

“TEA” Incident Narrative
CASNF 001395
September 9, 2023

Note: All times based on CAD Notes and to my best recollection (watch and phone time).

On Saturday, September 9, 2023, I was on duty in the CAL FIRE Fresno Kings Unit, covering battalions 11 and 12.

At 10:43 I was dispatched, along with Engines 4382 and 4362, to assist the Sierra National Forest with a wildland fire in the Blue Canyon area near Shaver Lake, CA. While enroute to the incident, it was determined that the fire was not in Blue Canyon but actually near “Ross Meadow” area on Forest Road 10S24, south of McKinley Grove. The responding engines and I were rerouted to that location.

While enroute, it was determined by Air Attack 15 that there were two fires in the area. The larger fire was located near Ross Meadow and named the “Poison” Incident. The second fire was located near the Tea Kettle Experimental Area near the end of Forest Road 11S10. It was named the “Tea” Incident. Prior to arriving at scene, I heard AA 15 order several aircraft, including a type two helicopter.

I arrived at scene around 12:00. I met with SNF Division 4 (Victor Lafor) to come up with a plan for the responding CAL FIRE resources. Helicopter 3HL was at scene performing water drops on the Poison Incident and Tea Incident. Most ground resources were assigned to the Poison Incident. One engine was assigned to the Tea Incident (Worland Engine 44). One CAL FIRE engine experienced a mechanical issue and was released to limp back to Shaver Lake Station.

Engine 4371 and Tollhouse Crew 1 remained at scene. Engine 4371 was to remain mobile until crews had hiked into the Poison Incident. Tollhouse 1 was assigned to assist Fresno Crew 3 in gaining access to the Poison Incident.

At around 13:00, Copter 3HL returned to Sanger to refuel and return to the fire.

At around 13:45, Copter 3HL had returned to the incident. I heard Air Attack 15 comment that 3HL was loading at Pine Flat Lake and would be enroute to the Tea Incident and would use Black Rock Reservoir as a water point.

Somewhere between 13:45 and 13:50, Air Attack 15 contacted Division 4 and reported a helicopter had gone down in the area of the Tea Incident. He was commenting that an order should be placed for smoke jumpers, rescue helicopter, etc. I was with SNF Division 4 when this happened. I asked him to confirm with Air Attack 15 if the downed helicopter was 3HL. It took at least 30 seconds to a minute to get this information confirmed. Knowing that Copter 3HL was the only helicopter in the area, at 13:51 I contacted CAL FIRE Fresno ECC on FKU Local 1 and reported that helicopter 3HL had crashed in the area of the Tea Incident. I advised that I was enroute to the Tea Incident and that I was waiting on further

information. I had earlier provided a rough latitude and longitude to the ECC for the Tea Incident and advised it would be the same. Later during the incident, the operator of Engine 4371 reported to me that they had heard an "emergency traffic call" reporting the accident on one of the assigned channels.

Around the same time, Air Attack 15 advised that the pilot was out of the aircraft with possible lower extremity injuries, the aircraft was completely involved in fire and that EMS gear and rescue equipment would be needed. I relayed this information to the Fresno ECC and advised that I was assigning Engine 4371 to the tea Incident and would also assign Tollhouse Crew 1. I also advised SNF Division 4 of the same and asked him to contact Tollhouse 1 and have them respond. I advised SNF Division 4 that I would take command of the Tea Incident when I arrived at scene.

While enroute to the Tea Incident I advise Fresno ECC to start an engine from Shaver Lake to the Tea Incident. This would be Engine 4352. Also, I was advised by SNF Division 4 that all communications for the Tea Incident would remain on SNF Channel 4 for command, R5 Tac 4 for tactical and AG41 for air to ground. The Poison Incident would move to SNF Channel 2.

I also communicated to Air Attack 15 that my responding resources would have the appropriate EMS and rescue equipment. He assisted us in making sure we were on the right route of travel (11S10 road).

At around 14:30 I arrived at a parking area near the incident along with two deputies from the Fresno County Sherriff (FSO). Engine 4371, with FAE Amador Montemayor and two FF's, arrived shortly afterwards. We both hiked into the crash site with EMS gear and necessary rescue equipment (stokes and lashing).

At around 14:45 I arrived at the crash site with the crew from Engine 4371 and deputies from FSO. The location of the crash site was a short hike from our vehicles. I would estimate no more than ¼ mile. Prior to my arrival, the pilot had been removed from the aircraft and was moved as safe distance from the crash site by Worland Engine 44 crew. They were with the pilot when I arrived. I assumed command of the Tea Incident and IWI and advised Sierra and Fresno of the same. I advised both dispatches of the condition of the pilot; dislocated left wrist / hand, left sided chest pain, back pain, conscious, alert and oriented. I advised FAE Montemayor to begin treatment and packaging of the pilot.

Shortly after my arrival air attack coverage of the incident switched from Air Attack 15 to Air Attack 410.

After my arrival at the crash site, I advised Air Attack 410 that we had several wide meadows to use as landing zones and that the patient condition would not require a hoist or short haul rescue if the helicopter pilots were comfortable with our LZ choices.

When Tollhouse Crew 1 arrived, I advised FC Ryan Katz that I would like a portion to his crew to "prep" the LZ which would be in the meadow west of the crash site. The rest of the crew would hike to the pilot location and prepare to carry the pilot to the LZ when the time came.

While this was going on I walked to the crash site and began to inspect and take initial photos. My first photo was taken at 14:49. The crash site was located on the ground in a group of trees less than 200 feet west of the Tea Incident. It appeared the nose of the aircraft was facing northeast. The tail of the aircraft was still near the body but detached. The entire aircraft was on fire as was a. A "debris field" of what appeared to be aircraft parts, rotor pieces and chunks of tree was spread out mainly to the west into a meadow and east into a group of trees at the rear of the aircraft. I did not disturb the wreckage or any area around the aircraft and was very careful where I placed my feet when walking.

After I inspected the crash site and took photos, I confirmed the LZ was being prepped. It was at this time that I had provided an updated latitude and longitude to both dispatches as a general LAT / LONG for the crash site, pilot location and Tea Fire. I was earlier advised by SNF Division 4 and air attack that Helicopter 551 from Yosemite would be responding. During the ensuing hour I made contact with air attack to confirm which helicopter was responding and what their ETA was. Air Attack 410 reported that multiple contacts had been made regarding this and that it was still not clear who was or was not responding. He advised that he was going to order CAL FIRE Copter 404 and whoever showed up first was going to get the job. Due to the elapsed time and reflex time involved, I concurred with this decision. I advised the Fresno ECC that a request for Copter 404 would be coming from Air Attack. It was at this time that I was advised the CHP Copter H-40 was responding and was over Hume Lake at the time.

At around 15:05 I was advised that H40 had a 12-minute ETA to the incident. I advised air attack of this information.

At around 15:35 H40 had landed in our LZ and the pilot was being carried to the helicopter. CHP flight crews reassessed the pilot condition, repacked him on a litter for transport and loaded him in the helicopter. Pilot condition was stable. At around 15:53 H-40 lifted off to fly to Buckeye Heliport and rendezvous with Skylife 3 for transfer to CRMC in Fresno. I advised both dispatches of this information.

At about 16:20, after the rescue was completed, I advised Sierra and Fresno that I would remain the IC and would be resuming fire control on both fires and protecting the crash site. I requested Fresno & Sierra to start Tollhouse Crew 2 to assist Tollhouse 1 with line construction. I released Worland Engine 44 back to their engine. SNF Division 4 advised that he was enroute to the incident to meet up with them and inspect that crash site.

When Engine 4352 arrived, I had FC John Wilson use flagging to secure the crash site and flag any parts that were any distance from the main crash site. I had Tollhouse 1 and both engine crews continue fire control on the original fire but advised them not to disturb any parts or any area of the crash site. I had them construct handline in a wide arc around the crash site and main fire.

SNF Division 4 arrived and inspected the crash site. He advised that he would be taking Worland Engine 44 off the incident and down to the district office. He asked if I could maintain the IC and I told him I would. I advised him we would continue with our action, and I would leave an engine overnight to monitor the fires and crash site.

Division 4304 arrived 17:00, hiked to the crash site and took photos.

Tollhouse 2 arrived at around 17:30. I had them clear a path from the parking area through the woods to the crash site to provide easy access in the coming days for investigators, etc. They then assigned Tollhouse 1 with line construction around the crash site fire. At the same time, I had the engine crews install a hose lay to the crash site for the purpose of cooling the crash site fire from a distance without disturbing it.

Line construction and fire control activities were completed around the incident and all hand crews and engine crews were back to their apparatus at 20:00. SNF had provided logistical support which arrived at around 20:00. Engine 4352 was assigned to remain at the incident overnight and would be relieved in morning by SNF resources. I advised both dispatches that Engine 4352 would be the Tea IC for the night and that all other resources were released.

FSO provided deputies to remain at the incident overnight as well to provide security for the crash site.

Throughout the incident I made sure to communicate the same information on both Sierra channel 4 and on FKU Local 1 to keep both agencies aware of our actions and needs.

Roger Raines
Battalion Chief
Fresno Kings Unit



TEA Incident Resources:

Worland Engine 44:

Captain Eric Berryman

FFT2 Clemens Abbott

FFT2 Taylor Horath

Battalion 4311 – Roger Raines

Engine 4371:

FAE Amador Montemayor

FFII Clayton Hodge

FFII Cameron Neill

Tollhouse Crew 1:

FC Ryan Katz

FAE Michael Harlan

Engine 4352:

FC John Wilson

FFI Daniel Garcia

FFI Issac Grillo

Tollhouse Crew 2:

FC Andrew Askew

FC Kris Felix

FAE Jeff Scheneman

On September 9 2023 I (FC Ryan Katz) was working on Tollhouse 1 with FAE Michael Harlan and 11 CNA crew members. At approximately 1125 we were dispatched to the Poison incident for a wildland fire. After arrival we were directed to stage while crew Fresno 3 attempted to locate the fire. At approximately 1520 we heard a mayday call over the radio. After the engine who called the mayday communicated that there was a helicopter crash, Chief Raines B4311 took command of the helicopter crash and TEA incident. B4311 requested E4371 and my crew (Tollhouse 1) to respond to the incident. On arrival B4311 requested that we hike into the crash sight and assist the equipment already there with setting up a landing zone for the incoming transport helicopter and to package and extricate the pilot. Upon arriving to a large meadow just outside of the crash sight I instructed FAE Harlan to utilize half the crew to prep the meadow for a landing zone. I utilized the rest of the crew to help E4371 with accessing the Patient. Upon contacting Pilot Freddy who was being accessed by my E 4371 crew, I observed a small laceration to the right side of his neck and bandaging on his left wrist. Freddy was alert and oriented and at a point I began communicating with Freddy to attempt to calm his emotions. He stated that from what he remembered, he was attempting to drop water on the fire when he noticed his helicopter had a failure to drop the water. He stated he tried to correct the helicopter malfunction but was unable to gain enough elevation.

When the transport helicopter (H40) came on over the incident, FAE Harlan directed them to a clear area in the nearby meadow to land. Myself and my crew along with E4371 carried the patient to the transport helicopter and assisted their crew with loading Freddy into the helicopter.

After the helicopter left the area, B4311 requested that we check the area for safety concerns and preservation of the crash site. After flagging off the area for exclusion, myself and Tollhouse 1 cut hand line around the fire to prevent any further spread. At completion we were released from the fire to return to Fresno.

FC Ryan Katz [REDACTED]

To whom it may concern,

My name is Sam Kapoor and I work out of Sanger Helibase. I was assigned as the Call When needed manager (T) for 3HL.

During the mornings, we start our day with our daily weather reading, safecom, Temporary flight restrictions and fire activity in the state. We lastly, end with any safety concerns for the day or anything that needs to be brought up to the group. In our morning briefings we have the manager on duty, pilot, mechanic, and fuel truck driver present. For 9/9/2023 nothing was abnormal and unusual about today's briefing to report.

At 1125, 3HL was dispatched to the Poison fire. By 1137 3HL had a safe launch. At the fire all seemed as planned while hearing radio traffic for the incident. At 1305 3HL was ordered for a hot fuel and return to the fire. By 1320 3HL had landed safely at Sanger helibase. I visually observed the hot fuel operations with Anthony LaNotte with no concern. I observed the mechanic Samar Gutierrez doing his visual inspections of the helicopter/tank with no concerns being brought up to me. I did meet with Pilot Koegler to hand him some waters and touch base to see how things are going out on the fire. I asked about any strange weather conditions and if he had any issues with the aircraft. I was not made aware of anything during that meeting. All I was made aware of that he was the only helicopter dropping on the fire as crews were still hiking in and that it seemed like very steep terrain. At 1335 3HL lift off Sanger helibase with no visual issues or concerns.

At 1355 scratchy radio transmission came through our main unit channel that 3HL had suffered a hard landing and that he managed to get out of the helicopter safely. At that point, I began making my notifications to the parties concerning the incident.

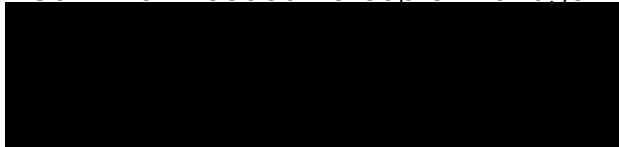
Thank you.
Sam Kapoor



Sameer Kapoor

Firefighter – Fresno Unit

Call When Needed Helicopter Manager



CAL FIER EU Manager Miguel Vasquez Statement

On Saturday morning we did our briefing at 1000, everything was normal as usual. We heard the tones go out to help Sierra National Forest with a fire around 1118. We Got dispatched and sent Freddy the card. When Freddy Returned he came back for a Hot-Fuel. I asked how everything was going, He said everything was going good. and would probably be back after this cycle. He mentioned nobody was on the fire yet, and the crews were about an hour out. Also that the terrain was steep and hard access with tall tress. Freddy did say he was dropping on the fire a little higher to prevent it from blowing out and getting bigger in size. After we chatted Freddy was ready to head back to the fire.

Thank You

Miguel Vasquez

On September 9, 2023, I was the company officer on Engine 4371 in Auberry, Ca. At approximately 1100 Engine 4371 was dispatched by Fresno Kings Unit Emergency Command Center (ECC) to assist Sierra National Forrest (SNF) in a Wildland fire in the area of McKinley Grove.

Upon arrival of the Poison Fire Engine 4371 was ordered to stage by Battalion Chief 4311 while he did a face to face with SNF Division 4. At approximately 1400 all personnel on the Poison Fire heard a SNF Engine company that was assigned to the Tea Fire call "Emergency Traffic" of a helicopter down, which immediately was determined to be 3 Hotel Lema. BC4311 and E4371 were diverted to the Tea Incident to assist in the emergency traffic call.

Upon arrival BC4311 and E4371 hiked in approximately ½ mile to the patient. BC4311 took IC and E4371 made patient contact to provide BLS. While the patient was laying down on the ground underneath some shade, I had one Firefighter on E4371 address the wound on the patients left hand by cleaning the wound and wrapping it with bandage, while the second Firefighter on E4371 obtained vitals. While doing so I made sure that the second Firefighter checked the patients' lungs by auscultating for any abnormal lung sounds. As well as palpating the abdominal region for tenderness. The lungs were free of anything abnormalities and the abdominal region was cleared from any tenderness. The patient also had about a ½ inch abrasion on the neck and left shin. Those wounds were cleaned up and addressed accordingly.

While waiting for H40 to land at scene, E4371 moved the patient safely off the ground and into the stokes basket. Once in the stokes basket we began to lash the patient and secure him into the basket. Once secure and ready for transfer, we began to carry him out with the help of Tollhouse Crew 1 to the area of where H40 landed. Then the patient was loaded into H40 with the help of H40 pilot crew.

During the lashing and securing of the patient he stated and I quote; "that he was in shock and that he couldn't believe what he did". He mentioned that "I tried dropping the water over the fire but the latch was not opening for the drop". "I tried powering out but the helicopter was not performing normally so I tried to keep it level as possible and embrace the crash landing".

The captain from the SNF Engine company that was assigned to the Tea Fire mentioned that he saw some type of fluid, perhaps hydraulic fluid spewing out from the helicopter.

Once the patient was loaded into H40 and en route to the buckeye landing zone E4371 began to do a hose lay to the crash site. E4371 applied water for extinguishment around the fires edge and cautious not to disturb any evidence of the area.

FAE
Amador Montemayor
[REDACTED]

On September 10, 2023 I arrived at the Sanger Helibase at 0856hrs.

Once on base I started my daily routine of inspecting truck RF 2050 and trailer T-33. At 0905 hrs. I inspected the fuel hose then emptied Friday's fuel which includes wiping and inspecting the sample jars. I took samples of the tank, filter then the nozzle. All sample were clean and clear with no impurities noted. Both hard copies and digital copies were filled out. 3HL had launched I moved the fuel truck from the shaded area to its fueling position and waited for it to finish fuel cycle. Once 3HL landed I waited for it to idle down and got a thumbs up from the pilot. After donning my PPE I started hot fueling procedures until 3HL was properly fueled. After fueling was complete I secured the fuel cap and checked securement of the fuel cap making certain it was in the correct position. While I was taking the hose back to the tank I turned back to the helicopter and check the cap position again. I started to walk back to release the ground cable and noticed Samar had it already and he walked it back to my location at the tank. I did another inspection of the area to make certain there was nothing fouling the area. Once in the truck I noticed Samar inspecting the right side of the helicopter including the fuel cap. Once the pilot got the thumbs up from Samar he looked over to me and I gave him a thumbs up. 3HL then launched to return to his assignment.

[REDACTED]

09-10-2023

ANTHONY LAMOTTE