

First-hand account by Richard (Rick) Martin

(Written in 2014 after reviewing all the Cart Creek Staff Ride and Annual Refresher material)

This case study has bothered me from the first time I saw it during the Fireline Refresher in 2013. Most of the information is correct here and in the Cart Creek Fire Investigation Report. As the last member of the fire crew flown into the fire, which is not mentioned here, some aspects are left out and are inaccurate as I remember them.

Although fire shirts, pants, and shelters were not required back then, I know for a fact that some of the crew, including myself, had stopped at our homes in Manilla, Utah after leaving the rodeo and changed into all of our PPE, including pants and shirts. Some members did have just fire shirts and blue jeans, but, everyone had a fire shelter that they took with them to the fire. Many of them left the fire shelters at either H-2 or H-3 where they were dropped off.

I was dropped at H-3 with Dave Dumas as part of the helitack on the ground. I was not on the ground more than just a couple minutes to get my orientation to the fire and I started hiking to the fireline with Dave Dumas. We hadn't gotten more than 50 yards from the helispot when the fire blew up. There was no indication at my location of what was happening or going to happen, but, when it blew up, I was able to observe both Gene Campbell and Dave Nole running in our direction when they fell to the ground and the fire over ran them. At this time Dumas and I turned and started running towards Spruce Creek when the helicopter flew over us and I could hear on the radio that Dumas was carrying, to drop everything and jump into the helicopter. Instead of dropping my green fire pack we had back then, I threw it into the back seat of the helicopter and then Dumas jumped in on one side and I jumped in on the side behind Don Black, helicopter foreman. The helicopter did not, I repeat, did not set down. I specifically remember jumping onto the skid as the helicopter started to lift higher and then I slide onto the seat in the back. This is erroneous in the investigative report. The helicopter never did land, it hovered off the ground between 3 and 4 feet when we got in.

The helicopter then flew Dumas and I across Spruce Creek and it let me off. Dumas stayed with the helicopter. By this time, the fire had passed all the helispot locations, so I decided to walk back into the fire location to try and find my crew. I didn't not know for sure what happened to the two individuals I saw fall down, so I walked past H-3 towards the last location I saw them and that is when I first found Gene Campbell lying face down with the canteen in his hands in front of his head as if he was trying to pour water over himself as the fire approached. After finding Gene, I turned and walked back to the northwest and then located Dave Nole. He too was lying face down. After finding these two crew members I finally found the rest of the crew and I specifically remember telling Ray Ruble and some others as to the location of Gene and Dave and taking them back to mark their location.

The other part of the investigative report that is incorrect is that it says Gene Campbell had not taken the step test. At that time the "step test", entailed stepping up and down off a box to the

timing of a metronome. I personally tested Gene just the week before in the Manilla Ranger District conference room. Gene took and passed the step test and those results were passed on to Dutch John for the fire records. I remember this very clearly as everyone joked about how Gene could pass the step test since he smoked a cigar daily and because of his age. But, since Gene was a Forest Technician, and did a lot of walking he was in excellent shape for his age even though he smoked.

Most of this information, even though I gave it to the investigative team, was never included in the fire investigation report and the first time I knew it had not been included was when I talked with Ted Mason after seeing the fireline refresher on the Cart Creek fire. Also, looking back at my training records, I found where some of the individuals who had been indicated that they had not attended fire school and had not been red carded, had indeed passed fire school that year, just a few days prior to the Cart Creek fire. How this erroneous information was placed in the investigative report is beyond me and it should have been caught and corrected at the time.

This fire has bothered me for years, and now having read the full investigative report, seeing the pictures posted and hearing some of the on scene information, I felt I had a duty to correct some of the information that was incorrect as I knew it to be at the time. This I say to the best of my knowledge and ability as being true and correct.

I was working on the Flaming Gorge Ranger District at the time as a Range Conservationist.

Signed Richard (Rick) Martin - Retired