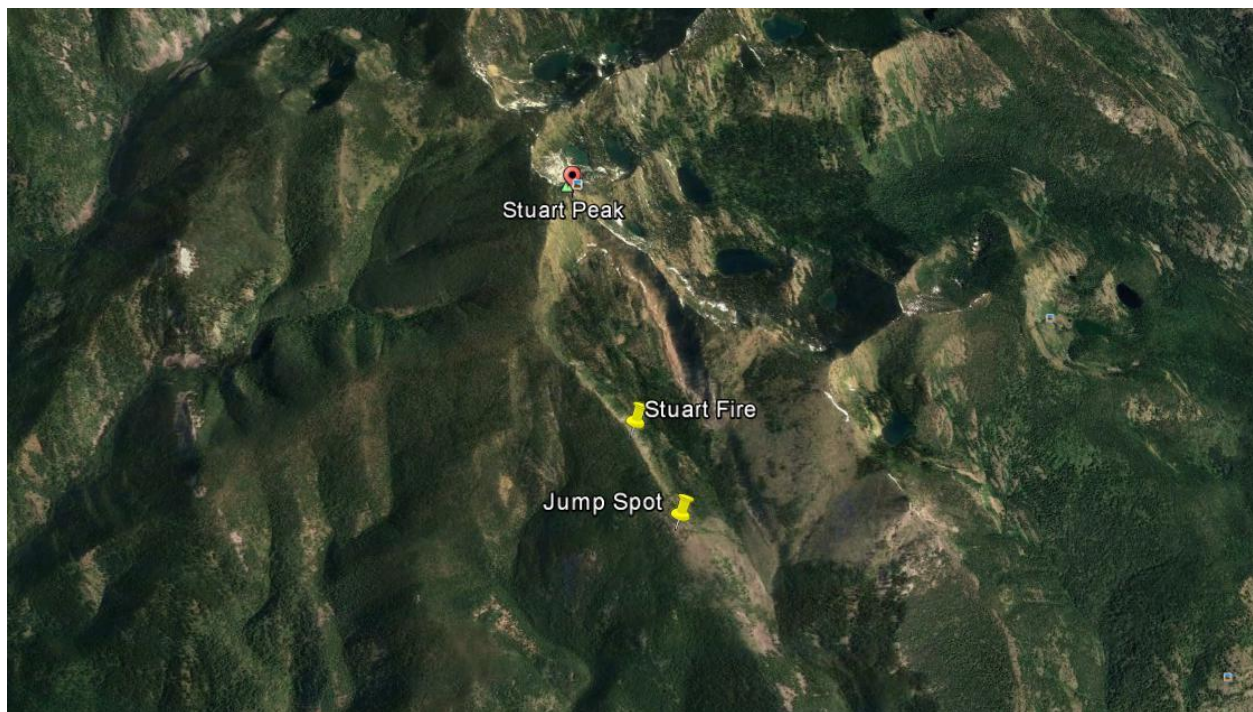


Lessons Sharing

Stuart Fire Smokejumper Injury and Evacuation

Lolo National Forest - Missoula, MT

July 31, 2017



Narrative

At 1620 on July 31, 2017 a Missoula Smokejumper was injured while jumping the Stuart Fire on the Lolo National Forest, MT.

Jump 11, a contract Twin Otter launched out of Missoula, MT at 1530 with a load of 7 smokejumpers, en route to the Stuart Fire. At 1545 the fire was sized up and the decision was made to staff the incident with all 7 smokejumpers on board. A jump spot was selected about ¼ mile down ridge and southeast of the fire. While Jump 11 was preparing to go into jump operations 7TD, the Missoula Helitak Type 3 helicopter, ordered for the Stuart fire was in the area and in radio contact with Jump 11.

The first two jumpers left the plane and encountered variable wind conditions throughout their entire flight. The first jumper landed in the spot with no issue, however he immediately reported shifting and gusting winds at tree top level. As the second jumper approached the jump spot, the tail end of his parachute caught the top of a dead tree, causing the jumper to pendulum forward and impact the ground on his right side.



Snag and jump spot looking East

“Any and all fire programs should strive to provide employees with the ability to knowledgeably and confidently respond in the case their coworkers are hurt.”

Upon assessment, the jumper complained of pain in his upper right leg and right half of his torso. The decision was made to continue with jump operations to assist with the injured jumper as well as staff the fire. The next two jumpers landed in the jump spot with no issue, however encountering similar tree top wind conditions, the decision was made to hold the rest of the jumpers in the plane and go into cargo operations.

Jumper #3, an expired EMT, and jumper #4, a current EMT took over patient care, while jumper #1 directed cargo operations away from the injured jumper. Further assessment, including exposure and palpations of the injured areas revealed nothing obvious to the examiners, however due to pain level of the patient and the mechanism of injury, it was decided that the patient would need transport off of the jump spot.

At 1630 dispatch was notified of an injured jumper requiring removal from the jump spot. 7TD, the local Type 3 helicopter in the area, was requested for patient transport. At 1648 the Missoula based helicopter touched down in the jump spot with no improvement needed, and the patient was loaded inside. The patient was brought to the Aerial Fire Depot in Missoula, MT and transported to St. Patrick's hospital via waiting ground ambulance. In all, roughly 50 minutes passed between time of injury and placement in advanced care.

After examination at St. Patrick's hospital, it was determined the jumper sustained two fractures to the pelvis and two broken ribs.

Lessons Sharing

Injury and Medical Response

Once jumpers #3 and #4 were on the ground, they initiated an assessment of the injured jumper. After clearing any immediate life threats, focus was placed on the patient's chief complaint, his upper right leg and right chest. After exposing and palpating the injured areas, no obvious injury was found, although pain level and inability to fully weight the right leg, as well as mechanism of injury dictated helicopter removal from the jump spot.

On this particular jump, all four jumpers on the ground had medical training; two expired EMT's and two current EMT's, including the injured jumper. The National Smokejumper Program prides itself on being extremely prepared for work in remote country far from immediate outside assistance and a big part of this is accomplished through medical training. The Missoula Smokejumper base in particular, fully supports both new and refresher EMT courses and trains with all its personnel, both yearly during refresher and continually throughout the season.

Any and all fire programs should strive to provide employees with the ability to knowledgeably and confidently respond in the case their coworkers are hurt. Hazards exist in all realms of firefighting and being medically prepared to respond better the chance for a positive outcome.

Cross Training Amongst Programs

Once the need for evacuation was made clear, all efforts and decisions, second to patient care, were placed on getting the jumper to definitive care as soon as possible. In the case of the Stuart Fire injury, the ground personnel were undoubtedly fortunate to have a Type 3 helicopter nearby and willing to safely land in a timbered and sloped heli-spot, almost immediately. The short time frame between injury and placement in advanced care was also aided by the fact that the two units were familiar with one another and cohesion was built quickly under stress.

Mixing of crews and personnel is a constant and expected factor in all ICS incidents, and it is sometimes taken for granted. Cross training, both at the beginning of the season and throughout the year should be a tool utilized and taken advantage of as much as possible by neighboring resources. Under stressful scenarios, such as medical response incidents, a quickly unified group is a powerful force to better the situation and improve the overall outcome.