USA aerial wildfire suppression related fatal accidents 1991-2008

Eleven fatal USFS-contracted LAT airtanker accidents (11 aircraft destroyed, 26 fatalities):

Oct. 16, 1991 — Aero Union Corp. of Chico, CA, P-3A N924AU, SBA-BOI near Florence, MT, NTSB SEA92T#A01. Two killed; John Sieglinger, Robert Shaw. CFIT/IMC (snow).

Oct. 1, 1992 — Butler Aircraft of Redmond, OR, DC-7B N848D, near Kyburz, CA, NTSB LAX93T#A01. Two killed; Chuck Sheridan, Leonard Martin. CFIT while dealing with onboard mechanical malfunction over fire.

July 29, 1994 — Neptune Aviation of Missoula, MT, P2V-7 N918AP, near Missoula, MT, NTSB SEA94T#A02. Two killed; Bob Kelly, Randy Lynn. CFIT/drop run.

Aug. 13, 1994 — Hemet Valley Flying Service of Hemet, CA, C-130A N135FF, near Pearblossom, Calif., NTSB LAX94FA323. Three killed; Bob Buc, Joe Johnson, Shawn Zaremba. Structural failure, followed by fuel tank explosion. Contributing factor, maintenance procedures.

June 21, 1995 — AUC C54G N4989P collided with USFS Beechcraft Model 58P lead plane in traffic pattern at Ramona, CA (before control tower was built), NTSB LAX95GA219A. Two killed in airtanker; Gary Cockrell, Lisa Nitch.

June 27, 1998 — Neptune Aviation, P2V-7 N14835, near Reserve, NM, NTSB FTW98GA286. Two killed; Jerry David Donahue, Charles Key. CFIT/drop run.

June 17, 2002 — Hawkins & Powers of Greybull, WY, C-130A N130HP near Walker, CA, NTSB LAX02GA201. Three killed; Steve Wass, Craig LaBare, Mike Davis. In-flight structural failure.

July 18, 2002 — H&P PB4Y-2 N7620C near Estes Park, CO, NTSB DENo2GA074. Two killed; Rick Schwartz, Milt Stollak. In-flight structural failure.

NOTE: After the two 2002 in-flight structural failures the USFS "exclusive use" LAT airtanker fleet was reduced from approximately 44 to approximately 22.

Oct. 3, 2003 — Minden Air P2V N299MA near East Highlands, CA, NTSB LAX04FA002. Two killed; Carl Dobeare, John Attardo. CFIT/ inadvertent IMC. Note: NTSB charged this accident to National Park Service.

April 20, 2005 — AUC P-3B N926AU crashed near Chico, CA, NTSB SEA05MA085. Three killed; Tom Lynch, Paul Cockrell, Brian Bruns. CFIT/pre-season training drop run. Note: NTSB charged this accident to Aero Union.

Sept. 1, 2008 — Neptune Aviation P2V-7 N4235T, just north of Reno-Stead airport, NV, NTSB SEA08GA194. Three killed; Gene Wahlstrom, Gregory "Gonzo" Gonsioroski, Zachary Vander-Griend. NTSB Probable Cause: The failure of the flight crew to maintain airspeed above in-flight minimum control speed (Vmca) after losing power in the left jet engine during initial climb after takeoff. Contributing to the accident was the crew's inadequate cockpit resource management procedures, the failure of the captain to assume command of the airplane during the emergency, the flight crew's failure to carry out the jet engine fire emergency procedure, and the failure of the crew to jettison the retardant load. Note: NTSB charged this accident to Cal Fire.

NOTE: U.S. airtanker fatality on non-USFS contract: 9/6/00 --- T&G of Coolidge, AZ, C130A N116TG, northwest of Aubenas (Ardreche), France, NTSB IADooWA083. Two killed; Joe Williams and Paul Trinque. Injured were Ted Meyer (mechanic), and Ted Hobart (Captain). BEA investigated; NTSB Preliminary report only. CFIT/drop run.

NOTE: Cal Fire (CDF) airtanker fatalities during same period:

6/19/92. N427DF. S2A T92, Roger Stark, near Columbia, CA, **LAX92TL#10 preliminary only (Public Use).** After retardant drop struck tree, severing about 11 ½' off left wing. CFIT/drop run.

10/5/98. N416DF. S2A T96, Gary Nagel, near Banning Pass, CA. **LAX99GA005.** Left wing tip impacted ground during tight turn to final on high wind, quartering tailwind drop. CFIT, possible LOCIF/drop run.

8/27/01. N450DF. S2A T87, Larry Groff **LAX01GA291B** and N442DF S2A T92, Lars Stratte **LAX01GA291A**. Midair collision in orbit over Bus incident near Hopland, CA. NTSB probable cause(s): the failure of both pilots to maintain an adequate visual lookout. The failure of the pilot in Tanker 87 to comply with suggested procedures regarding positive radio contact and orbit entry was a factor.

NOTE: Fixed-wing Air Attack/Leadplane fatalities during same period:

6/21/91 USFS Beechcraft Baron 95-B55 leadplane N36743/N156Z, Henry Kim, **ATL91FA116** near Irmo, SC. LOCIF.

6/21/95 USFS Beechcraft Baron 58P N156Z, Lead 56, Michael Smith, LAX95GA219B mid-air with T19 in the traffic pattern at Ramona, CA. NTSB probable cause(s): INADEQUATE VISUAL LOOKOUT BY THE BEECH 58P PILOT, AND THE OPERATOR'S INADEQUATE PROCEDURES CONCERNING 360° OVERHEAD APPROACHES.

6/10/97. BLM OV-10A . N94LM leadplane near Hollister, CA, IADooWAo83. Impacted ground while performing low-level aerobatics. LOCIF.

9/6/06. CDF OV-10A. N419DF. Two fatalities; pilot Sandy Willett and ATGS Robert Paul Stone. Air Attack 410 impacted trees and rising terrain while maneuvering at low level during recon flight about 25 miles northeast of Porterville, CA. CFIT, possible LOCIF.

NOTE: There were at least 3 fatal SEAT accidents during same period (2 on a fire, 1 training):

March 16, 2004. New Frontier WSK PZL Mielec M-18A, N6259N, Jim Towell, near Safford, AZ while requalifying at BLM training. NTSB **LAX04TA161**. LOCIF during practice drop, possible engine/prop malfunction.

June 17, 2004. New Frontier Aviation of Fort Benton, MT WSK PZL Mielec M-18A, N8214J on a fire near St. George, UT. NTSB **LAX04GA243**. LOCIF after retardant drop following 2 dry runs.

April 15, 2008. Aerial Applicators of Sterling, CO, Air Tractor AT-602, N602AA, Gert H. "Jerry" Marais on a fire near Fort Carson, CO. **DENo8GA076.** Pilot was reportedly communicating with USFS lead pilot, but was not currently carded, was not on contract. and it is uncertain who dispatched him. LOCIF after retardant drop.

NOTE: Two off-contract airtanker ferry fatalities during the same period. Although these aircraft were not on a fire or training mission, it may be that corporate culture/mission mentality contributed to the decision making/risk management of the crews:

o2/08/92. H&P P2V-7 N70600 near Dixon, WY while being ferried from Tucson AZ to Grey Bull WY for conversion into airtanker. NTSB **SEA92LA044**. Two killed; Mark Powers and Charlie Rennisen (both carded IA). VFR into IMC (not IFR instrumented, CFIT).

5/22/04. New Frontier WSK PZL Mielec PZL M-18B, N117BS, John Brandner (ATP rated). NTSB **SEA04LA095**. VFR into IMC/icing near Borah Peak (11,000'), ID, enroute Dillon, MT to contract base BOI, ID.

Total US LAT/CDF S2/SEAT, Leadplane fatal accidents 1991 thru 2008: 25 aircraft, 43 fatalities. Two mid-airs, 3 structural failure (none since enhanced inspections and monitoring), 4 IMC, 7 CFIT/LOCIF on drop run, 6 other CFIT/LOCIF. No CVR or FDR installed with exception of To9; cause of accident, especially CFIT/LOCIF, is often just a "best guess" (sometimes more like a WAG). No mid-airs with TCAS or TCAD installed. No radar altimeters or TWAS installed. No Angle-of-attack warning/indicator installed (except rudimentary, often unreliable, AoA system on CDF S2A's; current S2T airtankers

have a good AoA system). No (known) company-conducted or mandated upset training or AAMP courses other than basic unusual attitude/stall recovery practice.

Accidents in government owned/government operated (GOGO), government owned/contractor operated (GOCO), and occasionally privately owned aircraft operated as "Public Aircraft", were exempt from NTSB investigation prior to "The Pressler Act" (http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/trans/hpw104-37.000/hpw104-37_1.HTM), which was enacted around 1996. Before that, government agency aircraft accident reports were often difficult or impossible to access.

wwd 10/08 (updated 1/13)