



SAFECOM
Tracking #:

03-459

EVENT

Date: 7/24/2003 **Local Time:** 1120 **Injuries:** No **Damage:** No

Location: Wurtz Airstrip **State:** Montana

Agency Involved: Region 1 **Other:**

MISSION

Type: Fire, Air-Attack **Other:**

Procurement: CWN **Other:**

Persons Onboard: 3 **Special Use:** Yes **Hazardous Materials:** No

Departure Point: FCA-Glacier Inter. **Destination:** Wedge Canyon Fire

AIRCRAFT

Tail Number: N83747 **Manufacturer:** Piper **Model:** PA34

NARRATIVE

We launched from FCA on 7/24/03 @0926 for a 3 hour mission as Air Tactical Group Supervisor on the Wedge Canyon Incident. Front seat with pilot was an air attack trainee (ATGS(T)) with fully qualified air attack in the back. Operation followed standard operational checks. At 1115 the left engine started running rough and we lost all engine power within two minutes. While trying to determine why we lost one engine the pilot discovered we were out of fuel. Our first intention was to try and return to FCA with one engine out. I had pinpointed several airstrips along the North Fork road previously from

locating areas for a portable retardant plant. Directly below us we located Wurtz airstrip, a closed airstrip on Forest Service ground. The pilot executed a slow left bank turn while descending to the airstrip and we landed without incident at 1125. Pilot is currently refueling the remote aircraft to bring it back to FCA for inspection. The previous evening the pilot had requested that the aircraft be fueled by first thing in the morning. The pilot had arrived early this morning and cleaned all windows, leading edge of all wings, and pre-flighted the aircraft. With the aircraft sitting on the strip the fuel tanks still registered full. The FBO did not refuel the aircraft as thought, and the desk receptionist informed him that the receipt from fueling was still in the truck and he could get it later.

CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

This event is currently under investigation as an Incident with Potential. A report is in preparation. Investigation Follow-up: At approximately 11:15 hours on July 24, 2003, a Piper Seneca III flying an Air Attack Mission over the Wedge Canyon Fire began to lose power on one engine. During the trouble-shooting of the rough-running engine, the pilot realized his fuel gauges were showing empty. The pilot was able to make a successful forced landing into a back-country airstrip without damage to the aircraft. An interview with the pilot on the morning of July 25, 2003 revealed the following information: -the pilot asked the local FBO to "top off the tanks" on the evening of July 23, 2003. -the pilot was told by an employee of the FBO that the aircraft had been fueled on July 24, 2003. -the pilot believed the tanks were full but did not visually check the fuel in the tanks. - approximately 2 hours into the mission, when the engine began to lose power, the pilot noticed for the first time that his fuel gauges showed "empty". -the forced landing was successful to the back-country airstrip with no damage or injury. RASM COMMENTS: Pilot card was suspended and operator's contract placed on suspension pending an aviation safety plan. 9/10/03 operators safety plan was accepted by R8 Aviation and Contracting. Operator contractor returned to active status. No further action required