

Rapid Lesson Sharing



Event Type: Smokejumper Para-Cargo Burnover **Date:** July 21, 2013

Location: Citadel Fire – Jump Spot

1. Incident Summary

On July 21, 2013, at 1230, Jumper 49 with eight Smokejumpers was ordered to the Citadel Fire (HROD) on Craig BLM. After standard smokejumper operations, the fire activity increased and the para-cargo in the jump spot was burned up by the fire. Smokejumpers were able to salvage their jumper gear. No injuries were sustained.

2. TimeLine (All times are estimated.)

1230 - Jumpship departs Grand Junction for Citadel Fire.

1300 - Jumpship arrives Citadel Fire and begins jump operations.

1315 - All jumpers on the ground and in the jump spot.

1330 - Cargo drops complete and in the jump spot.

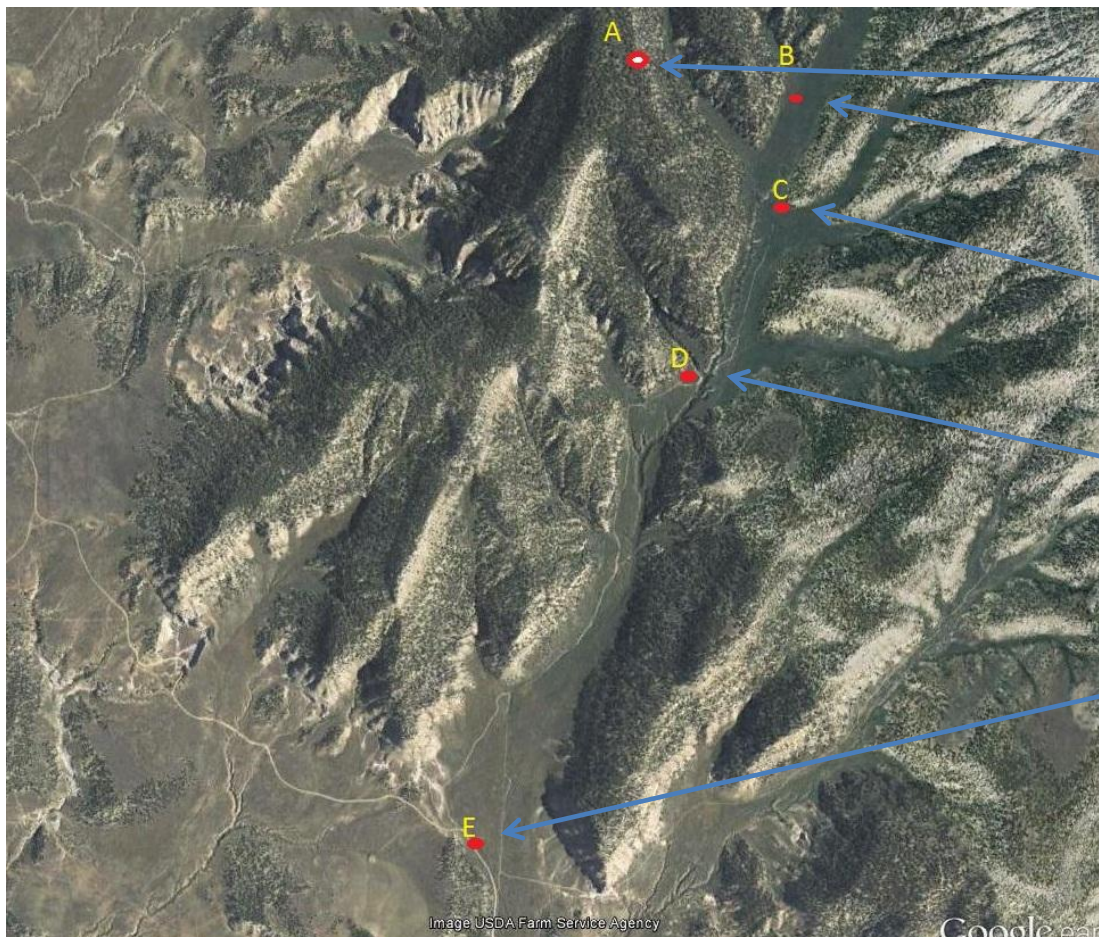
1340 - Jumpers move jump gear 200 yards down two-track.

1355 - Jumpers go back for cargo.

1400 - Jumpers move jump gear to second location.

1500 - Jumpers arrive at main dirt road.

1605 - Second resupply.



- A.
The Citadel Fire
- B.
Jump Spot/Cargo Drop
- C.
Location where jump gear was moved before going back for cargo.
- D.
Location where jump gear was moved the second time.
- E.
Main dirt road, final location of jumpers, jump gear, second resupply, Type III ICP.

3. Narrative

The fire call came at about 1230 on July 21, 2013. Flight time from Grand Junction to the fire was approximately 30 minutes. When the jump ship arrived at the fire it was about one acre, 50 percent active, with retardant around the heel. A jump spot was selected in a sage flat below the fire, approximately one third of a mile away. (See Photo 2.)

There was a two-track that ran down the east side of the sage flat and connected to a main dirt road about 1.3 miles to the south. (See Photo 3.)



Photo 2

The jumpship arrived at the fire at approximately 1300. The fire appeared to be mostly driven by fuels—not wind or topography. There were no thunderstorms, erratic wind, turbulence, or any indicators of abnormal local weather conditions. A low pass was performed and streamers dropped that showed 100

yards (approximately 3 mph wind speed) of drift up valley. For jump operations, these are very light and favorable winds. Sometime after the low pass and the start of jump ops, a spot developed about 30 yards below the main fire. (See Photo 4 on next page.)

Jumpers were on the ground at approximately 1315—with all smokejumpers landing in the sage flat approximately 50 yards from the two-track. Cargo drops immediately followed jump operations, with all cargo delivered in the jump spot by 1330. While the smokejumpers were gathering jump gear and cargo, fire activity increased. As the fire pushed down hill toward the jump spot, ash began to drop in the jump spot.



Photo 3



Photo 4

There was concern that a spot fire could develop in the jump spot before all the jump gear and cargo could be gathered.

Jump Spot Threatened

While the fire was not a threat to the jumpers, the jump spot was going to eventually be threatened. Therefore, the gear needed to be moved to a better location. The decision was made to gather just the jump gear and head down the two-track and find a better place to leave the jump gear. (The jump gear consists of a jump suit, harness, main parachute, reserve parachute, and PG bag. All the jump gear goes into a large gear bag and weighs approximately 90 lbs. Because the jump gear has the highest value and is not easily replaced, it was the priority over the cargo.)

All the smokejumpers walked down the two-track and regrouped with jump gear—about 200 yards to the south of the jump spot. The fire activity had calmed down and the spotter said the fire had hung up above the jump spot.

The decision was made to go back and gather the remainder of the cargo and bring it down to where the jump gear had been moved. The cargo consisted of four fire pack boxes, 20 gallons of water, two chainsaws, and ten cargo chutes. While gathering the cargo, the fire made a second push and was encroaching on the jump spot and pushing down canyon toward the jump gear. With the type of fire behavior being observed and the amount of equipment that needed to be moved, the decision was made to leave the cargo, take only the jump gear, and walk down the two-track to a better location.

Jumpship Resupplies Jumpers

The jumpers walked 0.4 of a mile to a ditch that crossed the two-track. By that time, fire had progressed past the point where the cargo had been left. There was no point trying to retrieve it. It was decided to continue down the two-track to the main dirt road at the base of the drainage.

While there was no threat from the fire, it was obvious the fire was going to continue burning down the drainage for the remainder of the day. The main dirt road was approximately 1.3 miles from the jump spot. The road was far enough from the fire to give the jumpers plenty of time to get resupplied with more cargo by the jumpship and to come up with a plan to fight the fire.

The jumpers arrived at the main dirt road at approximately 1500. The jumpship resupplied the jumpers with additional cargo at about 16:00. All of the original cargo was lost, along with one main parachute and a drogue.

The fire did continue to move down the drainage all day and that night. At about midnight, a burnout was performed that tied the main dirt road into the two-track and the base of a bluff on the east side of the drainage. The burnout secured the tail of the fire and established an anchor point.

The smokejumper ICT3 trainee debriefed with Northwest Colorado Fire Management about the loss of gear and the fire activity that occurred following the jump. They said with a Haines of 6 in that area it is not uncommon to have fires “pulse” and push downhill, down valley, with very little wind.

4. Lessons/Recommendations

All accounts indicate that the fire activity increased more than anticipated. Initially, the smokejumpers and spotter felt that jumping this small fire located 1/3 of a mile away from the observed fire activity was appropriate. This fire appeared to be a typical Pinon-Juniper fire that could be handled with the eight smokejumpers and some air support. The downhill pulse of the fire—with no real indicators such as increased wind speeds or T-storms—caught the smokejumpers by surprise.

1. Once the spot developed, the strategies for catching the fire had changed. There was an opportunity to reevaluate the jump spot at that time. Smokejumper management will ensure all smokejumpers are reminded to reassess and change plans in these kinds of situations.
2. The two-track to the east of the spot should have been emphasized as the place to land. Smokejumper spotters are to be reminded that under extreme fuel conditions, alternative jump spots may need to be considered.
3. There was a misunderstanding on the placement of the cargo between the jumpship and the jumpers on the ground. About 50 yards south of the jump spot, a trail was located that ran from the two-track up toward the fire. Jumpers asked to have the cargo dropped on the two-track. The pilot thought they meant the trail. Smokejumper pilots, spotters, and jumpers on the ground should ensure clear communication is taking place and adjust accordingly.
4. Not all cargo had been dropped before the fire activity had picked up. There was an opportunity to hold the cargo and drop it farther down the valley. Smokejumper management will ensure all smokejumpers are reminded to reassess and change plans in these kinds of situations.

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Great Basin Smokejumpers