

UTV ROLLOVER

Wildhorse Incident

R3 Santa Fe National Forest Coyote Ranger District

7-10-2018



Be Safe!

Almost every operational briefing ends with the statement, “Be safe” Or “Be safe out there”. When we say it so much does it lose its meaning? On this particular day the District FMO knew of what he was asking of the fire fighters that were asked to go direct and fully suppress a 7 acre fire. The Swiss cheese model was in full swing.

The Wildhorse fire started on July 8th 2018. Because of its remote location it was known to have characteristics of an unsafe fire due to terrain, fuels and fuel moistures or lack thereof. July 9th was used to gather intelligence as far as where the fire could move, what natural barriers could be used to stop the progression and how fire fighters could access incorporating LCES. Initial plan was to use 3 natural barriers and cut .2 mile of fire line and corral the fire. This would have limited fire fighters exposure to the elements consisting of steep terrain, approaching thunderstorms and remote locations with little or no medivac sites. During the peak of the burning period the Wildhorse fire showed characteristics of a fire that could quickly grow and have a high resistance to control. It was spotting ¼ to ½ mile ahead of the main body of the fire and the decision was made to go direct as soon as personnel could get in the morning, taking advantages of the rich night time recoveries.

Committed resources included a rappel ship with 8, 1 type VI engine with 8, IA module with 6, and an additional type VI engine with 4 personnel. This additional type VI engine was dispatched with an ATV and 6 wheeled UTV with mini-pumper capabilities, and was involved in this incident.

The Engine Captain of the type VI engine was assigned to a type 3 team and committed. The Assistant was deemed the ICT4 (t) of the Wildhorse Incident to take advantage of the training opportunity. Subsequently an engine boss qualified individual was borrowed from the other type VI engine that had 8 personnel. The senior firefighter on the engine was granted permission to act as ENGB (t) on this smaller fire. In his organization was 2 FFT2 crewmembers.

During the operational briefing it was stressed that this is one of the worst weeks to be fighting fires in the Southwest region, that you must be on your “A” game, and to take time getting prepared mentally. The saying “Slow is smooth-- and smooth is fast” was used in the final words from the Duty Officer to conclude the briefing.

The plan was to get all resources to the parking area and brief. The crewmembers towing the UTV were unable to drive the truck and trailer all the way to the parking area because of the low clearance of the trailer. They parked 2 ¼ miles away from the parking area, unloaded the ATV and UTV, and joined the rest of the resources at the parking area. Once all resources arrived in the parking area, briefing was held and the ATV and UTV were deemed to be used to scout the easiest route for the crew hiking in to the fire. Once that was accomplished, the passengers and operators of the ATV and UTV were to hike into the 3 spot fires. Crewmember 1 operates the ATV. Crewmember 2 operates the UTV.

A critical assumption was made at this point by crewmember 2. Crewmember 2 assumed that since he had been driving the UTV, he would remain in doing so, and that he was tasked to do so and should be comfortable in that action.

Soon it was noticed by ENGB(t) that he had forgotten his pack at the station. He returned to the station and retrieved his pack. Crewmember 1 navigates the ATV, and crewmember 2 and ENGB proceed in the UTV as planned and scout for access into the fire. A pink flag line was used to communicate the path in and out. After scouting and finding the best access, a parking area for the ATV and UTV was designated.

Crewmember 1 and ENGB begin hiking into the 3 spot fires. ENGB(t) arrives at parking area and radios for a shuttle in. Crewmember 2 leaves ATV/UTV parking area and retrieves ENGB(t). All other assigned resources continue hiking to the main body of the fire, also using pink flagging to mark their route.

Crewmember 2 and ENGB(t) follow the pink flag line in an effort to return to the ATV/UTV parking area. As they maneuver in, the flag line appears to proceed over a log and stump. This is a clear indicator to both that they may have missed the other pink flag line leading to the ATV/UTV parking area and are now following the flag line deployed by the crew hiking into the main body of the fire. ENGB(t) instructs Crewmember 2 to stop and he dismounts trying to orient himself to the path used earlier and search for tracks. ENGB (t) does not locate tracks. Crewmember 2 attempts to back up, digging in the back left tires into the ground, causing the center of gravity of the UTV to shift. The weight of the tank and pump aboard were perceived at the time to have exasperated this weight shift. The UTV rolls one full rotation and is stopped by a ponderosa pine tree several feet downhill. During the roll, Crewmember 2 tumbles in the cab, landing on his back on the interior roof half way through the roll. As the UTV continues to roll, crewmember is ejected out the passenger side of the UTV.

In the immediate aftermath, ENGB(t) radios ENGB and Crewmember 1 for help as well as EMT on the main body of the fire. Crewmember 2 appears in good health, EMT on site administers care. IC4(t) is notified and he notifies dispatch and duty officer. Duty officer has the entire module return back to District for further evaluation of Crewmember 2 as well as rest of the crew. Crewmember 2 appears healthy and only points out a "Charlie horsed" leg. He is evaluated for an hour and sent home to rest. No further medical attention was needed.

Root Causes (as stated by Duty Officer)

I contribute *inexperience* to be a contributing factor in this incident. The UTV was operated by a 2nd year seasonal who had not taken a UTV certification course, he was unaware of the policy to wear his seatbelt as well as his helmet. He was wearing his fire fighting hardhat. His experience driving the vehicle was limited and it was deemed by management earlier in the season that as a passenger he would need to be exposed to the capabilities of the machine before offered to take the course. In the stated judgement of Crewmember 2, after observing the topography and the fact he was initially responsible for moving the UTV, he felt he was responsible to drive the UTV to the parking area where he thought a qualified driver would be appointed. That did not happen and Crewmember 2 did not raise the issue. The lesson learned: *Speak up and tell folks you are uncomfortable driving a UTV with no certification.*

ENGB(t) forgetting his pack was a hinge pin on the incident because it eventually led him to have to go back and distracted his attention from the mission. I feel that without this distraction, he would have had the presence of mind to take the wheel away from Crewmember 2.

Forgetting the pack also created a sense of urgency to catch up time lost by having to retrieve the pack.

ENGB should have spoken up as he saw folks not wearing PPE in the UTV and assumed it was local culture and did not question it.

Crewmember 2 felt a sense of urgency, brought on by the nature of the assignment. "If I would have taken just 15 seconds to look around I would have seen the route I had just taken and the flag line we just hung up. I was in a hurry".

Multiple routes serving different purposes were flagged using the same color flagging.

Lessons Learned

Do not commit all leadership roles of an engine module to incidents or other management roles.

Do not forget your gear. Be prepared for the mission.

Do not assume that because one is driving the apparatus that they are qualified to drive the apparatus.

Slow down and look up, look down and look all around.

Question folks as to where their PPE is and do not assume that it is the local culture to disregard PPE.

Use PPE and do not disregard just because upper management is not on the incident.

Do not use same color of flagging for 2 different routes with completely different purposes.

Speak up when you are assigned tasks for which you are uncomfortable. Learn how to decline assignments.

These are all solid lessons learned and have been shared and compiled with all personnel that were on the incident and **change will happen**.