By GISEELLE ARREDONDO

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As soon as it's noon, the firefighters gather around a table with their sack lunch or favorite spaggetti from home and to eat at the station, calls permitting.

Firemen Capt. Jose Torres, Warren Headrick and Andrew Huelsman sat at headquarters and ate lunch together Friday.

Torres stated that they never go out to eat at a restaurant because if there was an emergency, they would have to rush out and not be able to pay.

He then explained some of the other activities taking place later on in the day.

"After 5 o'clock we start making sure the trucks are wiped down. The guys, since there's three of us up here, we'll take care of them up here. And the ones down south, they have two trucks down there, so they'll make sure their trucks are clean, make sure all of their equipment is where it's supposed to be," he said.

From sunrise to sundown, the firemen must always be prepared and ready to go.

“The guys do the trucks in the morning. On our shift we kind of have the same thing at night, especially if we had a call. We’ll make sure the equipment’s on there if we used it. By the time they get that done, they get to sleep by 9:30 or 10,” Torres said.

Long shift hours means not very much sleep.

“Most of us have our part-time job, so sometimes when we have calls in the middle of the night and when you go to your part time job, it makes it hard,” Torres said.

Headrick added, “Especially when you are on a tractor at about 3 o’clock in the afternoon. It’s hard to keep your eyes open.”

Torres explained, “He’s a farmer.”

Headrick continued, “Good thing it drives itself. I can sit and watch movies. Whatever tractor, we have a DVD in there. What I’ve been in, we don’t so I’ve just been watchin’ movies on my phone.”

“I’d be too scared I’d run into something,” Torres joked as the tractor beeped.

Headrick said, with a laugh, “The beep used to be a lot louder. It used to be beep really loud and your seat started vibrating and kind of give you a little shock.”

After lunch, the men continue with their afternoon shift duties. Some of the firemen head down

to their weekly spanish classes.

“We do different type of training. We do emergency spanish,” Torres said.

“I can say ‘hospital.’” Headrick joked, while washing his plate in the sink. “I can say ‘taco,’ ‘burrito,’ I can count to 100.”

He then proceded to count to 100 in spanish.

Torres asked, “Que le duele?”

A while later, Torres explained that while they are not doctors, they do Emergency Medical Service work.

“We do EMS stuff also so any time somebody’s arms hurting, head’s hurting from a vehicle accident, we can ask them. We are first responders. We assist the EMS, depending on what they need,” he said.

After lunch, firemen Headrick and Huelsman joined Lieutenant Tyson Rice down at the airport station.

“Basically we’re sitting out here, and we don’t have to watch every plane take off, but we have a commercial aircraft take off five times a day, land five times a day. We got to be out here to make sure nothing happens to it,” Rice said.

Rice agreed that the station at the airport does get a little lonely.

“It does, but we get enough counter action with the other stations,” he said.

Also located at the station, is the “Hulk,” a massive green firetruck, located at the station by the airport.

“It’s yellow,” Lieutenant Rice said.

“No, it’s green. Just say it’s green,” fireman Headrick joked.

Rice then explained why the truck is so massive.

“It holds 1,500 gallons of water, and the tank empties in five minutes with every nozzle running,” he said.

Like the rest of the trucks, the green truck also has a thermal camera handy.

“The thermal camera can be adjusted to see if there is a hidden fire,” Rice said.

The truck also includes a little monitor that flares up with different colors as it is driven depending on how fast the truck is going too. A sharp turn would cause it to flare red.

“That means we’re about to roll,” Rice said.

The green truck had been off for five years but the men took it for a stroll down the runways at the airport Friday afternoon.

Some of the duties at the airport station for a fireman is to check the runway lights and make sure that they all work.

“There’s thousands of them,” Rice said.

There are wind indicator lights, the runway marker lights, taxiway centerline lights, clearance bar lights, stop bar lights and runway guard lights.

Afterwards, the men headed out to the south station. Fireman James Jacobs was finally done with his physical and his EMT test.

As soon as he arrived, it became the talk of the department.

“Be very specific. James Jacobs finally passed his EMT test. I want it in bold, underlined, italicized, circled, in quotations,” Rice said.

“Parentheses,” said Torres, with a laugh, and the room was filled with laughter.

The men then geared up and prepared for a simulation down in the basement.

With boots, fire resistant jackets and pants, oxygen tanks, masks, gloves, helmets and flashilights, the men made their way down the steps to the basement.

Tools in hand, the men stopped at the closed wooden door at the end of the steps.

“Hit, hit, hit,” Rice instructed.

Loud beeping noises sounded all throughout the station while the firemen pounded away until it popped open. Smoke drifted out of the basement as the men were then swallowed by the fog and darkness of the room.

Torres entered the basement after all of the men had already gone in, and he stood aside and monitored the simulation.

The smoke was pretty thick, but a ray of light from back at the entrance showed that there was a rope reaching farther into the area.

Torres explained why there was a rope reaching back to the exit.

“Part of the reason we have that rope, is if you just come in here and all of a sudden take that rope away, or you don’t have anything to go back to, you are lost. At least with a rope, they have a way to get out. Any time we’re doing search and rescue, they require us to at least to be two together. Because if you are by yourself, if something happens and you can’t talk, we don’t know what’s going on,” he said.

He then walked over to the course that simulated the framework of a house.

“With this opening we have right here, that’s how big a wall is. If you take the sheet rock at your house, if you take it off, that’s how big of an opening we have to get through. If for some reason your two exits are done, and you can’t go out the window, you got to find a different way out,” Torres said.

Beeping oxygen packs sounded all throughout the room.

“The beeping noise is – if for some reason if his pack doesn’t move or if he doesn’t move for for 30 seconds, it will start beeping letting us know he’s not moving, If it starts going off, we know something’s wrong,” he said.

The course is a challenge sometimes if somebody’s clausterphobic, Torres said.

“See, right now the way he was going through, it’s hard for him to have his air pack on. There are some guys that are small enough to go through with their air pack, like has to take his off and once you get out you gotta put it back on,” he continued.

Huelsman started hyperventilating while crawling through the course, and Torres coached him to calm down.

“Hey, relax. Relax. Relax. Where’s your air pack at? Hey, just try to back out all the way in and try going with your air pack first. Slide your airpack first. Take your time. Catch your breath. You’re doing fine. You have to streighten yourself up, gather yourself,” he instructed.

“Calm down buddy,” Rice added.

“Get your helmet out first. Then just start sliding out,” Torres said.

He explained that the course gets even the best of those who aren’t clausterphobic, too.

“As long as you can see, it makes it easier – It’s whenever you can’t see and it’s dark. If you’re not clausterphobic it starts making you clausterphobic. Right there where you go underneath, there’s just enough room where you can put your body through. Sometimes you push and get caught,” Torres said.

Rice said, “I’ll be honest that corner got me this time, too.”

One by one the men completed the course until they were all finished.

Fireman Scott Helberg said he did alright.

“It was tough for me right here in the roof – trying to get through an area that is two and a half foot with a pack on and stuff. I don’t know how these bigger guys do it, ‘cause it’s hard for me,” he said.

The basement was warm enough already and with full gear on, the men were drenched in sweat by the time they were done.

According to Rice, the men don’t do the same activity everyday, but they train everyday.

“This is what our daily activities are. We do some type of training everyday,” Rice said.

After the simulation at around 4 p.m., the men sat down on the back of the firetrucks and ate watermelon. And after resting for a moment, the firemen proceded to shower Jacobs with a bucket of ice water for finally passing his EMT test.