

Statement of events 7-10-24

Steven Matt Counts

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

On the evening of 7/9, I was made aware of a new start outside of Helena MT. The Horse Gulch Fire.

That night I had a good phone brief from Nick Pieper the ATGS of AA-115. We talked about the fire, resource needs and the plan for the following day. Nick needed to troubleshoot some potential radio issues on his plane, so I agreed to be first up at 0900. For resources needed, we thought the 4 Single Engine Scoopers out of COE, a couple Type 1 helicopters and a couple LAT's should be sufficient. If needed, we talked about a VLAT or ordering Multi Engine Scoopers. Nick said he ordered a Secondary Air to Air frequency from Helena Dispatch to use with the scoopers and rotors.

On the morning of the 10th, I called Helena Dispatch and gave them my contact info and generally touched base and talked about being on-scene at 0900. I got my first kneeboard from dispatch around 0820 and I immediately noticed a wrong A/G secondary frequency and the lack of an AA secondary frequency. I called Helena Dispatch to let them know about the wrong AG. I also inquired about the AA secondary, and they told me it was in the works.

We took off from MSO and were on-scene around 0915. Enroute, I programmed radios and had very spotty contact with Helena Dispatch on their repeaters and direct. They could hear me clearly, but when they transmitted, it was all just loud static. I tried the frequencies on multiple radios in my stack and got the same results. I could hear Operations fine on AG1 and eventually I could hear Nick doing radio tests from his plane on the direct frequency. We deduced that it was a problem with Helena Dispatch consoles and not the planes. Dispatch eventually diagnosed the issue as a computer mouse somehow interfering with the aircraft desk radio console.

Arriving on-scene, I was very surprised to find the only engaged ground resource was just a type 6 engine. The engine was still operating on the previous day's frequencies and eventually I got them rolled onto current freq's. The Holiday Gulch road was holding and the retardant line from the previous night was holding. I was very confident that if they had some hand crews engaged and timely aviation support that we could get it wrapped with retardant before the heat of the day.

I ordered the 4 Single Engine Scoopers the Helicopters and 2 LATS. I was just amazed about the lack of ground resources. From the time I got there, to the time I transitioned with AA-115 the only engaged ground resource was E-641. I had Type 1 Helicopter 43T working buckets, and I had expected that since I was brought on early, that they might have had Tanker 168 sitting at HLN on and ready early too. It took forever to get 168 on-scene. Apparently, they were waiting on a kneeboard to load him. When he checked in at 12mi he called me on a transition frequency and not the assigned frequency. He said that the TFR frequency wasn't on his kneeboard. After I cleared him in, I asked him to double check, and he said it wasn't. I called Dispatch to report that the Tanker was missing the assigned TFR frequency on his kneeboard. He put his first drop in, and I put him on a load and return until further notice. He was significantly delayed on his return, and I inquired

about his status and was told that he had been overloaded and had to be downloaded. It was frustrating. I also kept asking about the secondary air to air frequency and told them how critical it was that we had it before the scoopers arrived. I was told they were working on it. Tanker 168 eventually showed up and put his second drop in on the ridge above Cave Gulch.

We had a drone incursion on the North side of the fire. I reported it to the aircraft, operations, and dispatch. I followed it for a while but lost it in the smoke on the North side. I never saw it in the clear air on the South side where we were working aircraft. I deemed it safe to continue and proceeded with the air operations.

Everything was holding and just needed some crews to get engaged to take advantage of our drops. Eventually Helicopter 5GE showed up and I put them in a Daisy Chain with 43T working an open ridge that I wanted to hold and eventually paint. I knew the scoopers were about 45 minutes out and needed that rotor victor badly. I asked dispatch if they had a tertiary frequency we could use, and they said they had to ask the FAO. Eventually they got back to me with it, and I gave it to the rotors.

When the scoopers checked in, I gave them a clearance and said they had multiple options to scoop from within 5 miles of the fire and to pick the one they liked best. After the scoopers took a lap around the fire I heard B-61 about 50 miles out and I went ahead and gave him a clearance and the freq's in case I got busy later. I got the lead scooper FB-206, oriented to the helicopter circuit and check and told them I was going to sequence them in with the rotors and got everyone on the same page and rotor frequency. The fire activity had picked up a little and I let operations know and then dispatch asked for update on fire behavior, so I gave them one. The lead scooper FB-206 said they found a site they liked and were going in for the scoop. I was coming around the fire and was looking at the rotors and the fire and when I got my head around to the scoopers I saw FB-205 in the water on the plane for the scoop. She was looking good, and going straight, and things were looking fine. Suddenly, she veered left and impacted the cliffy bank. I told the other scoopers they could consider their loads, jettison, and do whatever they needed to do. I declared an Emergency to dispatch and told them to activate a 911 emergency response to the shoreline of Castle Road going down to Spokane Bar in section 35. I could see boats in the water immediately making their way to the plane. I estimated the boats would be on her in a minute or less. I told B-61 to step on it, as I had a plane in the water with a potential bad outcome. I let operations know and sent the remaining scoopers back to sit down in HLN. I transitioned ATGS to AA-115 and went to Helena Tanker Base.

My pilot, Pete Mahony [REDACTED] was watching the scoopers scoop and said he saw a noticeable difference in the wake of FB-205 vs the other scoopers. I had my eyes on the fire and did not see the other scoopers in the water. I only watched FB-205.

Kimberli Beaver

7.10.2024

Horse Gulch

I was notified of a UAS on the Horse Gulch Incident by Whitney Casebolt just before noon. I was over at the aircraft desks gathering information from Whitney and Kelly Elder - A/C Dispatcher. A radio call came over the radio - Aircraft mishap of FB impact in the water. - In pieces below Ward Ranch and I was immediately grabbing Mishap Guide when first part of transmission came in & handed one to Brandon Clifford - IA/ACDP, I told Everyone in the room to start documenting - (Kevin Booher - IA dispatcher was also in the room (on IA floor). I had dialed Björn Troberg right away & said FB crashed & had him on phone when second part of transmission came in of it being in pieces in water. I then texted ~~to~~ David Nunn, Deputy Forest ~~Fire~~ Management Officer to notify. At same time, LC911 page came across phone/radio of accident. Could hear on County radio that Tri Lakes was en-route DNRC Aviation folks came over - Wade Hendricks, Mason Quick as well as John Huston. I was also calling LC911 ~~again~~ ^{now} to verify who was all responding. Asked if emergency resources were responding - asked for Life Flight per AA115, told Tri Lakes would be contact on TAN. While on phone one of my dispatchers gave me paper with TAN freq on it to make sure LC911 had it for

Tri. Lakes. - I believe it was Kevin. Shortly after we were told to cancel Life Flight. I recieved numerous calls from Zach Slattery, 911 Supervisor to coordinate information - I had also told him I tried to reach Sheriff Dutton. When I had first contacted Bjorn, I asked him if he wanted me to make any other notifications from the Mishap Guide - such as FAA or any others And I told him I notified David Nunn, he said he would make Mishap Notifications. Bjorn, Mitch Dang and me were tied in at this most of the day once they arrived getting notifications from LC911, Sheriff Dutton and also providing information when asked. We were notified by Sheriff Dutton that this was no longer a rescue and was now a recovery. Later in the day I was asked for Pilot identification for next of kin notification, I handed this call on to Bjorn Troberg - Forest FAO, as I didnt know who the pilots/occupants were on the aircraft.

Kumberli A. Beaver
Center Manager
Helena Interagency
Disaster Center

I was back @ the I.A. desk
after just informing Kim of the drone
incursion on the North Side of the fire.
And was waiting for Kelly at the
aircraft desk to get more information
from Air Attack who reported the incursion.
I needed the information to pass onto Law Enforcement
so they could go and look for the drone pilot.
@ 1210 the Air Attack platform declared
an Emergency and informed us that
an aircraft had impacted the bank and
was in the water on Hauser Lake.

Kevin Booker

7/10/2024
USFS I.A. DP(T)

7/10/24

Horse Gulch

Kelly Elder and myself were working the aircraft desk together for the Horse Gulch. AA ~~was~~ was over the fire and saw a UAS on the North End of the fire. He advised us of the UAS and wanted us to contact FS 60 to report and catch person. He advised us that he was moving all air traffic to South End of fire. I called FS 60 and he was busy with the investigation, advised me to call the FAA investigator in HIN, get location from the AirAttack and call Lewis + Clark CO. 911 center about it. Kelly called the Horse Gulch AA ~~and~~ and he no longer saw the UAS because of the smoke. I notified the CM Kim Beaver of the situation and we decided to call Mike Kaiser. Calling Kaiser, I asked who was in the area that I could contact from the ground to check out the UAS. Div A: Stanaway. After hanging up, picked up traffic w/ the 4 Fire Boss from Missoula. Created timers and they were instantly fired in w/ A.A. on the A/A w/ TFR. Meanwhile, Kevin Booher was advised that I would be contacting Div. A to get UAS ~~was~~ spotted to resume air operations. I texted Stanaway (who was Div A at the time, because he didn't answer radio traffic.) While doing this, a radio call came over that we had an aircraft mishap. Kelly Elder took over radio commo, I opened the IWI and started writing for him, Kim was notified and Brandon Clifford grabbed the mishap guide from the back wall. We initiated medical with Lewis + Clark co. (Kim) then est location of downed aircraft. Kim advised David Nunn, Bjorn Troberg and was told Tri-lakes was responding. FB was in pieces below the dam, AA cleared other FB to head to Airport. Meanwhile, DNRC Hendricks/Quick/Huston came over, and asked me if there was anything they could help with. Had Hendricks take Flight Following of H-95M, who was working a training mission at Campbell. I maintained other timers and the AirAttacks started to break/transition. We were advised to call life flight, I called Lewis + Clark CO, ~~as~~ was ~~the~~ to update and just advised them to call Life Flight. Lewis + Clark CO. launched life flight. AA then requested to →

Confirm that they were on Tan. Shortly after, AA advised to cancel Life Flight.
(Think Kim cancelled) Advised Recovery Mission and to add Tan to to KA.
*Some point before life flight, Dana + Troberg arrived to aid. Troberg was
working with Kim + Tri Lakes ~~to~~ over a cell phone.

MIKE REDMAN
CROMAN CORP
N1043T

TANKED SL1

ON FIRE, SEAT HAD GOOTD BRIEF FROM A/A
WANTED TO DIP N/ DAM, HAD WE TO
BOATERS, HELI WAS IN DEP. HOTTED
SOMETHING OFF. AA - "I DIDN'T SOB YOUR
P# 2 COME UP." (3) I'M GOING TO CIRCLE
AROUND TO HAVE A LOOK IT.
THERE'S A PLANE IN THE H2O
HELI OFFERED ASSISTANCE, CIRCLED
IN THERE AREA, WAITED.
DIP TOO FAR AWAY TO SOB INCIDENT.

PH#

AVAIL AS ABLE

From: Pieper, Nicholas - FS, MT [REDACTED] >
Sent: Wednesday, July 10, 2024 5:37:02 PM
To: Harris, John - FS, MT [REDACTED]; Baker, Brian - FS, MT [REDACTED]
Schlapfer, Hon - FS, MT [REDACTED]
Subject: Statement regarding FB-205 for AA-115 (Nick Pieper)

Statement regarding FB-205 for AA-115 (Nick Pieper) July 10th, 2024 @1736

AA-115 was requested for relief ATGS over the Horse Gulch Fire at 1230 MST. We walked out to the plane and did our preflight walk around as normal and loaded into the cockpit. As we were spooling up Brian Baker called me on my cell phone to inform me that FB-205 had went down. We proceeded with the rest of our checklists and launched for the fire. Once airborne I initiated flight follow and called AA-104 and he cleared me into the TFR and briefed me on the fire and the IWI. AA-104 showed me where the IWI happened, and I made a mental note of where it was because it was adjacent to one of my favorite fishing spots. AA-104 turned the primary A/G frequency over for the emergency traffic associated with the IWI and moved A/G Primary traffic over to the fire's secondary frequency. Once I assumed ATGS of the fire and IWI, I was able to coordinate with dispatch and talk to the first responders on scene the crash site on VMED 28 or "TAN" and I turned the primary A/G frequency back over to the fire because we were getting busy with line clearances for tanker drops. I ordered a life flight helicopter at some point during this time to get it moving our direction. Once the Mercy flight showed up, I asked Tri Lakes 61 (the ground contact on the IWI) if they needed the Mercy Flight and they informed me that there was a confirmed fatality and they were transitioning command of the scene to SAR and LCCSO. I was given a new ground contact by the name of Robinson who was part of the SAR team. IAA 4EB was on scene doing a mapping mission I asked them to try and capture some images of the crash site. This all took place in the first 30 to 45 minutes of the mission. The rest of the mission was focused on the firefight.

Nick Pieper
Air Tactical Group Supervisor
Forest Service
Region 1

p:
c:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
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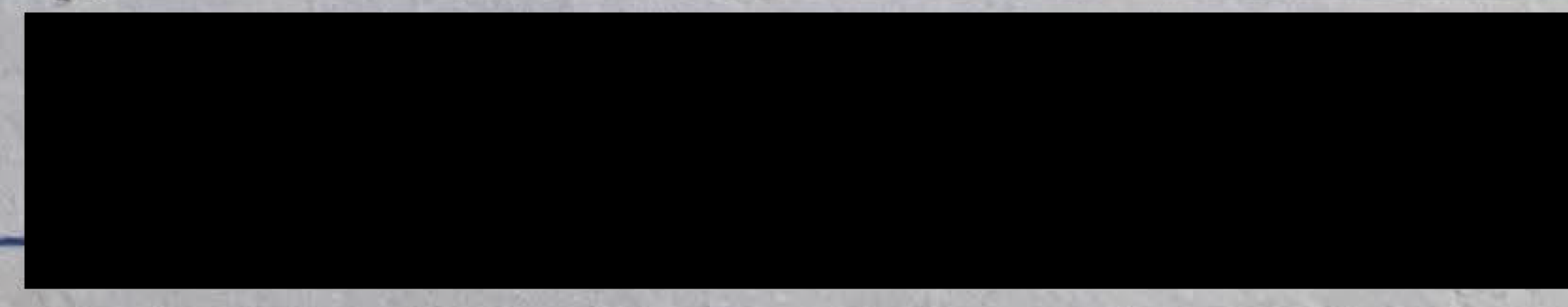
7/10/24

Statement from B-61 Air Tactical Supervisor

We were dispatched to the Horse Gulch Fire out of Wenatchee Wa. We made contact w/ Horse Gulch Air Attack on roughly 1145. We could hear AA brief the flight of Fire Bosses FB206 as we entered the fire Air Space. We heard the AA call out that there was a FB incident. We took over Aired Supervision of the Horse Gulch fire so A.A. could deal with the FB incident.

My Notes show the FB incident happened at 1211. ~~B~~ We B-61 continued the air show until the Air Attack was able hand over the IWT to local responders. and return to the fire.

Dirk Stevens


Air Tactical Supervisor
B-61

We were dispatched from Wenatchee to the Horse Gully Fire. We started listening to fire traffic about 50 miles out. The air attack was giving the fire bosses scoop location. Air attack called us early because he was getting relief from another air attack soon.

We could hear the flight of fire bosses going in for their first scoop during the in brief for us. Air Attack had us standby at 1210. He then came back and told us to hurry because a scooper just crashed in the lake.

We got on scene and took control of the fire while the AA took control of the I&I.

Ralph Sweeney
Lead 6.1

