

THE ORIGINS OF OUR MISSION

We're in Cincinnati this week for the Blue Card Hazard-Zone Conference because years ago, one man started making things better & he never stopped.

BY NICK BRUNACINI

B SHIFTER Buckslip, Oct. 12024

Alan V. Brunacini joined the American Fire Service in 1958 during an era where structural firefighting was supposed to beat the living shit out of you. In 1970, newly anointed Battalion Chief AVB led the effort to develop an incident command system for his fire department. He had a whopping 12 years of experience when he took the reins of his department's operational future. His original mission was fueled by the first decade of his firefighting career, where the only benchmark that mattered to the cult was a firefighter's ability to take the fire's beating on the path toward extinguishment. It was how they separated the weak from the strong and the resilient from the fragile to forge fire warriors worthy of song. Adoration in the social hierarchy and a spot on A Shift were the rewards.

To call him unique is an understatement. Young AVB had the hubris to ask a lot of whys: "Why do we do it like this? Why does it look so different from company to company? Why does it have to inflict so much injury and pain upon the firefighters? Why does it get more out of control every time another company shows up? Why is the BC directing traffic?" The young Turk would not stop asking questions that had no answers. Before long, AVB established a simple tactical equation: Standard actions applied to standard conditions produce a standard outcome. (The most accurate description for the desired outcome is still "Prevent Harm.") A decade later, AVB's efforts culminated in *FIRE COMMAND*, the seminal textbook on local fire department incident command. Its principles have been used to manage millions of incidents.

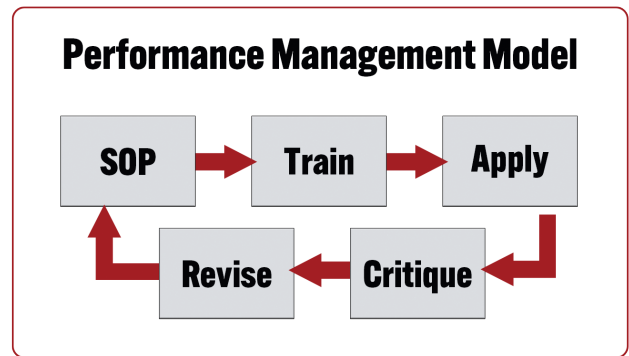
A major turning point in *FIRE COMMAND*'s evolution came after the tragic line-of-duty death of Phoenix Firefighter Brett Tarver during the South-west Supermarket Fire. This incident triggered one of the largest recovery efforts in the history of the fire service. It was a very comprehensive after-action review, and the key lessons emphasized the importance of tactical supervision and the need for rapid intervention capabilities throughout the entire incident response, not just a single company.

FIRE COMMAND's progression and staying power are the result of the Performance Management Model, which is the basis for the after-action reviews Blue Card uses to evaluate incident operations as well as the simulations in its three-day sim labs. AVB applied this model to his career, and it was

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central to FIRE COMMAND's creation. He carried a 3"x5" card in his pocket for the last 30 years of his life, becoming the Johnny Appleseed of incident command.

Change is the only way to improve a process or system. Early in AVB's mission, the post-incident review, initially called a "critique," evolved into the "after-action review," a term that is more accurate and less judgmental. Review and revision are key elements of FIRE COMMAND, a book that has been continually revised since its release. Today, the Blue Card program is the most up-to-date version of the FIRE COMMAND curriculum (it's much quicker to update an online program versus a book, but this will change when we release the third edition of FIRE COMMAND). The program has been used to train as many firefighters after AVB died as when he was alive.



This brings us to FIRE COMMAND's latest expansion—after-action review software. Blue Card Instructor Erik Phillips already had an expert understanding of the fire department's mission of "Prevent Harm, Survive & Be Nice" before joining the B Shifter universe. He had been struggling with the same questions that haunted AVB over 60 years ago. After completing Blue Card's Train-the-Trainer program in 2021, Erik identified decision-making as a key element of the FIRE COMMAND/Blue Card system. He collaborated with Blue Card Instructors Josh Blum and Chris Stewart to create the two-day Strategic Decision-Making Workshop. This step led to the next, and soon, they created AAR software that evaluates incident strategies and the incident action plan based on the critical fireground factors and the risk management plan. This closes the learning loop, using the SDMM as the framework for conducting the AAR. This week in Ohio, Blue-Carders come together to celebrate a 50-year-old model we use to improve on our work. **BS**



Nick Brunacini joined the Phoenix Fire Department (PFD) in 1980. He served seven years as a firefighter on different engine companies before promoting to captain and working nine years on a ladder company. Nick served as a battalion chief for five years before promoting to shift commander in 2001. He then spent the following five years developing and teaching the Blue Card curriculum at the PFD's Command Training Center. His last assignment with the PFD was South Shift commander. Nick retired from the PFD in 2009 after spending the first 26 years of his fire-department career as a B-shifter and the last three on C Shift. Nick is the author of "B-Shifter—A Firefighter's Memoir." He also co-wrote "Command Safety." Today he is the publisher of the B Shifter hazard zone periodical and a Blue Card instructor.