HISTORY OF THE
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
FIRE PROTECTION MOTTO

The Desire To Serve

The Ability To Perform

And

The Courage To Act
This document records the history of the U.S. Air Force Fire Protection Motto.

The Motto was developed by popular vote and was announced in the July – September 1980 edition of The Air Force Fire Fighter, an informal Fire Protection Newsletter published by the Air Force Engineering and Services Center (known today as the Air Force Engineer Support Agency (AFESA)).

In late 1979 or early 1980, then SMSgt Donald W. Warner, the managing editor of The Air Force Fire Fighter, originated the idea to develop a motto for Air Force Fire Protection. A call went out for fire protection organizations to submit their nominations. Each nomination was required to have been selected by popular vote of the members. Sadly, documents that announced the contest cannot be located. I believe it was by letter or message since I cannot find it in my archive of The Air Force Fire Fighter publications.

The nominated mottos were published in the April – June 1980 edition of The Air Force Fire Fighter, along with a ballot. The cover of the publication along with the original article containing all the nominated mottos are included in included this document.

Votes were tallied and “The Desire to Serve, The Ability to Perform, and the Courage to Act” was selected. The selection was announced in the July – September 1980 edition of The Air Force Fire Fighter. The cover of the publication along with the original article containing the number of votes for the ten nominees receiving the most votes are included in this document.

The United States Air Force fire protection motto was submitted by the 435th Civil Engineering Squadron’s fire department, Rhein Main AB, Germany. SSgt William J. Sawyers originated it.

DONALD W. WARNER, CMSgt, USAF (Ret)
Chief, Air Force Fire Protection
When we started the motto competition, we said we'd send out only the top 10% of the submittals to select from. We've changed our minds. We've decided to allow you folks to do all the selecting so here's all the mottoes that were submitted.

We ask that you submit your selections as a fire protection branch or office instead of from each individual. If you are not in a fire protection branch or office, but work alone, then you may cast the ballot. In any case we want as much participation as possible from all fire fighters regardless of rank or position. For purposes of this competition, fire fighter is defined as a person working in fire protection or directly related fields.

Here's how the Fire Protection Motto will be determined: Each selection receiving a vote (ballot below) will be assigned a point value according to rank order (i.e., 5 points for first choice; 4 points for second choice; etc.). These points will be multiplied by the total number voting. The motto with the most points wins.

Take part in the vote whether you submitted an entry or not. Remember THIS IS YOUR MOTTO.

Please complete the ballot below and send it to us prior to 1 Sep 80. The motto will be announced in the next Fire Fighter. Be sure to enter the total number of persons voting. Send the ballot to: HQ APESC/DEF, Tyndall AFB FL 32403.

Select from the following proposed mottoes:

1. Let us know to let you know we care.
2. Wherever flames may rage, we are there.
3. The desire to serve, the ability to perform, and the courage to act.
5. No task too severe, to save a life that's so dear.
6. Our one desire, to keep you from fire.
7. Duty bound.
8. To serve and preserve.
9. To intercede in time of need.
10. When no one else can do.
11. Duty bound when the chips are down.
12. For those special times.
13. To care to be there.
15. Readiness is our profession.
16. To even the odds for life.
17. Life and property is such a precious thing, remember only you can make our bells ring.
18. Guardians of life and property.
19. Fire prevention - our job is everyone's business.
20. Support your fire fighters, we can't do the job alone.
21. To serve and protect.
22. To protect - to serve.
23. Without fear and without reproach.
24. Honor through compassion and bravery.
25. We serve to save.
26. Fighters for life.
27. Protection is our profession.
28. To protect life.
29. Fire prevention - life's extension
30. Forever vigilant.

FROM: [official mailing address]

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TOTAL NUMBER VOTING:_______(must be completed)

First Choice

Second Choice

Third Choice

Fourth Choice

Fifth Choice

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(signature of certifying official)
The Motto for Air Force Fire Protection has been selected! By a wide margin, "The desire to serve, the ability to perform, and the courage to act" was chosen. Here's how the voting went:

1. The desire to serve, the ability to perform, and the courage to act. (4142)
2. Guardians of life and property. (3260)
3. Protection is our profession. (3188)
4. Prepared for the challenge. (1634)
5. Fire Prevention - life's extension. (1332)
6. We serve to save. (1149)
7. To serve and protect. (1056)
8. Fighters for life. (975)
9. Support your fire fighters, we can't do the job alone. (798)
10. Readiness is our profession. (794)

We only listed the top 10. Nearly all nominated mottoes received some votes. The winning entry was submitted by the 435th Civil Engineering Squadron, Fire Department, APO NY 09057 (Rhein-Main). The originator of the motto is SSgt William J. Sawyers.

The motto signifies that the first prerequisite of a fire fighter is "the desire to serve." The fire fighter must understand that he is "serving" the public and there is no compensation which is adequate to reward the fire fighter for what they may ultimately give - their life.

The second part of the motto is absolutely necessary if the fire fighter is to do the job and do it safely. "The ability to perform" signifies not only a physical and mental ability but also that knowledge is possessed which enables the fire fighter to accomplish the task.

The final segment of the motto indicates that fire fighters must have an underlying "courage to act" even when they know what's at stake. To enter a smoke filled building not knowing what's in it or where the fire is, or whether the building is about to collapse requires "courage." To fight an aircraft fire involving munitions, pressure cylinders, volatile fuels, fuel tanks, and just about anything else imaginable requires "courage."