

"I SAY GOODBYE TO YOU ALL, BUT WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THE FUTURE?"

KEVIN CHALMET (Fire service Bruges, Belgium)



1998-2014 Already – or mere – 16 years I am committing myself to the fire service. I started in 1998 as a volunteer in the fire service of De Haan – Wenduine (Belgium) and worked my way up to become a captain (sergeant in Belgian ranks). In 2003 I started working in the petrochemical industry as a firefighter and became a professional firefighter with the fire service of Bruges (Belgium) in 2004. I always kept training and studying until I received the diploma of chief warrant officer.

In 2009 I made the transfer to operational support services. I had the responsibility to work on the realisation and lay out of the pre-incident planning. This got me involved in several project teams working to improve support for our operational services. Mainly on pre-incident planning, geographical data and mapping,... Anywhere that I felt I could be useful I made myself available and tried to help in any way possible. This way I also got involved in some projects managed by the KCCE (federal agency for sharing of knowledge between fire services) where I worked on low-pressure hose tactics and the Firefighter mayday project.

IN THESE 16 YEARS I SAW A LOT THINGS CHANGE, BUT THEN AGAIN MAYBE NOT.

Allow me to give a short overview by using open questions, some facts and some thoughts. There are no correct or wrong answers, but who knows this can be the start of a wider discussion. A discussion on a horizontal level, but hopefully also in a vertical way, within the organisation of the fire services. Here we go...

FIREMAN OF FIREWOMEN IS A PROFESSION, a fulltime activity in aiming for perfection in the tasks that we are expected to perform. Constant training and education is a must in our rapidly changing society and fast evolutionary technologies. The time of dogma's, thinking that you know it all just by holding on to what you know is, over. Or at least, almost over. Since even with the last legally implemented reforms, we see that in some fire services people still keep working as if we are living yesterday. The fight for territory for your own fire service is still vivid in some services. And it is the efficiency that is paying the price for it! Ain't that a pity?

AND NOW AGAIN, WE ARE STANDING ON A TURNING POINT. Not only with our new statute and the new structure for our fire services. It is also a turning point for our education, training and integration of 'new' technologies.

THE TRAINING TO BECOME A FIREFIGHTER HAS BEEN IMPROVED, think about the life fire trainings with the Compartment Fire Behavior Training program. More focus on the new knowledge about fire behavior and extinguishing tactics can only be applauded. But I do miss some important points. What about radiocomm's? And drill... yes that one too. These days more and more negligence comes looking around the corner. Don't you think?

AND SPECIALISATION, THAT'S A HOT TOPIC TOO. To maintain the quality in our service(s) to our fellow-civilians this is a logic evolution. Divers, climbers, hazmat-teams, specific tools and techniques,... Centralization of these within a geographical area will lead to better trained staff. We can't expect nor believe that we can be a specialist in everything. You can't expect a person to know every truck and engine inside out. And on top of that they have to be able to use all the tools with a 100% efficiency... And in the meanwhile they are actually doing more medical runs than anything else. You can't expect that people who are specialised in prevention and building legislation also will be hazmat or fire expert. And on top off al that they often have to be responsible for staffing department. Which most of the times just themselves. And beside all that they have to make up legally correct request for the new truck or engine they desperately need. Are we still serious?

MULTIMEDIA ARE READY TO BE USED IN FIRE TRUCKS, ENGINES AND DISPATCHES.

A positive evolution from my point of view. GIS (Global Imaging Systems), mobile mapping, digitale reports,... But aren't we aiming too high? Shouldn't we first walk and then try to run? Think for example about the flying drones. The simple one can only capture video and stream it to the ground.... Or should we go for the full option that can also measure gasses and can build up geographical maps?

A NEW HOT TOPIC IS THE FIREFIGHTER MAYDAY PROJECT, a wonderful initiative from the colleagues from the fire service of Brussels (Belgium). It hopefully will soon be implemented in all fire service training centres in Belgium. It is an open source project, with a clear vision: being able to help colleagues if needed and to be able to get out of trouble yourself if you have too. A reality check for current operational guys... I can only applaud the fact that this project is an open source project. These kind of initiatives are exemplary for the future of our fire service. This concept should be copied.

THE DIFFERENCE IN TRAINING BETWEEN THE FIRE SERVICE TRAINING CENTRES AND BETWEEN FIRESTATIONS IS TOO BIG. This is commonly known. Why not exchange trainers and instructors between schools / training centres? Or, one central training centre where everybody has to go to. That way we finally make sure that every firefighter gets one and the same training!

WHY NOT GATHER ALL RECRUITS IN ONE STATION AND GIVE THEM A YEAR OF TRAINING BEFORE THEY GO OUT TO THEIR LOCAL STATION? That way everybody stays equally trained and educated, with identical mindsets. Wouldn't this be wonderful? Or will it always stay utopia?

I WILL NEVER KNOW, SINCE WITH THIS PUBLIC LETTER I SAY GOODBYE TO YOU ALL.

After a long battle against the infernal pain caused by a brain tumor, I have taken the humane decision to choose for euthanasia on Wednesday November the 12th. My body will be donated to science. On Saturday November the 15th at 10:30, there will be a memorial service in Blankenberge (Belgium) in the funeral centre Lambrecht.


I would appreciate it to read your messages and reactions on this page - http://pietermaes.zenfolio.com/kevin_chalmet#h300f2abe - and this until November the 12th 08:00 in the morning.

TO EVERYBODY THAT I EVER WORKED WITH, FOLLOWED TRAINING WITH OR SPEND TIME TO PHILOSOPHIZE ABOUT THE WORLD, THANKS!

Special thanks to the fire service of Bruges, fire chief Gardin, fire chief Bulteel and battalion chief Dekeire. For their trust and freedom they gave me to work on these projects, on a local level and on a federal level. But above all I must thank my awesome wife Nathalie. For all her support and love during the past 6 years! I wish her all the best and success with her training to become a operational officer in the fire service!

See you in the unknown known.
All the best, Kevin.

**FILL WHAT'S EMPTY, EMPTY WHAT'S FULL,
AND SCRATCH WHERE IT ITCHES.**



*Please no flowers,
donate the money to
Make A Wish
with the message
"On the occasion of
Kevin Chalmet".*