

first day on fires...

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To

I was fortunate enough to get to fly with [REDACTED] for a little bit on her first day of fighting fires. [REDACTED] and I were dispatched from Yakima to a fire approximately 8 miles east of Lake Chelan. We worked the fire for a full fuel cycle. Toward the end of the fuel cycle [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] showed up and joined our flight. [REDACTED] was number three, [REDACTED] was number 4 and I was leading. Our scoop site was the Colombia river abeam Lake Chelan. We were scooping north to south, and our touchdown spot on the river was approximately 1 mile south of the Lake Chelan airport. The canyon ridgeline on the east side of the river is 3200 ft MSL and the crossing point is about 2 miles from the touchdown point. The river is at approximately 1000 feet msl. It made for a somewhat challenging approach to the water. A "slam dunk" approach if you will. It was completely safe and do able, albeit a bit intimidating the first couple of times through the circuit. I knew the approach would be challenging for [REDACTED]. Heck, it was challenging for us until we completed a couple of circuits and settled into the groove. I briefed the flight about the scoop and exit and we went to work. After [REDACTED] called off the scoop, she remarked that she didn't get much water. There was a little sound of disappointment in her voice. [REDACTED] jumped in and said, "Don't worry about it you'll get more next time". We proceeded down the canyon in the climb back to 3200 ft to clear the terrain and headed to the fire. After I dropped my load, I turned so that I could see [REDACTED] drop. She nailed it! I was proud of her. We only flew one circuit with them as we were bingo fuel. We left the fire and [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] kept working. Later that evening I called [REDACTED] to debrief the circuit with him and to see how [REDACTED] did. He said she struggled with the first couple of scoops but settled right into the groove and did very well. She was scooping well and was hitting her targets. I spoke with [REDACTED] and she was so excited. She was really pumped up. The learning curve on that scoop was steep and she adapted to it like a pro. That impressed me. I congratulated her on a job well done and we ended the call. I am so glad I got to speak with her that evening and hear the excitement in her voice. I left the call feeling like "Yup, we got us a new Fire Boss pilot!!" That was the last time we spoke.

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report on J first two fire missions

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Following is my report on first two fire missions on 4 July 2024:

1. We were dispatched to Incident #1429 at approximately 1500; the fire was only 2 miles from the Omak airport. Earlier in the day, we had briefed the Omak tanker base SOPs as well as the DNR's comm SOPs for the Omak tanker base and our surrounding region. I handled all communications with air attack, the DNR helo on scene (N326WN), and the ground. As we had agreed, this was so could focus on her flying and target acquisition, etc., and not be overloaded with radio duties on her first fire, which normally would be #2's responsibility. Her only comms were with me on our company frequency.

We only made one drop on the fire and did not scoop, as another load was not requested. did an excellent job and hit her target with no difficulties.

We landed at Omak and debriefed after refueling. This was a tactically simple, straightforward fire and she did a good job. There were really no major items to discuss, as it all went smoothly.

2. Less than an hour after the 1429 fire, we were dispatched 43 miles south to the Road 11 Fire near Lake Chelan. Again, I handled all comms other than talking on our company frequency. We arrived at the fire with a load onboard and after dropping, we joined two Dauntless Firebosses already on scene: (#1) and his #2. We were #3 (me) and #4 in the flight of four. We had agreed while enroute to the fire that she would be #4 in the flight and, while this is difficult from the perspective of wingtip vortices and wakes from the airplanes in front of you, there is much less pressure on a new pilot to be in back of the flight where they are not feeling the pressure of being watched or of having to worry about giving the airplane behind them enough space. She agreed with my reasoning.

This fire was a level of difficulty greater than our first fire of the day at Omak. The fire was on slightly rolling ground on the plateau east of the Columbia River, but the scoop was an approximately 1500-foot descent from the fire area, but not treacherously so. We basically flew a long left base off the drop which took us down into the river canyon for our scoop. We had ample water length for our scoop, even

for someone only on their second fire. [REDACTED] communicated that she was not getting a huge load but otherwise was not having any difficulties. That is normal, in my opinion, and I told her not to worry about how much she was carrying and that it would become easier as she burned off fuel and became more comfortable with the scoop site. The biggest challenge was the long, hot climb out of the canyon behind three other aircraft. She struggled to keep up with the formation but that is normal too, as the last airplane in the flight has to work hardest to stay caught up, and that skill simply comes with more experience. Otherwise she did a great job and hit her target on every drop, which numbered ten in total. I was able to witness most of her drops as I turned left off my drop towards the river canyon. It was a medium paced FTA with four Firebosses, two 415s, one helo, and an air attack platform, so she was getting quite a workout compared to our first fire of the day, but again, she did really well.

After we RTB'd to Omak and debriefed, she said her first two or three scoops had been her most difficult but became easier as she burned off fuel and became more familiar with our scoop site and the surrounding terrain. That is perfectly normal, as well. I really had no serious issues about which to critique her flying and simply told her that she would continue to improve, literally, with every scoop in the Fireboss. I reminded her that being in the back of the flight and keeping up would get easier as she gained time in the airplanes and became more comfortable with being more aggressive. However, I also reminded her to never exceed her personal limitations regarding terrain, scoop sites, hopper loads, etc., until her continuing experience warranted it. She was in complete agreement.

[REDACTED]

Statement of events 7-10-24

USFS R-1 ATGS AA-104 N721TB

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 [REDACTED] the ATGS of AA-115. We talked about the fire, resource needs and the plan for the following day. [REDACTED] 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. [REDACTED] 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, [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.

On June 24, 2024, I did a local area familiarization and proficiency flight with [REDACTED] in the Coeur d'Alene area of Idaho. This involved water-work and a mock bomb run at the jettison area above Hayden Lake.

We departed COE and proceeded north to the Clark Fork River inflow area of Lake Pend Oreille to start continuous scoops and drops in a SW and S direction from there along the lake.

The SW wind created 1+ foot waves as we started the landing, scooping, getting airborne, dropping routine about ½ mile off the south shore and 3 miles SW the river.

Upon reaching the "point" we bent our track towards the south and did one more on this heading before doing a right 360 so we could swap positions and I could watch her scoop. The conditions near and after the bend were calmer with obvious ripples to almost glass, but not quite. She did 3 more that I witnessed from behind on Pend Oreille and they all looked good.

There was minimal boat traffic.

We then proceeded to Hayden Lake to show her that lake, the boats/jet-skis and have her drop at the jettison area on top of the hill.

At Hayden we surveyed it from the upwind side as I explained our SW water run, the climb out to crosswind and our left circuit pattern climb to the target area NE of the lake.

On our left downwind I identified the obvious boat traffic and the low-level power line/pole on our short final and for her to stay above the pole, or above the trees, until beyond them.

Crossing the P-line I pointed out the boat traffic wakes at and beyond our normal touchdown area and that we would hold off touching down until passed them.

She followed me to the main body of the lake past Chicken Point so as to just have wind driven waves at touchdown. The waves were in the 8-10 inch range.

We climbed to the top of the hill and orbited around the jettison area (bald spot on the hill with thinned trees and the run low grass colored vegetation) at 5000 feet while I found a target tree. I verbalized during my downwind, base, final and at my drop and banked hard enough to be downwind and see her drop. Hers was a good drop that involved a pushover of about 500 feet.

We returned to Coeur d'Alene after doing this drop.

Kind Regards,

[REDACTED]
Dauntless Air