

Special Edition: Northern Region



AIRWARD NEWS

In Recognition of Professional Performance during a Hazardous Aviation Event or Significant Contribution to Aviation Mishap Prevention

Good SA

The Buck Fire on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest was a small lightning fire that began on August 2, 2007 and was staffed by Missoula Smokejumpers. Godot Apuzzo was the IC assigned to this 7 acre fire in steep, heavily timbered terrain.

On August 3rd, Godot ordered helicopter support in order to deliver blivits to the fire. He noticed at that time that the pilot of the Type 2 Helicopter appeared to be a little unsteady with the use of the 150 ft. longline. When the helicopter was utilized again a few days later to deliver more blivits, he began to feel more uneasy about the pilot's ability as he witnessed the remote hook become entangled and the pilot's abrupt reaction to "jerk the hook free" His primary concern was for the firefighters on the ground and the fact that no communication took place between the pilot and ground forces. At that moment he made contact with the pilot, who acknowledged that he was less than fully comfortable in this mission profile.



Helicopter in longline mission profile.
NOT actual helicopter from this event.

As a result of this conversation, Godot informed dispatch of his concerns and suspended the use of the helicopter. His decision was based on his fireline leadership in adhering to our most important objectives of firefighter and public safety. He expressed to the FAO that he felt that

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too many people are injured or killed because someone failed to take positive action during a key decision point on a fire. Thanks Godot for recognizing unsafe flight characteristics, communication issues, and making the decision to suspend the use of the helicopter. As a result, safety of both aviation and ground forces was not compromised.

DERBY MOUNTAIN FIRE Controversy



Photo by Terlene Keller

On August 29, 2006 Helicopter 205 BD with pilot Jim Ranney, and Helicopter Managers Kathy York (205BD) and Rob Heavirland (Superior Helitack) were assigned to a mission to retrieve firefighters at a Division break (also a helispot). As a result of an urgent radio call, it was believed that firefighters and the two assigned helitack were potentially surrounded by fire, and numerous attempts to contact personnel at that location were unsuccessful. Because positive communication could not be obtained with the firefighters, the seriousness of the situation could not be adequately assessed.

Managers York and Heavirland had demonstrated to the Air Support their extensive experience in fire and aviation as well as the ability to remain calm and make good decisions; therefore they were assigned to a mission to assess the situation and take appropriate action.

Upon arrival to the Division break, 70 to 100 ft flame lengths were observed racing uphill towards the area that was estimated to be less than 1 acre in size. Because of smoke, the 13 firefighters were unable to see the fire and its extreme behavior. Pilot Jim Ranney assessed the situation and was able to make a safe approach and landing into the spot. Both York and Heavirland noted that the firefighters were “anxious” to get out, and that the area was indeed surrounded by fire. All thirteen firefighters were safely relocated to a larger, more defensible area, and all personnel were accounted for and safe. At that point the information was relayed to the Incident Commander, who was very appreciative of the effort since the last transmission heard at the Base Camp Communications tent was that “people are surrounded by fire.”

After the incident, controversy over the situation became apparent.

Some firefighters believed they were never in danger, and were disappointed and even offended that a helicopter came to retrieve them. Because of the varying stories and differing opinions about the seriousness of the situation, a formal After Action Review and a formal site visit were conducted that resulted in a report to offer lessons learned.

To this day opinions of the incident remain very polarized. However, opinions and reports cannot change the fact that a very professional job was completed by Jim Ranney, Kathy York and Rob Heavirland. Their efforts demonstrated the type of leadership, composure, risk assessment and decision-making ability that are the hallmark of aviation safety. Congratulations to all of them!!

[SAFECOM 06-1076](#)

My Mistake!!

On July 18, 2007, while managing initial attack/support missions on the Kootenai National Forest, Tom Rawlings noticed his own mistake. Tom and his pilot had flown to a helispot where two blivits had been filled and left for transport to a nearby fire. After the first blivit was attached and on its way to the fire, Tom noticed that the second blivit had no swivel. It was at that moment when he realized that he must have allowed the first blivit to be flown without a swivel as well and that he had attached the remote hook directly to the steel ring on the first blivit.

Tom submitted a SAFECOM on himself to highlight this mistake and to serve as a reminder that even experienced people make mistakes. He emphasized the necessity of checks and good personal awareness. Tom's willingness to admit his mistake and then to submit a SAFECOM demonstrates professionalism and a strong commitment to safety. This is an excellent example of open and honest reporting of our mistakes that will serve to improve effectiveness and execution of our mission. Great job, Tom!

[SAFECOM 07-0742](#)



Jocko Lake Fire—Saving the Governor of Montana

During the summer of 2007, the State of Montana declared a state of emergency as a result of several wildfires and a shortage of available resources to manage them. The Governor of Montana toured many of the fires in a National Guard Blackhawk, often stopping in at helibases to meet with Incident Command, and fire communities to thank firefighters in person.

While working at the Jocko Fire Helibase in Seeley Lake in August 2007, Scott Robinson and Wes Throop's attention to detail prevented an incident from having a worse outcome. After visiting the Jocko Lakes Fire and the Seeley Lake community, the Governor boarded the Blackhawk Helicopter to depart for another location, and the pilot began to initiate start-up. At that time, Scott and Wes noticed that the main rotor blades were still tied down. They took immediate action to notify the pilot and crew, and the start-up was aborted before any damage was done.

Thanks to Scott and Wes's attention to detail and quick decisive action, this incident had a safe outcome!

TOO HOT, TOO HIGH



Lynn Emerick, Lance Hamel and Joel Williamson

While working in Region 3 in support of fire suppression during the summer of 2007, Kootenai Helitack and their pilot demonstrated professionalism and commitment to safety when they turned down an assignment. The Hwy 152 Fire started near Silver City, NM on July 3, 2007. An ASM platform was over the fire and began to assess resources needed for suppression. Tanker drops had proven to be ineffective in places, and the ASM platform

called for a helicopter to support the fire with bucket drops—and they were notified that helicopter 48U was available. The fire was burning intensely and homes were threatened. A 6000 gallon pumpkin was also being set up and filled with water for the helicopter to dip from to support this emerging and fast moving fire.

Dispatch contacted the ASM (John Burfiend ATGS and Terry Cullen, pilot) platform a few moments later, and informed that the helicopter would not be coming due to the density altitude. The fire was actually caught at about 60 acres and the ASM soon returned to base. After they landed, the crew of 48U debriefed with John and Terry, as they were concerned about the fact that they had to turn the mission down. However, John gave the 48U helitack crew and pilot accolades for their decision. In the face of pressure (assumed pressure due to threatened homes) the 48U crew made the right call to turn the assignment down. John informed them that he was very proud of their decision and outstanding use of risk management. He added that he was impressed with the pilot of 48U, Joel Williamson because he took the time to pull out his performance charts to verify the ability to do the mission as assigned. Joel took an extra step by contacting his company to ensure that he was interpreting the charts correctly. John felt confident that the Helicopter Manager, Lynn Emerick, and Assistant Manager Lance Hamel, and their pilot could have easily added to the problem on the emerging fire, but instead made the tough, and correct, decision to turn the assignment down. Great Job Lynn, Lance and Joel!! The ability to make wise decisions under pressure is a product of good teamwork and leadership!!

Good Catch!

In the spring of 2007, the Missoula Smokejumpers were gearing up to do practice jumps from the DC-3. Spring is the time to get rid of the cobwebs and sharpen skills, and catching all the details is sometimes difficult after a winter off. Keith Wolferman was on the ramp at the Aerial Fire Depot when the DC-3 was getting ready to roll for some spring training. Keith observed that the DC-3's main landing gear pins had not been removed just as the flight crew was beginning their taxi. Keith took immediate action and alerted the flight crew and the problem was corrected without incident. Keith's attention to detail and quick action prevented this from becoming an incident.

Great job Keith!

AHORN RESCUE

While supporting the Ahorn Fire on the Lewis & Clark National Forest, helicopter 667HP crashed shortly after departing H-1 with a sling load. Quick action combined with calm thinking resulted in a successful rescue of the pilot. The helicopter crashed in very steep, rocky terrain, and the route to the crash site was hazardous due to numerous stags and loose rocks. Scott Jones, a Missoula Smokejumper, made a quick assessment of the scene for his own safety as well as the pilots, and then carefully chose the route to the crash site. Scott safely reached the pilot, assisted him out of the helicopter and then turned off the fuel and battery switches. He assisted the pilot away from the aircraft to a safer location where the Line EMTs could provide a medical assessment.

Scott demonstrated his ability to be alert, keep calm, think clearly and act decisively resulting in a safe outcome.



Aviation Safety Offices



http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/av_safety/ - <http://amd.nbc.gov/safety/>