

MY COOL CARDINALS JOB

Marc Weiter

FIREWORKS TECHNICIAN



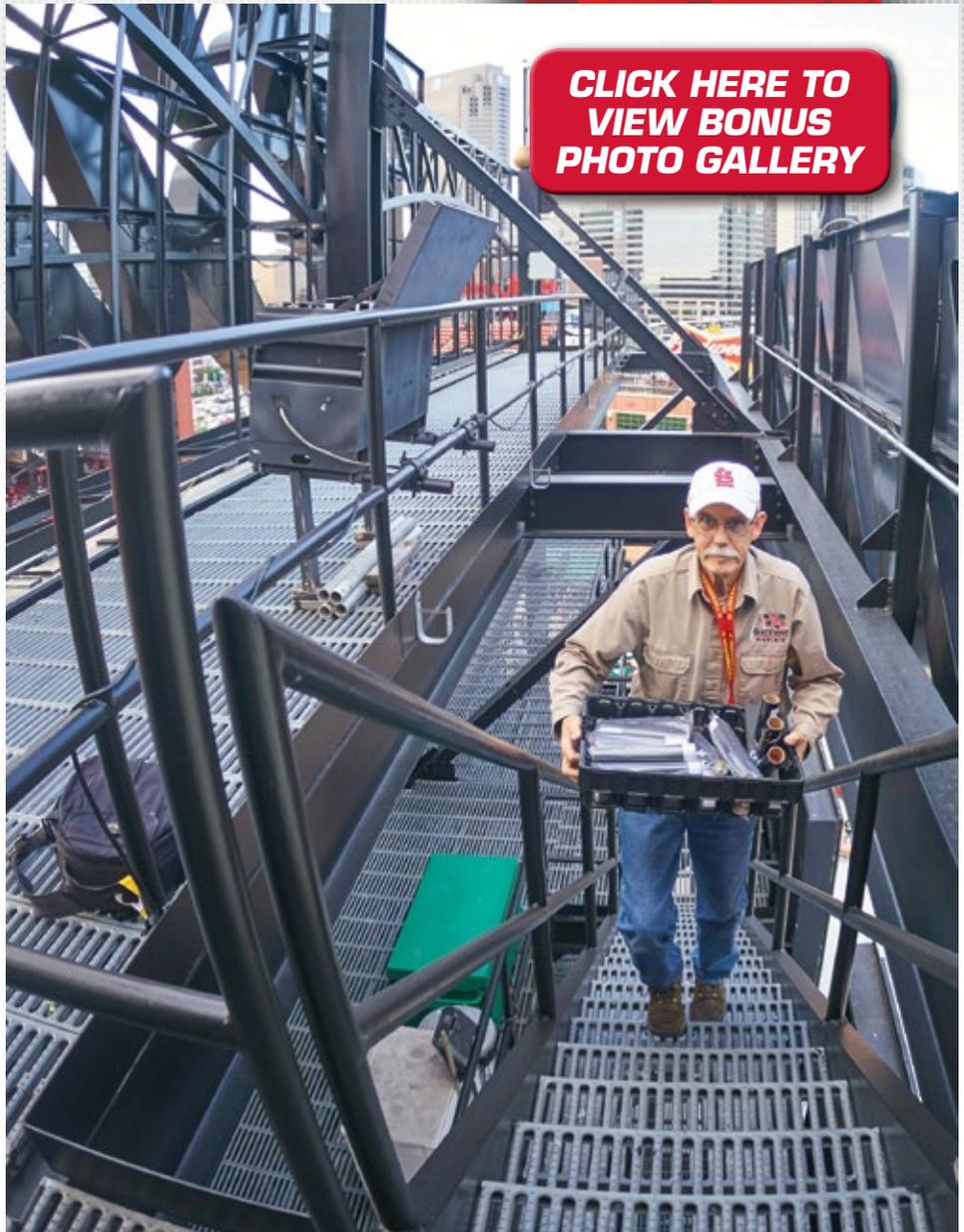
Apologies to Matt Carpenter, Dexter Fowler and the other bats in the Cardinals lineup, but no one puts on a fireworks show at Busch Stadium like Marc Weiter. From his spot high atop (and just behind) the main scoreboard in right-center field, the native St. Louisan is the man who ignites the visual and sonic celebrations that mark each Cardinals home run and the last out of every victory.

It's probably not a stretch to assume your training runs deeper than having experience with a disposable lighter and a bagful of bottle rockets.

WEITER: I couldn't do any of this work without being licensed, which I am through the state of Missouri. I started in pyrotechnics on a part-time basis in the late 1990s, helping my brother put on shows in St. Louis. He owns Gateway Fireworks Displays, which the club hired in 2006 when Busch Stadium III opened. We'd previously worked at Busch II with another company. We've also done Fair St. Louis shows downtown, and we currently do about 10 fireworks displays on the Fourth of July, as well as others throughout the year. I was able to start dedicating more of my time to pyrotechnics after retiring as a state probation and parole officer in 2008.

Did you like fireworks as a kid?

WEITER: I was as big a fan of fireworks as any kid, but not necessarily more than anyone else. I used to line up my army men and drop fireworks on them and put fireworks in Matchbox cars. And I still remember the time my cousin made a large waterproof firecracker we took to our parents' rental



It's not a stairway to heaven, but Marc Weiter gets a little closer than anyone else at Busch when he ascends the steps to his post behind the top of the main scoreboard.



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Weiter keeps three “firing boxes” loaded at all times – enough for three Cardinals home runs and a postgame victory blast.

property. After we put it in the water – and got a safe distance away – nothing happened for a while. But then, finally, the water shot way up in the air. It was great.

So where do you make things go boom at Busch?

WEITER: I’m located above the right-center field scoreboard, behind the Budweiser sign. I take a ladder to the first level behind the board, then a staircase to the next level, where I have a 3-by-5 foot shack that’s located at the end of a catwalk that runs behind the Budweiser sign. I operate the firing system from inside the shack and keep myself safe when the fireworks go in the air. There’s also a small window AC unit inside to keep me cool.

Everything is shot out of three firing positions above the scoreboard. There’s one on each end, which you can see from the stands – it’s a little black box that sticks out.

The center firing position is blocked by the Budweiser letters, and so is the shack, which is directly behind the “w”.

How do you monitor the game so you know when to shoot the fireworks?

WEITER: I can’t see the action on the field from inside the shack, but I have a live video feed of the game along with the radio play-by-play call. It’s imperative that I know what happens as soon as it happens so I’m ready to shoot the fireworks.

How much inventory is in place for each game?

WEITER: At the start of every homestand, I stock everything. I can store enough fireworks for up to 16 home runs and six wins. We have three storage boxes on the same level my shack is located, and one larger storage box on the level below. Everything is locked and secured.

As far as what’s ready to fire, I have one win and three home runs wired up at all times. So I can do up to three home runs in a single inning. Once the visiting team comes to bat, I can leave the booth to reload. I can get one home run loaded in a half-inning, but I have to be inside the booth before the Cards come to bat. I’ve never run out of fireworks in a game. We keep annual statistics to make sure our needs are covered.

As far as timing the fireworks, you’ll also hear a siren (controlled by the crew that operates the scoreboards) that plays at the same time. There’s no official coordination, but I like to get my fireworks in the air before the siren goes off. My motto: Let’s get the celebration going. I’m like everyone else, because I’m excited for the home run.

Have you ever shot fireworks in error?

WEITER: I’ve had a couple mistakes.



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The view from his booth is more boxed-in than breathtaking, but live video and radio keep Weiter on top of the action.

But in those instances, they were suspected home runs by everybody – the broadcasters, the players, even the siren went off. Luckily, I’ve never shot fireworks for a home run hit by a visiting player.

Another time, there was a challenge on a home run call and I held off shooting the fireworks. When it was a called home run, I went ahead and shot the fireworks. Most of the time, though, my fireworks are fired correctly.

What types of loads do you shoot for a Cardinals home run, and then for the postgame victory celebration?

WEITER: There are three basic types of fireworks. First, there are traditional outdoor fireworks like you see on the Fourth of July. We don’t use them because of the closeness of the crowd. Second, there are indoor fireworks, called stage effects, which you typically see at concerts. Then you have a hybrid called “close proximate,” and that’s what we shoot here. It’s an outdoor product but designed like an indoor product – it has very controlled manufacturing specifications. There’s no hot debris. Everything launches from the device inside the box and at that point, it’s all expended.

Are the fireworks specially geared to Busch Stadium?

WEITER: The fireworks are manufactured by a company in Florida that’s our exclusive provider. We trust the product; it performs day in, day out. We rarely have duds. Everything is specified – even the noise of the fireworks – for an urban environment.

The red and white fireworks the fans see go 200 feet. The other firework, called a Cannonade, is the boom you hear and sometimes see during night games. Those go no more than 150 feet. Both have to perform a precise way. There can’t be any variables that would cause a safety problem.

What safety guidelines are in place?

WEITER: I work closely with the fire department to ensure all the fireworks regulations and guidelines are followed. We present

them with our plans at the beginning of the year: a site plan, which products we’re using, how they’re supposed to work, who’s shooting them, copies of our up-to-date licenses and credentials, and a certificate of insurance. The fire department issues a full-season permit. Before each game, an inspector shows up to check the fireworks in their firing positions, the wiring and other particulars.

For the special theme-night fireworks shows we do postgame, we have to obtain a separate permit because we’re using more fireworks, different shooting locations and more personnel. We also require a new permit for the postseason if the club wants something more than the standard fireworks for Cardinals home runs and postgame victory celebrations.

What kind of set-up is involved for the postgame fireworks shows?

WEITER: We have two shows a year (July 3 and July 29 in 2017). We use the same type of fireworks, but we shoot most of them off the black canopies that hang over the stadium. We load all the fireworks onto the roof with ropes and pulleys, along with fire extinguishers, generators and hundreds of pounds of sand bags to hold everything in place. We have a lot of wire up there, too. The show is controlled from a computer on the canopy that works in communication with the stadium’s sound system.

Any idea how many fireworks have been shot since Busch Stadium III opened in 2006?

WEITER: For home runs and victory celebrations, we’ve launched about 38,000 pyrotechnic devices. And in almost 900 games to date, I’m proud to say we’ve had no injuries or incidents.

Are there any stipulations that prohibit fireworks from being shot at games?

WEITER: The weather would have to be very extreme before we couldn’t shoot. Because we don’t have any hot fallout from the fireworks, we’re fine.

The only game we don’t shoot fireworks is the “pooches in the park” promotion because the dogs and their owners are seated near the scoreboard. Obviously, the loud noises would scare the pets. Otherwise, we haven’t had a special set of circumstances that has prevented us from shooting.

Is there an unpleasant part of your job?

WEITER: Rain delays. It’s the waiting. If the weather turns nasty, I’ll vacate the shack and go to a safer spot. Typically, unless the weather is really bad, I prefer to stay in the shack because I have TV there.

What are your best memories associated with the job?

WEITER: I’ve been in the booth to shoot fireworks for both World Series clinchers here in 2006 and 2011, and the NL pennant clincher in 2013. Whenever I see photographs from those nights showing the fireworks in the background of the field celebrations, I think to myself, “That’s my work.”