

# Supporting the Attack Team



By **A. C. Eric Johnson,**  
**De Pere Fire and Rescue Dept.**

I hope I caught your attention with the title of this. What does this mean? Well, it actually has many meanings but with a very important singular goal. The goal is to quickly get to the seat of the fire, extinguish the fire, and return home safely.

I will never raise my right hand and proclaim to know everything about fighting fires; far from it. I take pride in continually learning on how I can improve myself and pass it on for other firefighters to improve themselves and their departments. Remember I used to wear  $\frac{3}{4}$  boots and ride the tail-board to fires!

It seems like more than just a few things have morphed over the years from how we used to take care of business like the need for higher flow rates on our attack lines (150 g.p.m. minimum), larger supply hose (from 3" to 5"), SCBA bottles (from 2216 to 4500 p.s.i.), our trucks get bigger and bigger, the need for more mutual aid, and the list goes on.

Besides our equipment getting bigger over the years, our tactics have also morphed from the seemingly more simplistic era of chasing fire. In my earliest days of answering the pager we didn't think of waiting for "backup" crews to initiate the attack. RIT was non-existent, mutual aid was only for the "big one" or need for tankers (yes, I said tankers not tenders). Officers were the only ones to have a portable radio and ventilation was something that occurred after the fire was knocked down, usually with a smoke ejector!

Now, I want to fast-forward and discuss the way that we should be conducting business at your next fire and beyond. As I mentioned earlier, I continue to try to learn as much as I can about my job as a firefighter. There has been a tremendous amount of data published about fire behavior, ventilation best practices, and fire attack methods by organizations like Underwriters Laboratories and other leaders in our industry. I have tried to share these findings in the pages of previous issues of the Wisconsin Fire Journal because I believe in what the information is telling us and I want to make your job fighting fires a safer endeavor.



There has not been more emphasis on the need for rapid response, "quick water", transitional attack, and coordinating fire attack with ventilation. This is all due to increased fire development due to the era of lightweight construction and the burning of plastics and synthetics that is found in virtually everything in our living environment.

Something to add to the list to emphasize during the firefight is to **SUPPORT THE ATTACK TEAM!!** It is easy for the Incident Commander to hand out assignments when crews arrive on scene of a structure: fire-attack, back-up, search, ventilation, water supply, RIT, etc. especially when they use



Door control for the attack line going inside

a tactical worksheet to help fill out the assignments. What I mean by support the attack team is:

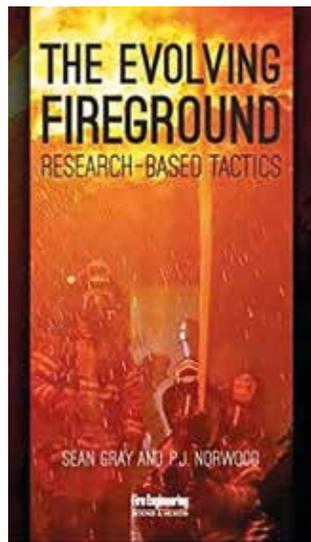
1. Assign someone to door control and /or have another crew assist with door control and help advance the attack line(s) from the outside. Nothing is more frustrating than to advance on a fire only to have the hose get pinched going around a corner (usually the entrance door). Closing the door behind the attack team stops the flow path and prevents the fire from rolling back out over the attack team.

2. Coordinate the attack team with ventilation. This cannot be overemphasized! Communication with the attack team and the ventilation team is essential. This needs to be done in a coordinated fashion to support the attack team so they don't get beat up with steam, heat inversion or both.

3. Have another assigned crew to be "on deck" to relieve the attack team. The crew entering on the attack is going to be going full steam to reach the fire and extinguish it. This is going to be a physical and psychological overload experience for them. You can plan to get 15 minutes of hard work out of them and they will be ready to come outside for a fresh air tank and a chance to rehab.

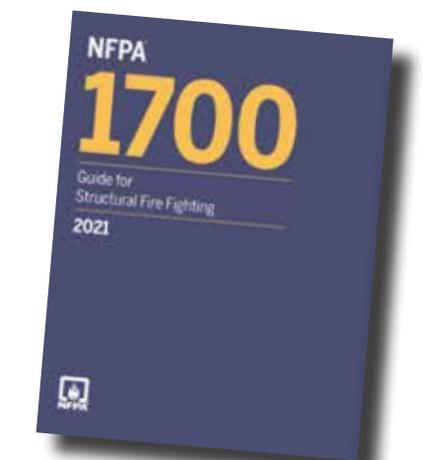
There are two textbooks I believe that belong in every firehouse for firefighters and especially fire officers to read.

The book *The Evolving Fireground: Research-Based Tactics* by Sean Gray and P.J. Norwood is a summary of all the testing and research that Underwriters Laboratories (U.L.) has conducted on fire behavior, building construction, fire attack, ventilation, and



search and rescue, over the last 15 years or so. A great line from the beginning of this book that relates to this article is,

***“in an effort to become smarter***



***firefighters, it's imperative to evaluate the research and apply it to fireground operations.”***

The *NFPA 1700 Guide for Structural Fire Fighting, 2021 edition* essentially validates all the research that U.L. has performed and adopts their practices. I am sure that future students who join your department and attend the Entry Level Firefighter and Fire fighter I and II courses will certainly see this information in their training at the technical colleges. So why not start to adopt these procedures now into your organization?

I have been following all the studies that U.L. has conducted on fire research since they started. I have also presented this training for every fire department that is willing to listen. I have no doubt that it makes a department safer and more efficient. Don't we owe it to our members to make sure that they return from the incident in the same condition they turned out for the response?

Note: If you would like your department to receive training on the research-based tactics or other fireground operations, feel free to contact me to discuss arrangements. Stay Safe.

*Eric started in the fire service with the Oconomowoc Fire Department in 1984. After serving more than 26 years, he retired from the Green Bay Metro Fire Department as a station captain and paramedic in 2019. He currently works at the De Pere Fire and Rescue Department as the Assistant Chief of Training and Safety. In addition to having many certifications, he has an associate degree in fire science technology, a bachelor's degree in emergency management, and has a master's degree in leadership with an emphasis in disaster preparedness and executive fire leadership.*

*Eric is a 20-year veteran of the Wisconsin Army National Guard as a medic serving units in Watertown and West Bend. He also is a fire service instructor for Northeast Wisconsin Technical College in Green Bay. He can be contacted via e-mail at ericjo366 yahoo.com.*