

9/10/23

## Statements for Helicopter Incident

### **Eric Berryman – Captain of Engine 44 from Wyoming**

Air attack and he informed me that 3HT would be the airship for bucket work. When I heard 3HT I could hear from the distance to observer. He saw orange panel that I laid out for his reference tool for a drop. He acknowledged he saw the panel and he would be coming in. at this point my crew and I were in an open mdw were 200 yards from the drop (roughly). He came in over the top of us so we were visual for him. We were at a good vantage point for him to see us on the ground. I gave him the wind direction so he knew where to drop and he acknowledged over the radio and that the line was clear. As he came over the top and over the fire, I believe he said brace yourself due to the trees he was going to maneuver over and where he was going to drop high. He came over the fire where he wanted to drop and then hovered there a short time and that is where we started to see the helicopter descend. The nose of the helicopter went down and the blade struck the tree and flames started showing mid way down and then impacted the ground. When it impacted the ground I immediately got on the radio and called May Day, May Day, May Day. My Crew and I ran towards the grass to assist survivability or victims.

Upon arrival at the downed helicopter, I noticed that there were flames, fire and smoke showing from the engine compartment above and below the rooter, along with fuel and water on the ground. It was a mixture of fuel and water. I observed the pilot hanging out the left window/door but there was no door there. He was at an angle which showed still strapped in and had is helmet on. I was unsure if he was alive or not. I heard a shallow moan from him and I knew he was still alive. I instructed my crew to attempt to get him out of the helicopter. At that time they worked to pull on him to forceable remove him. The crew said he was struck or trapped in the helicopter. Meanwhile, I was on the radio with air attack and dispatch working to inform them of the incident that just happened. The crew stated that either his leg or foot was trapped. They worked through to extricate him out of the helicopter. They pulled him 7-10 feet away from the helicopter. At that point, I did a basic assessment of the pilot to see if he had any broken bones or severe bleeding or any other life threatening injuries. After my basic assessment, FF Clemens and I got the pilot to his feet and the pilot was in shock but mobile. Clemens and I took him under his arms and brought him to adjacent meadow 100 yards away to remove him from the burning helicopter flames and smoke as it was thickening from the fuel. Once we were in the meadow, I instructed my crew to stay with the pilot and make sure he didn't lose consciousness and further assess him. I was working with air attack to inform them of the pilot's condition and what was needed to get aid to him the fastest.

The air attack came in with LATs to bring retardant in to make sure we were safe where we were at for the time being. Ground sources were in route. In a span of 15-20 minutes, Two FSO deputies arrived first. They hiked in and provided medical care assessment further than what I had to me. They stated they could pick him up and walk him out. As I was notifying dispatch, Roger with Cal Fire, Battalion Chief 4311, stated that he didn't want the patient moved because he was going to further assess once he arrived. I was told to leave him place for the time being. Meanwhile, we were told to keep the patient calm and kept him in the shade until Cal Fire units arrived and took over medical care. The Battalion Chief assumed command of the IWI. He stated that they had a hoist ship and would land at an adjacent meadow to fly the pilot out. Roger and 3 to 4 engines were the ground resources that were incoming to help.

### **Taylor Horath – crew member**

Eric wanted to call a ship in and then the plan changed to us doing hose lay. I stayed behind at the Tea incident with the radio because we originally going to do hose lay but it changed. As far as I knew, then Eric and Clemens went back to the engine to begin hose lay. When they returned there was no hose lay so I knew things had changed. They came back with no hose and they told me that the ship was going to come in. We were to the west of the Tea incident from the meadow. We back off from the Tea incident. As we backed off, Eric told the pilot, there was the orange panel where the drop needed to occur. beyond the orange panel. I was facing east from the Tea incident. The helicopter made one full circle around counterclockwise and came back around again and figured he was getting the angle to drop the water. He came in from N/NE. The Tea incident was between massive trees. I believe he came over the two trees and I remember watching him and I thought he was going to drop water but he didn't. He went over the trees and I knew something was up because he didn't drop the water. The roter went from the normal noise to a weed whacking noise like cutting branches. It was in the trees and the engine spooling down as it was descending, and it was fast. He had very little air speed. It was a small patch of trees, between the 2 meadows. There was a little fire ball nothing crazy. Eric immediately started on the radio.

We ran up to Freddy and the door to the helicopter and I didn't see a door to the helicopter. There was debris all over the place. There was nothing keeping him inside, except his harness. His feet were lodged between the pedals. I was supporting his body while Clemens were getting his feet out. I remember the smell of fuels and the back of the engine was on fire. I remember the fire getting closer to us. He was groaning and making noises. I thought okay he is alive. We pulled him out of the helicopter 20-30 feet away from the helicopter for our safety. He was moving his legs, which told me he wasn't paralyzed. Eric and Clemens lifted him up to support him and get him out of there because the helicopter was more on fire. I had his helmet and went back to get our tools. We went to the other meadow, N/NE to the other side of the meadow to the shade and he was coming back to and cussing up a storm. It sounded like popcorn of trees which were on fire and popping from the helicopter, while we are walking him out. We were on the other side of the meadow and laid him out by a tree. We aren't EMTs but wanted to make sure no bones popping out. He was asking why didn't it drop, why didn't it drop, repeatedly. He was frustrated. He didn't appear to have anything injured. He wanted to get up and walk around in a circle. We took his shirt off and gave him water and tried to calm him down.

The two sheriffs were first to arrive. I'm horrible with directions, I think it was SE from where we were. Someone hollered out and I hollered back and let them know what the status of the pilot was to them. The sheriffs cleaned up some scraps. The sheriffs tried to be light hearted to help us. We can't believe it just happened. The Cal Fire engine people arrived next. They had medical equipment with them and started care for him. The hand crew then showed up, they were carrying the stretcher and we took the sidelines and calm down and process what we had just been through. We knew we needed to get him out. The Cal Fire boss, he called in the ship to get him. The Cal Fire guys picked him up and lead him to the ship where they took him out. We saw Victor after the pilot was loaded to the ship and then he took Eric to go get the Engine and came back to us and had a chat.

**Clemens Abbott – crew member**

Eric got the ship to come over. We put down an orange panel north of the fire and drop south of the panel. We were positioned on the west side of the meadow so we wouldn't get blasted. He came in from the north/northwest we don't see him drop anything. He was losing altitude faster and faster. After that, we ran across the meadow where he came down. Eric got ahold of air attack and said May day, may day, may day. Air attack took care of medics and ship incoming. Me and Taylor ran over to the pilot. I tried to see if he was unconsciousness and I got him out of the harness. His legs were through the bottom of the aircraft. His feet were trapped. We saw the fuels and water because it was a full tank on the ground. The water turned red bc of the jet fuel. I reached in the cockpit because his legs were unstuck. We carried him 10-15 yards away from the immediate crash to get away from the place. He said he could walk. We assisted him to the meadow east of the meadow we were in across from the crash site. We embraced let him know, it was going to be okay, don't worry about the helicopter. . He was cussing because of the crash. Took off his jacket off and gave him some water. The two sheriffs arrived first and then Cal Fire showed up and checked him for other wounds. It was probably about 30-45 minutes between the time of the sheriffs arriving and Cal Fire arriving. Cal Fire got him out of there on stretcher to the CHP helicopter and air lifted him out.