



Chairman's Conference Report

The fourth northern hemisphere Tangent Link Aerial Firefighting Conference, held at the Sheraton Airport Hotel in the Winter Olympic city of Vancouver proved an attractive venue for North American Firefighters. Delegates attended also from Japan, Russia, Australia and four European countries, however the preponderance of 'in country' delegates reinforces the community demand for an annual conference on each side of the Atlantic. The Sheraton readily accommodated the close on 200 delegates and a record attendance of exhibitors who commented that these events are the only place where they can guarantee to meet everyone they wish to and that they prove beneficial in business terms. Dennis Brown, the Director of the Canadian Inter-Agency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) welcomed everyone to the Conference. Andrey Eritsov, Deputy Chief, Aerial Forest Fire Centre in Russia, brought a report from the UN Economic Committee for Europe, Food and Agriculture Organisation's Team of Specialists on Forest Fires, where he is deputy to the Team Leader, Johann G. Goldammer.

A key theme of this Conference, the need to constrain the burgeoning cost of aerial resources through greater cost effectiveness in their operation, was set by the Keynote Speaker Brian Simpson, the Director of the British Columbia Wildfire Management Branch in the Ministry of Forests and Range. Of BC's 95 million hectares, 90% requires fire protection; it is the most challenging terrain in Canada averaging 2,500 wildfires every summer. The record fire rate of 3500 experienced in 2009 had shifted the focus from protecting forest values to protecting communities while allowing certain fires to play their natural role. Fire seasons are getting longer and more extreme and the cost of aerial firefighting in BC is already at an unaffordable \$400M. Previous conferences have highlighted the advanced level of asset coordination and cooperation in Canada, but BC itself has honed this to a fine art, not least through their Incident Command System and seamless exchange of resources between the Provinces and with the USA.

Jeff Berry, the BC Aviation Manager, faced with the challenge of doing more with less, has shifted his focus from Acquisition and Contracting to Operations. A detailed analysis of operations and collation of the relevant data has identified Efficiency Indices and Key Point Indicators to ensure maximum cost effectiveness. Data is not only of vital importance to the analysis of operations, but to justify the expenditure on aerial assets and to support future resource proposals. Steve Newton, Superintendent of Aviation Management, provided an equally illuminating analysis of cost effective operations where existing metrics are often inadequate. Performance needs to be measured to validate Key Point Indicators and he demonstrated for example, the need to understand the impact of range to fuel point and fuel load, on water load and bombing rates.



He carried this forward to a panel session on the mobility of fuel and chemicals where stockpiling forward can reduce turn round times and enhance Initial Attack. His next steps are to encourage 'thinking outside the box', to standardize automated data collection and to educate field and management personnel, bureaucrats and politicians and the general public. Needless to say his work reinforced the message that hitting fires quickly with all available assets is a 'Spend to Save', when set against the cost of fires which are allowed to get away. However, saving the up front costs can only be achieved by the most rigorous analysis of aircraft employment and the sharing of these valuable resources.

A further theme for the conference was on the tools available to assist the Command and Control exercised by Incident Commanders with an emphasis on Situational Awareness.

Lockheed Martin's Director of Sensor Programs, Doug Pasquan, contributed with a presentation on the potential for Laser Detection and Ranging (LADAR) to contribute to the data fusion required for C3ISR, complemented by presentations on Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR), the contribution of increasingly innovative solutions for UAS with Intelligent Sensors and Data Visualisation Systems, and their integration into civil airspace.

As observed in Anaheim, data on the potential value of these systems to firefighters is essential if R & D and subsequently resource allocation is to be justified. There is scope at a future conference to address the efficacy of Integrated Command Systems in the round.

The acquisition of air assets must not be at the expense of ground equipment where, as ably articulated by Gavriil Xanthopoulos, significant ground appliances can be procured for a fraction of the aerial budget. An holistic approach is required to the combined efforts of Air and Ground Forces.

With safety high on the agenda, Training was examined in some depth with Best Practice Training and Evaluation of Pilots, and an intriguing analysis of the impact of age on pilots by Dr Jerome Yesavage, endorsing the maxim there are no old *and* bold pilots! Meanwhile Dennis Hulbert of the US Forestry Service Simulator Center presented his 11 station simulator for fixed and rotary wing operations, 'not to train pilots to fly, but to instill lessons learned in the fire environment'. Other potential applications include homeland security, National disaster response, hazard response and law enforcement. Thomas Short, a senior pilot for the LA County Fire Department has many hours on NVG and has amassed considerable experience in the employment of night vision aids, which assist firefighting at night when fire growth is slower. He drew the attention of the Conference to www.firescope.org which originated in Southern California almost 40 years ago and created the first Incident Command System. This web site is recommended viewing.

Large tankers were examined in some depth with an analysis of the Operational Loads and cycle rates for drops from aircraft, which far exceed the aircraft design parameters.

Richard Alder, on behalf of the National Aerial Firefighting Centre described the comprehensive evaluation of potential Air Tankers for Australia. Evaluation may be expensive, but is minor compared to the cost of acquisition. Walt Darran, Safety Chairman of Associated Aerial Firefighters USA gave a sage presentation on Air Tanker Safety, Effectiveness and Efficiencies which merits careful reading. Whilst cautioning against public, media and political pressure in firefighting operations, technology will increase expectations. Increased costs will demand the intelligent approaches highlighted in the earlier part of this report

The conference could not have been rounded off better than by motivating presentations from Jim Messer of the Coulson Group, with his Chief Operating Officer's perspective and Doug Brown, General Manager of the Conair Group, whose company watchword is 'safety' – not the mandated Safety Management System (SMS), but a Culture of Safety – a mantle which we should be competing for with the Airline industry and 'If you think Safety is expensive – try having an accident'! Jim exhorted us to embrace technology which is growing at an exponential rate and with resultant timely information we need better tactics, procedures and cooperation to exploit it. And finally, you can't manage what you can't (or don't) measure and data collection is vital in the increased competition for decreased funding.

The excellent presentations of which this report is a précis are available on the secure portal for those who attended the conference, however Tangent Link heralded the final development phase of their Web Portal which is intended as a virtual meeting place for the international aerial firefighting community. It will have restricted access to Government, Industry and Operators who register with Tangent Link and will include an invaluable archive of past conference presentations, along with a directory of operators and technologies and links to appropriate Associations. It will provide a forum for international aerial firefighters to discuss relevant issues and include interviews with key personalities. Maintaining such an ambitious facility will of course attract a management and maintenance cost for which the company is looking to the industry to sponsor and place advertising. Depending upon the response it may be necessary to have a small subscription cost. Individuals supporting this concept please register your interest with Tangent Link and if you can see the benefit to your company of a modest investment through sponsorship and/or advertising they would welcome a call. mkraus@tangentlink.com

Attention was drawn to the two upcoming conferences: Wildfire 2011, the 5th International Wildland Fire Conference, under the auspices of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) will be held in South Africa 9-13 May 2011 – register online at www.wildfire2011.org; and the next Tangent Link Aerial Firefighting Conference will be held in Istanbul, Turkey this November, details to be announced shortly.

Terry Loughran
Rear Admiral CB
Conference Chairman
26 March 2010

Web Addresses of the International Aerial Firefighting Conferences:

Please check the website of Tangent Link for news on the upcoming AFF Conference in Turkey, November 2010: <http://www.tangentlink.com>

At GFMC Archive (<http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/>)

Athens Conference (2008): 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

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

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

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