

Acton man part of airport's rescue team

Preparing for disasters— —at Pearson International

By MARY-LIZ SHAW
Herald Staff

An American humorist has said that every woman since the dawn of time has wanted to marry a firefighter. They are brave, considerate, and usually handsome.

It is the dream of almost every child under ten to grow up to be a firefighter. The glamor of saving lives from burning wreckage seems a compelling way to make a living.

Firefighting has its glory, but it is also very hard work. Just ask Acton resident John Frankland.

He is one of over 30 firefighters who work at Pearson International Airport's fire station.

Toronto's airport handles over 1100 flights per day and 16 million people per year. A shift of five to seven firefighters respond to about 730 calls per year within a five mile radius, which includes the airport's 4,500 acres and surrounding parts of Mississauga.

"During Christmas or the busy seasons when there are a lot of flights going out, you can feel a lot of pressure in the job," said John Frankland. "But sometimes, it is so slow, it can just about drive you crazy."

Airport firefighters earn \$38,000 per year, about \$9,000 less than their Mississauga counterparts down the street. Their training is similar

although airport firefighters have to learn to work with larger vehicles and the possibility of a greater number of fatalities.

A large aircraft contains over 40,000 gallons of fuel, which burns at a higher temperature and a faster rate than gasoline.

John Frankland explained that his gear is different from those in municipal fire departments to protect him from the intense heat and smoke emitting from any aircraft fuel blaze.

The pants for his "bunker outfit," named after military aircraft firemen for whom the suits were designed, are made of pure wool. Wool is the best fabric for insulation

and keeping water off, Mr. Frankland said.

"It's hot on a day like this," he said, looking up at the sun. "But not as hot as the fire when you're close to it."

He points to the five vehicles sitting in front of the station, which is located in the west section of the airport beside the main Air Traffic Controllers building.

"Our trucks are much larger than municipal fire trucks," he said. Two all-terrain trucks are capable of holding as much as 2,000 gallons of water and foam.

Such large quantities of extinguishers came in handy during the Mississauga train derailment in November, 1979. Pearson International's firefighters were called to the disaster to help dissolve thousands of pounds of liquid chemicals which had spread across a large section of western Mississauga.

John Frankland has been a firefighter for seven years, having worked in the airport's maintenance department before. He also has military training from a brief stint in the Navy. His unique background is shared by over 70 per cent of the firefighters at Pearson Airport, according to shift Captain John Crowe.

Mr. Crowe himself is a former Army man. He served in the military for ten years. Paul Elcone of Brampton has a different sort of training. He was with the Metropolitan Toronto Police Department for about three years. He arrived at Toronto airport as a carpenter.

"I didn't like the police department," he said. "It was too much paper work."

Common backgrounds and the pressure of working in a confined space — those on the night shift sleep three to a room — have developed into a sense of professional kinship and camaraderie. Each one watches out for the other.

One firefighter is on leave at the moment recovering from a triple heart by-pass operation. When his sick days and compensation ran out, the remaining firefighters agreed to take over his hours to keep him on staff.

"It's not that bad," John Frankland said. "We had a meeting about it and we decided to do it. He's had a hard enough time as it is." Would the kinship be the same if they were working with women? The question hits a nerve. The silence is broken only by the buzzing of the overhead fluorescent lights.

"Well, we have openings for women," said Captain John Crowe. "We only have two in Canada right now. It's difficult — we had a bit of a problem with a station in Northern Ontario."

But, the government is hopeful more women will become airport firefighters, John Crowe added.

During a brief tour of the station, John Frankland pats firefighter

Paul Parker on the shoulder in a gesture of understanding and sympathy.

"Have you slept Paul?" he asks. Paul Parker has slept but he hasn't been home in 24 hours. He has been working on a video about the station's newest vehicle — Red One. The airport's firefighters designed the \$450,000 truck which is the newest and best equipped vehicle of its kind. The video describes training techniques and will be sent to Ottawa as part of a presentation package.

Improving training for airport firefighters is one of John Frankland's personal hopes. He had to train on the job, which is useful, but not very reassuring. Those aircraft firefighters who work for the military are trained at Camp Borden, outside Barrie, but civilian aircraft firefighters are not permitted to train with them. Mr. Frankland attended a conference in Ottawa this year to try to develop a training facility for Canada's over 700 aircraft civilian firefighters.

It is a tough battle trying to convince Ottawa what is needed, John Frankland said. He smiles. Somehow, in his own soft-spoken, good-natured way, he leaves the impression the battle will be won.



AIRCRAFT AFLAME — Clouds of black smoke billow over the wreck of an aircraft at Pearson International Airport. The old plane is part

of a large training area for the airport firefighters. Firefighters use contaminated aircraft fuel during their training sessions. The

firefighters send out two of their vehicles to the fire — one to extinguish the fire, one as a back-up. (Herald photo)



DEDICATED STAFF — Pearson International Airport firefighters work 10 hour day shifts and 14 hour

night shifts. From left to right are: John Frankland, Paul Elcone, Don North and Paul Parker. Shift Cap-

tain John Crowe is sitting in the station's newest truck Red One. (Herald photo)

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Authorized by Dave Whiting, North Halton PC Candidate



READY FOR WORK — Acton resident John Frankland puts on his firefighting gear at Pearson International Airport. He has been an aircraft firefighter for seven years. (Herald photo)

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Sheila and Art Bull moved to Georgetown in June from Porcupine, Ontario, about four miles outside of Timmins. They are seen here with their two children, Harmony, 14, and Mandy, 11. The Bulls are living on McIntyre Crescent. (Photo submitted)

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