not tell what. I felt sure one must have had a boot in the threshold of the elevator and the doors came open when they hit. I later found out that we had gone to the first floor but needed to go to the ground floor, one level below us.

When the doors opened on the ground floor I rolled backwards out of the car. It was important to me to get out of the way, so Jeff could be brought out. I knew he was worse than me, but was not sure how bad. As I looked around in the hallway I saw firefighters and medics at the west entrance and an ambulance outside. I couldn't hear anything at first. Crawling toward the door I found myself lifted by a thousand hands, and delivered to a waiting stretcher. These few seconds seemed to go in slow motion. I looked up and all these faces kept appearing in front of me. Clint pulled my turnout gear off and kept me steady on the stretcher.

I saw my friend Thomas. I said, "Thomas, give me some water." So in his southern drawl, he said, "All right man." He opened a bottle of water and totally missed, pouring it all down my shirt. Later Thomas told me when he did that I gave him a "real dirty look" and he then he knew I would be OK.

I was loaded into the ambulance, and I saw Foster, a medic I know from working at 3. He told me I needed to strip down, so as I was lying on the stretcher I took off my pants and shirt, and was embarrassed because I was wearing my one and only pair of pink underwear.

I asked Foster about Jeff and said he didn't know. He told me that his main concern at that moment was me. It was a 30 second drive to the hospital. Then Foster rolled me off the ambulance and into the ER. I was quickly assigned a room, and before I knew it I was surrounded two deep by frantic doctors and nurses.

I saw Kricken, a medic I know in a flight medic uniform. I asked him if he could give me a ride in his helicopter, he said no. But proved him wrong. My thoughts went back and forth from, "I should just get up and go," because I was truly fine, to wondering when I would die.

I asked about Captain Bowen several times, but no one would give me an answer. Eventually I started screaming his name hoping he would yell back to me. "JEFF! JEFF!" I would scream. He never called back.

At one point a nurse started praying near my head, and I felt sure I was going to die. I asked one of the nurses if we could have some music, and wondered aloud if he had an iPod. When he laughed me off, and said "no", I started rapping aloud. WU TANG CLAN AIN'T NOTHING TO F#CK WITH, WU TANG CLAN AIN'T NOTHING TO F#CK WITH, WE BRING THE RUCKUS, WE BRING THE MOTHER F#CKING RUCKUS.

I could hear them in the background, saying, "This guy is freaking out." And I said, "No, this is what I'm like. This is me." I looked over and saw a doctor greasing up an intubation tube, a 12 inch long rubber schlong. I looked up at her and said, "Doc. Please put me under before you shove that thing down my throat!"

The next thing I remember is waking up unable to open my eyes. I couldn't move any part of my body. And felt sure I was under paralysis. I had an overwhelming urge to kick my feet and I felt like that was the key to my survival. I tried with everything I had, every ounce of strength, but my feet would not move. After this effort I passed out.

Later Kricken told me every 40 minutes or so they would see me stirring in the helicopter. They would have to be quick in getting more sedatives into me, because I would try to pull the intubation tube out of my mouth.

I came to again, and once again tried to kick my feet. This time I was successful, and was very pleased with myself. I vaguely remember feeling the sheet bounce off my legs, and losing consciousness. Sometime later, I opened my eyes and saw the outline of my wife's face. I closed my eyes, and the outline moved to the other side of my head. Her face was directly above mine. I could only



see her face. Everything else was darkness. I thought I might be dead.

The next time I woke up I could tell I was in a dark hospital room. It was quiet, and seemed like the middle of the night. I was all alone, and realized I was restrained to the bed with a giant rubber tube shoved down my throat. Throughout my time in the fire I thought I was in some sort of hell realm. I must get myself and Jeff out to escape this hell. Waking up in the hospital in that strange condition in incredible discomfort seemed like I was in a new form of hell.

A very helpful nurse came in who must have noticed that I was starting to regain consciousness. She put on a country music channel and put the remote control in my hand. Some country singer was whining at me about some loss she had had in her trailer park. My new mission in life was to make her shut up. Through some highly sedated ciphering I realized the remote control was in my hand. And though I was unable to read the words, I could make out the arrows. I started stabbing one of the arrows with my thumb as fast as I could to make this woman stop. But unfortunately it was the up volume arrow. Now Reba was whining in my ear at full pitch. "Yes, I am truly in country music hell," I thought.

It took several hours to convince the hospital staff to remove the intubation tube. By using only my eyes and my restrained hands to communicate I let them know that I desperately wanted it removed. At first they told me, "later." To a nurse in her comfortable uniform without a ball gag in her mouth, later means most of a graveyard shift. To me in my condition, later means five minutes. So I hit the nurse call button about every five minutes. Then they would say, "A doctor has to take it out." To this I would indicate with my eyes only, that we are indeed in a hospital, and there should be a doctor almost everywhere. Once again, my eyes lost the debate.

I could see the clock across the room from my bed. Although in my drug delirium state I could not read it. I think it was about five hours until the doctor came and ordered the nurse, who told me she needed a doctor to take it out, to take out the intubation tube which I felt decidedly annoyed by.

I started asking about Captain Bowen immediately, and no one would give me an answer. I was told my wife was in the waiting room. So I grabbed my room phone and

tried to call her. After two or three failed attempts. I called the nurse and told her my room phone was not working. She asked me if I was trying to call a local number, and I said "Yes, it is an Asheville number." And using her best Georgia peach accent, she said to me, "Honey, you're in Augusta, Georgia. They flew you here last night."

I started justifying why no one would tell me about Jeff. He must be back at Mission Hospital. Maybe they flew him to Raleigh. Then the doctor, who had ordered my intubation tube removed, came in. I asked him if he knew about Captain Bowen. He looked at me as though he was about to lance a boil, and said, "Oh. He's dead." Just like that.

He told me that I dragged him out of the fire, and that I was a hero. I wanted to punch this doctor in the face. A moment later a wheelchair came for me, and took me to a hyperbaric chamber. There, I spent the next 90 minutes in Plexiglas tube hacking up half dollar sized chunks of black bloody yuck and contemplating the death of my friend and mentor.

When they brought me back to my room, my wife Lucy came to see me. After a few minutes with her, the firefighters that brought her down came in, along with my mom and stepfather. After a couple hours of tearful greetings, I was released to go home.

A four hour surreal drive delivered me to my house where Chief Burnett was waiting, along with other chiefs, city officials, and a barrage of firefighters. I went around and hugged each one of them individually. This trip was no small task, due to my condition. And then I told Chief I was going in. And there I was back on my sofa. Just over 24 hours after the original call to 445 Biltmore had gone out. I was at home in a daze. What just happened? Is it still happening? When will it stop happening?

I cannot express the gratitude for the firefighters who came in for Captain Bowen and me after working through the point of exhaustion on this shorthanded fire, and continued to work long after we were gone. There was still a fire to fight. Or for all the brothers that came in off duty when the news of our MAYDAY spread through the city. These people truly exemplify what it is to be a firefighter.

TRAINING SAVES LIVES