



## Chairman's Conference Report

### Introduction

Sacramento saw Tangent Link chalking up another first in its long running series of International Aerial Firefighting Conferences, coupling the traditional presentations with a combined fly in of firefighting aircraft and aerial demonstrations.

### Background

Returning to California after a three year break, the Conference attracted 165 delegates from 13 countries with 22 exhibitors giving the Ballroom at the Lion's Gate Garden Pavilion a great buzz. The desire of the Aerial Firefighting community for this flying construct, held at the home of CALFIRE in McClellan, arose from the event last year in Washington DC. That venue had been chosen to access and influence Congressmen and senior members of the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, and paid dividends in the key speakers attending in Sacramento to report progress on issues vital to the successful aerial prosecution of Wildfires in the USA.

### Issues

Tom Harbour, the Director of Fire and Aviation Management, U.S. Forest Service, articulated progress with his National Cohesive Fire Management System and the Wildland Fire Council. The latter is a step towards the voice of Aerial Firefighting Operators being heard, although a single focus will need to be identified if they are to be adequately represented. Fiscal issues were evident at even the lowly level of travel costs with Art Hinaman, the Director's deputy with responsibility for Aviation unable to attend; he is a key conduit for us in the Forest Service.

At the higher financial level the Office of Management and Budget clearly remains to be persuaded that investment in Aerial Firefighting is a 'spend to save' and the private Large Air Tanker community in particular is suffering from lack of contracts. Their absence from this gathering was keenly felt and it was a sad reality that the only sponsor contributing to this flagship event was the 'Russian Helicopters' company.

A particularly valuable contribution was made by former Congressman Jim Coyne, now President of the National Air Transportation Association (NATA). Aerial Firefighters are much a part of the General Aviation (GA) community, which makes a key contribution to the economic wellbeing of the country. The NATA is a powerful advocate for GA, challenging Government inefficiency, burdensome regulations and high taxes where these impact adversely upon aviation. He advised the formation of the strongest caucus of our community to lobby on behalf of the industry; there is nothing like the prospect of alienating a significant number of voters to focus the attention of Congressmen and Senators on the issues. It is not yet apparent, however, where the energy to achieve this will come from.

### Technology

Our California hosts, CALFIRE, remain the best equipped and organized Aerial Firefighting Organization, but even Chief Ken Pimlott's upbeat welcome could not disguise the impact of budgetary cuts on an ageing aircraft fleet with increasing maintenance costs. Faced with our challenge to do 'more with less', he was optimistic that traditional Californian innovation would bring forward the technology which will allow us to do so. His optimism was justified with advances on show by the exhibitors and in the various presentations. These included improvements in Night Vision aids and the prospect of Enhanced Synthetic

Vision Systems coming on line; ESVS utilises the database benefits for synthetic vision and merges a high tech sensor system on the aircraft that allows the pilot to 'see' through dust and smoke and land in zero visibility.

The new ideas coming forward from Range and Bearing included the Airborne Wildfire Intelligence System (AWIS) – real time fire mapping, which was demonstrated in a combined display with the system airborne in a Piper Cheyenne down loading (illustratively) information to WithRotor's Bell 205 fitted with Isolair's 350 gallon Eliminator Fire Tank and Croman's 1000 gallon capacity S61.

Technical progress was not all home grown and Colonel Yoram Ilan-Lipovsky (Israeli Air Force Retired) revealed for the first time his proposal to attack wildfires with 'pellets' from a safe height, ensuring greater accuracy of delivery and improved effectiveness of the chemicals in use. He was reluctant to be drawn on the size of the pellets or the frangible nature of the casing, but if this proves both feasible and cost effective it will be a significant technological breakthrough.

Two new firefighting aircraft were revealed: Russian Helicopter's cost effective Kamov KA-32 is highly versatile including the ability (like the Erickson Air-Crane) to fight fires in high rise building and to effect rescues from the same and this capability will be carried forward to Tangent Link's 'High-Rise Aerial Firefighting and Rescue Conference' to be held concurrent with the Dubai Helishow in November. Randall Stephens' knowledge of U.S. bi-lateral aviation agreements and of the Russian scene, highlighted the less than reasonable licensing regime for Russian aircraft, The USMC meanwhile presented the MV-22 tilt rotor Osprey in the firefighting role and CALFIRE's Battalion Chief Ray Chaney highlighted the greater integration of military assets, maximizing the use of all available assets during major fire sieges.

## **Discussion**

The International flavour of the Conference was emphasized by presentations from Brazil and Australia: The former has progressed its Aerial Firefighting Strategy, but has a challenge to educate the poorer members of society with regard to uncontrolled burning to increase agricultural land, and AFF investment lags behind their growing economy. Meanwhile the Australian Royal Commission convened in the wake of the devastating fires of 2009 has mandated a 5% annual controlled burn to better manage the wildlands. A consequence of this is greater routine demands on the fire services with associated costs. The Commission has equally defined the safety of human life as the highest priority, including the safety of aerial firefighters. Richard Alder, General Manager of the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC) in Australia and also Chairman of the UNISDR's International Fire Aviation Working Group (IFAWG), took the opportunity to update delegates on the developing activities of this valuable forum. A discussion panel with question and answers formed of 'gray beards' of considerable experience, rounded off a vibrant day of discussion.

## **In Conclusion**

Delegates to McClellan, loyal followers of this key event in the Aerial Firefighting calendar, expressed themselves well pleased with the access to key aircraft and the invaluable Networking opportunities on offer. The opportunity to tour the static aircraft park and talk to operators proved a highlight, as did the flying displays which attracted great attention from the local television station, a subsidiary of CNN. None of this could have been possible without the highly supportive and professional contribution of McClellan Airfield, ably led by the Vice President Scott Owen and his Operations Manager Bill Appleton. Tangent Link has been invited to return in 2014 when a more extensive Airshow element would be envisaged; this proposal is under active consideration as is the venue for a European event in 2013.

Terry Loughran  
Rear Admiral CB FRAeS  
Conference Chairman

27 January 2012

## Web Addresses for the International Aerial Firefighting Conferences:

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### **At Global Fire Monitoring Center (GFMC)** (<http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/>)

All websites and reports of previous Aerial Firefighting Conferences are available at the archive of the GFMC

**Athens Conference (2008):** [http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2008/meet2008\\_09.htm](http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2008/meet2008_09.htm)

Athens speakers booklet direct: <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2008/AFFC-Athens-2008-Speaker-Booklet.pdf>

Athens report direct: <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2008/AFFC-Europe-2008-Summary.pdf>

**Anaheim Conference (2009):** [http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2009/meet2009\\_09.htm](http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2009/meet2009_09.htm)

Anaheim report direct: <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2009/AFFC-Anaheim-2009-Report.pdf>

**Rome Conference (2009):** [http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2009/meet2009\\_17.htm](http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2009/meet2009_17.htm)

Rome report direct: <http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2009/AFFC-Italy-2009-Report.pdf>

**Vancouver Conference (2010):** [http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2010/meet2010\\_06.htm](http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2010/meet2010_06.htm)

Vancouver report direct: [http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2010/meet2010\\_06.htm](http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2010/meet2010_06.htm)

**Malaga Conference (2010):** [http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2010/meet2010\\_19.htm](http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2010/meet2010_19.htm)

Malaga report direct: [http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2010/meet2010\\_19-Dateien/AFFC-Malaga-2010-Report.pdf](http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2010/meet2010_19-Dateien/AFFC-Malaga-2010-Report.pdf)

**Washington Conference (2011):** [http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2011/meet2011\\_06.htm](http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2011/meet2011_06.htm)

Washington report direct: [http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2011/meet2011\\_06-Dateien/AFFC-Washington-2011-Report.pdf](http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2011/meet2011_06-Dateien/AFFC-Washington-2011-Report.pdf)

**Melbourne Conference (2011):** [http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2011/meet2011\\_14.htm](http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2011/meet2011_14.htm)

Melbourne report direct: [http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2011/meet2011\\_14-Dateien/AFFC-Melbourne-2011-Report.pdf](http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2011/meet2011_14-Dateien/AFFC-Melbourne-2011-Report.pdf)

**Sacramento Conference (2012):** [http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2012/meet2012\\_05.htm](http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/course/meeting/2012/meet2012_05.htm)

Melbourne report direct: This report