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Liberal firefighters Warren Headrick and Andrew Huelsman check the firetrucks early Friday morning at the fire department's headquarters, located next to Light Park, as a part of their daily routine. They make sure that the trucks are working properly and ready to go. L&T photo/ Giseelle Arredondo

## Each day starts with vehicles, equipment inspections, cleaning

By GISEELLE ARREDONDO

- Leader & Times

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first in an L&T series looking at the day in the life of a Liberal firefighter while doing shift duty.

They inspect, prevent, prepare and kill fires.

## A day in the life of Liberal's firefighters

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A day in the life of a firefighter includes many chores, working out, inspecting buildings, hydrants, gearing up and doing simulation exercises, cleaning fire trucks, participating in Spanish classes and long-hour shifts.

“Shift B” begins with Liberal firefighters reporting for duty a little before 7 a.m. at Station No. 1, headquarters.



At about 6:50 a.m., or a little before, firefighters Warren Headrick, Andrew Huelsman and Capt. Jose Torres start shift by reading the log book, a book that describes what happened during the other shifts prior to theirs.

“It is required to read the log book by the guys who arrive to the station first,” Torres said. “Pretty much every day we work, that’s what they put on there. We have a bunch of these in cabinets from previous years. The log book says who’s working at the station and who’s working at the other stations. It’s pretty much a story of what happened the whole day.”

Headrick and Huelsman read the log book and drink coffee while the other firefighters finish waking up.

The guys then go ahead and inspect the trucks. They have to do it every day.

From axes, to hoes, to padlock cutters, to Jaws of Life, to lights, to smaller engines, to thermal energy cameras and air bottles, the men at the fire station make sure that the fire trucks are serviceable and ready to go first thing in the morning.

“When they check the trucks in the morning, they go make sure everything’s on the truck that needs to be on there, especially when we have a big fire or anything like that,” Torres said. “Sometimes if any of the other shifts overlook something, these guys will find what’s missing. They just gotta make sure the trucks are ready to go in case we have something. If a truck is out of service, not working and we have to get the truck somewhere, these guys let us know.”

This task includes looking into each compartment and analyzing each tool.

The guys do EMS work, so they carry an AED, which “shocks people,” Headrick said.

“This tool helps us get into walls, into confined spaces where there might be fire,” Huelsman said of a pull tool.

And of course, they have a chainsaw.

“This way, we can do lots of damage,” Warren said, with a laugh.

“We like to cut stuff up,” Huelsman added after he climbed his way to the top of a firetruck.

There are also thermal energy cameras handy, and they are used for finding hidden fires and fire in walls, warren said.

The trucks have numerous amounts of tools.

They even carry a blue lawn chair for other people to use if they happen to need to sit.

“Back here, we got a bunch of rope equipment,” Headrick said. The rope equipment is used around town for rope training,

“And over here, we got more air bottles,” he said.

“We like our air,” Huelsman added.

Torres commented, “The reason for all the air bottles is we do confined space. If for some reason we have to go in the hole, search for anybody or anything, it all depends on the atmosphere, but if you can't breathe in there, then that's the reason we have all the air bottles. We have to protect ourselves first and we have to be safe about any situation. And once we go in, we can go rescue the person out of whatever they are in.”

The fire station located by Light Park has four trucks available, with one of them being a truck dedicated for medical calls. They also have a technical truck.

After inspecting the vehicles, the men also do a little bit of cleaning. They keep the station nice and tidy by hosing down and mopping the floors themselves.

“We stay pretty busy. We do all of our maintenance, we do all of our mowing,” Torres said.

Liberal's Fire Department has three shifts. Shift A, Shift B and Shift C.

"Each shift has six people on it, except A Shift. A Shift has five. Then you have the chief, deputy chief and the fire inspector," Torres said.

The men work 24 hour shifts. They report for duty at 7 a.m. and work until 7 a.m the next morning. They then take 48 hours off before being 24 hours on again.

With such long hours, one may wonder what is the best part of being a firefighter.

"Sleep," Warren said.

With only six guys on shift, the firefighters have other guys in the community on call.

They have about 10 volunteer fire fighters and they are men who are on call when they are at home. These men also have their own jobs, but they carry a pager and if there is an emergency or a fire and they are available, they respond to help assist the firemen.

"We ask them to just go respond and assist, relieve the guys that are working," Torres said. "They can't have any lights and sirens on their vehicles, so pretty much when they get there, they get there."

In the case of an emergency, each of the guys has their own gear ready to go.

They carry their helmet, boots, fire resistant jacket and pants, along with other tools and gear in their vehicles.

"It's easier if they just put it in the back of their pick up," Torres said.

At 8 a.m., the firemen then go and work out as a group at the south fire station for one hour.

Headrick, Huelsman and Torres joined fireman Scott Helberg and Lieutenant Tyson Rice to do Insanity together, with Jacobs, from the station located at the airport, gone getting his physical.

They did Yoga once. And the guys agreed that it's pretty difficult.

"We are required to work out for one hour a day, and we all decided to do it together," Torres said. "We chose to do it not only to keep us in shape, but it also builds a bond."

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