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Date: 19 March 2019



Category: Safety in Aerial Firefighting

Recipient – Riccardo Filippi

From the first edition in Athens, back in 2008, this conference has steadily been growing. This afternoon and tonight at our Conference Dinner I see many people here, many nationalities represented. Obviously most of you are from Europe – and among our participants, Italy is well represented.

Italy has an important role in aerial firefighting, not only because of its central geography in the Mediterranean Basin, but also because over the years Italy has put together one of the largest fleets in the world. This was due to the great relevance this issue has in this territory and because of the complex environment, pilots are required with both skills and creativity; and, I must say, there is a lot of creativity in Italy...

In any case, anticipating interoperability agreements, Italy has always been very active in helping countries affected by wildfires, by dispatching its CL-415s over the border, to states ranging from Greece to Russia, Israel, Lebanon, Sweden and several others.

Having said that, tonight we are going to present the Walt Darran Award to one of those who made the interventions of Italian firefighting aircraft in national and in out-of-area missions reliable, effective – and safe. The decision by the Award Committee to select him among the nominees was made unanimously.

I talk about Riccardo Filippi. I imagine quite a few of you here know Riccardo. I have the feeling that I even may not need to introduce him, since he attended all AFF conferences – in a dual role of pilot and aviation journalist....

Riccardo is a CL-415 captain at Babcock Mission Critical Services of Italy, operator for the Government-owned firefighting fleet, and for the last 15 years he has been extensively flying over wildfires, giving his contribution both nationwide and abroad, where different operational standards and procedures – together with higher risk of miscommunication – represent critical points in safety.

Even from his early days in professional aviation as a young sailplane instructor, Riccardo has always had a strong focus on safety, when from the back seat he used to keep telling his students how check-lists are paramount – in his unmistakable, colourful style.

Fast forward, and a few decades later, from a Canadair's left seat, he insists on his proactive approach to safety. It has to be remembered that at the start of his career he sat in a working group focused on the adoption of life vests and life rafts.

He has his personal interpretation of the aerial firefighting dilemma: How to put safety first, while keeping the mission effectiveness at the highest possible level. Riccardo lost several colleagues in flight accidents – he himself had a close encounter with a power line in 2017. But beyond the mourning, each loss has made his determination stronger, and not only to understand the causes of an accident. He has also increased his editorial efforts as he thinks safety can be improved by informing the specialized audience with articles in which he bonds his expert view with general information.

In a holistic air-to-ground approach, Riccardo often stresses the fact that safety doesn't only regard cockpits. He also focuses on the co-ordination between aircraft and ground crews, not only in order to maximize synergies – but also to avoid personnel and civilians on the ground being hit by the aerial drops.

I remember that I once said to Riccardo: An AFF pilot must be a personality acting in the full logic and coherence between the cockpit and the view outside the cockpit windows. And I do not only mean to look from wing-tip to wing-tip or down to the ground – but also beyond the horizon.

Nîmes, 19 March 2019

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