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# ERICKSON AERIAL FIREFIGHTING TEAM VIEWED AS CONSUMMATE PROFESSIONALS

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**Redding, California resident provides first-hand account of aerial firefighting performed by Erickson pilots and crew during the massive Carr Fire of 2018.**

*By: Jennifer Ferrero, APR, DTM*

The city of Redding, in northern California, is known for trout fishing, 200 miles of trails, and 300 days of sunshine per year. It is also now known as one location hit hard by the [Carr Fire of 2018](https://youtu.be/3-gEbPNvblg) (<https://youtu.be/3-gEbPNvblg>). The fire decimated a large part of the region, in total burning almost 360 square miles. Over 1,000 homes were lost.

An eight-year Redding resident, Tebbin Salvesen (70), loves living there and when the fire started to approach his neighborhood, he went into a protective mode. Salvesen ended up saving his home and the homes of others. But found by immersing himself in the experience that he learned a lot about firefighting and the Erickson S-64 Air Crane® Helicopter with the water cannon.

Salvesen, who has a history in emergency management, was not afraid to be around the fire and when it first started, he went toward it to investigate. He said, "The fire started mid-day, it was burning, and we knew it. But we didn't know what it would become." As soon as Salvesen smelled smoke, the night before it hit his area, he and a friend grabbed a camera and went toward Whiskeytown Lake, eight miles west of Redding. The fire is known to have started at the Carr Tower House adjacent to the lake by a metal wheel creating sparks from a failed camper trailer tire.



*Photo by Tebbin Salvesen*

When Salvesen and his friend Ollie arrived, he saw that the entire mountain range in front of them<sup>1</sup> was on fire. “It was burning like crazy. I set my camera down and let it run. The fire looked like lava flowing down the hill, it was moving so fast.”

They stayed there for about 30 minutes, shooting film of the event until they saw the fire coming to a head at two ridge lines, “we got out of there just in time,” he said. The fire was heading toward Redding.

When they arrived back home, they had an evacuation order. The fire was on his side of the river. But Salvesen was worried about leaving. He said there was a natural area nearby that was full of brush, he said, “If the fire gets in there, it won’t be good.” Unfortunately, the fire hit the area, adjacent to the Sacramento River, and went up like an explosion.” The fire jumped the riverbank and then started to head toward town. He said it was called a “firenado” because it went up so fast.

“Then the calvary came in, the S-64 Air Crane® Helicopter came in to fight the fire. They were flying over my house, I could see them dipping into the Sacramento River, and dropping water on my house, and in my neighborhood,” he said.

He could see the S-64 pilots, about 150 feet up, from his vantage point and marveled at their skill and commitment.

Salvesen’s wife was out-of-town camping and had their bigger SUV; he was left with a Mini Cooper and their 100-pound dog. He grabbed what he could from the house and went to his in-law’s house. “When I could see flames, and the helicopters were still working, I decided to escape with my dog and whatever I could grab.”

While he was gone, he was worried, and thought, “If it gets my house it will be gone instantly.”

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*Video by Tebbin Salvesen*

He did not like waiting to find out what was going to happen, “I didn’t know the situation and what was going on,” he said. He came back and saw that the fire had been controlled, but it was still burning down homes in his neighborhood.

“The Fire Department did a whale of a job,” he said. He knew that so many, from Erickson, to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire) were working to mitigate the spread of the fire. But he knew he could help.

“They would knock down the fire, then little fires would start back up,” he said. Salvesen grabbed some tools and went into the backyards in his neighborhood to stop smaller fires from starting back up. He worked for hours and finally, exhausted, sat down on a pile of dirt to rest. Luckily, he had put on a fireproof flight suit



from his days of working at the Reno National Championship Air Races and the Reno Air Race Association, whom he worked with for 35 years.

He felt heat underneath him and noticed that the fire was burning under the ground, in the dirt, and started digging down. “It was burning several feet underground, which is why it kept starting up again,” he said. He said that he spoke with a Captain with CalFire who said that burning tree roots are a big problem with firefighting because you cannot see the fire because it is underground.

Several homes in his neighborhood burned down. He said that he saw one home explode from a gas line and spoke of another that at one time was beautifully landscaped with statuary – all lost in the fire.

Salvesen said now there are quite a few vacant lots in the neighborhood where the remains of homes were razed. He is sad about the oak trees, which were prevalent and now are, “stumps and burned trees – it looks awful,” he said.

Following the fire, he went out to the Redding Municipal Airport to look at the S-64 Air Crane® Helicopter and to thank the pilots and crew for their work on the fire. He said they were still on call, and hanging out ready to go to another fire. “They probably thought I was some kind of goofy character,” he said. But for Salvesen, it was cathartic to go visit with the crew.

“The S-64 Air Crane® Helicopter is a very complex machine,” he said. “They run all of these checks and the aircraft is ready to go at any given moment,” he added. While he was there visiting with them, he said they received a call to go back out. “They were on the roll within seven minutes. It is interesting to watch their well-oiled systems. The crew, the maintenance checks, are all interesting the watch.”

While Salvesen went through a tremendous trial with the Carr Fire, he is eternally grateful to Erickson pilots and crews, along with the firefighters with CalFire. He concluded that the Erickson aerial firefighting crews are, “consummate professionals, the best of the best.”





*Photos by Tebbin Salvesen*

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