

Staff Ride

Resources



Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program

Mann Gulch Fire – Discussion Points

Stand 1 Discussion Points

Note to Facilitator: This would be a good time to hand out copies of TDG #1 to participants, if you are going to use it. If you are doing Stand 6, then it would be best to address Jansson there, on the way back down from the ridge top. Stand 6 is performed at the Harry T. Gisborne Memorial site. You will pass it en route to Stand 2.

In the historical situation what conditions at this point were in the firefighter's control and what conditions were outside their control?

Given the circumstances at the time, were their actions reasonable? Why or why not?

Today, given current technology and standard operating principles and procedures, how might you handle the very same situation?

What are some of the factors influencing the smokejumpers decision to jump and initial attack this fire that you think contributed to a higher potential for a bad outcome to take place?

What are some of the factors that influence the decision to initial attack fire in this day and age that could contribute to a higher potential for a bad outcome?

What are some things that can be done to mitigate those factors and thus lower the potential for them to contribute to a bad outcome?

What are some of the leadership and crew cohesion challenges faced by the smokejumpers on board the C-47 headed for Mann Gulch?

What are some leadership and/or crew cohesion challenges you have faced?

Can you describe any specific bad consequences that occurred because of these leadership and/or crew cohesion challenges? Alternately, can you describe what you or your crew did to resolve these leadership and/or crew cohesion challenges?

Stand 2 Strategic Discussion Points

In the historical situation what conditions at this point were in the firefighter's control and what conditions were outside their control?

Given the circumstances at the time, were their actions reasonable? Why or why not?

Today, given current technology and standard operating principles and procedures, how might you handle the very same situation?

Situational Awareness

What assumptions were made in the initial size up and assessments?

How is situational awareness important in ensuring perceptions are in line with reality?

What other things may be competing for the attention of the men at this point? (first fire jump, not knowing the other crewmembers well, etc.)

Briefings

What are the elements of effective briefings?

What is Leaders Intent, and does a leader communicate changing intent if dictated by changing conditions?

Tactical Decision Making

How would you read the orientation of the terrain in Mann Gulch? What affects would you expect the terrain and prevailing weather to have on fire behavior?

What are the effects of resource policy on firefighting today (consider grazing, urban interface, etc.)

Stand 3 Strategic Discussion Points

In the historical situation what conditions at this point were in the firefighters' control and what conditions were outside their control?

Given the circumstances at the time, were their actions reasonable? Why or why not?

Today, given current technology and standard operating principles and procedures, how might you handle the very same situation?

Situational Awareness

How did the attention grabbing blow-up across the canyon affect the firefighters' situational awareness?

Leadership, Split Second Decision Making, Communication

What effect might the changing leadership in this stressful situation have had on the crewmembers?

How do you achieve a balance of quality vs. speed in emergency briefings?

How do the Standard Operating Procedures on current crews handle this type of situation?

Stand 3A Strategic Discussion Points

In the historical situation what conditions at this point were in the firefighters' control and what conditions were outside their control?

Given the circumstances at the time, were their actions reasonable? Why or why not?

Today, given current technology and standard operating principles and procedures, how might you handle the very same situation?

Human Factors

What could be the psychological effect of dropping your tools? For example, feelings of ceding defeat, admitting loss of control, etc.

Stand 4 Strategic Discussion Points

In the historical situation what conditions at this point were the smokejumpers' in control of, and what conditions were outside their control?

Given the circumstances at the time, were their actions reasonable? Why or why not?

Today, given current technology and standard operating principles and procedures, how might you handle the very same situation?

Human Factors, Leadership

At what point in a dangerous situation is there a breakdown of cohesion? What does trust have to do with it?

At some point is each individual justified in seeking out what they believe to be their own best path to safety?

What might Dodge have done in that critical moment to get people to follow him?

Why might they not have? How did the crew end up on this situation?

When we select our leaders now, do we assess leadership qualities as well as technical competence? How do we get better at hiring those who can be leaders, and training them to be even stronger leaders?

Innovation

Are there cultural and/or organizational barriers to creative innovation as wildland firefighters, or do we nurture such qualities in individuals and/or groups?

Physical Fitness

Notice the deceptively difficult terrain and the effect of steep ridge and rock outcrops to the north of the escape route. Did you walk along the same path the jumpers took?

How important is physical fitness in a firefighters overall safety plan? Is it fair for one unfit individual to risk the safety of the others?

Stand 5 Strategic Discussion Points

Note to Facilitator: After finishing your discussion at Stand 5, we recommend giving Staff Ride participants some quiet time on their own to pay tribute to the markers for those who died. Many will want to explore the rock slide where Sallee and Rumsey survived at the top of Rescue Gulch.

If you did the POI assignment, encourage participants to visit the marker for the person they studied. It is very important to set a time to meet back at the mouth of Mann Gulch—or at Stand 6, if you are doing it—depending on when you need to catch the boat. It is worthwhile.

Give participants with generally good fitness at least 45 minutes for the hike to the mouth of the gulch.

Questions

In the historical situation what conditions at this point were in their control and what conditions were outside their control? Given the circumstances at the time, were their actions reasonable?

Today, how might you handle the same situation?

Risk Assessment

Why were they fighting this fire? (Purpose? Need? Cultural pressure?)

Would we fight it for the same reasons today?

How do we change our work culture, or wider national culture, to be smarter about balancing decisions about what's at risk and is it worth risking lives? Is our training adequately addressing these questions?

The Rescue

How well do you think the rescue mission for Hellman and Sylvia was handled? What did they do well and where did they have problems? What can we learn from this for today's firefighters?

How well do you think the body retrieval mission was handled? What did they do well and where did they have problems? What can we learn from this for today's firefighters?

Fire Investigations

Are we learning the lessons that we need to from how we currently conduct our fire investigations? What might be the best way to learn from fatality or "near miss" incidents?

Is our culture changing in terms of the human factors findings that we have begun to talk about in the last few years?

How did the fire organization change as a result of the Mann Gulch Fire and report findings?

How does our current fire organization value our history? Is it important to teach about our past and are we doing it?

Moral Courage and Leadership

What kind of skills does a situation like this Mann Gulch rescue mission and aftermath call upon from a leader? How and where do we or should we learn such skills? Do we address instances like this, which demand a kind of moral courage, in our current leadership training? How could we do better?

Do you think that the bureaucratic response to this situation would be different from the best response for human beings?

Who made the phone calls to the next of kin for those who died in Mann Gulch? Is there anything we can learn from how this was done?

Are there any heroes in the Mann Gulch Fire story? What do you think makes a hero? How do our media affect our perception of heroes? Do you know of any firefighters or leader that you think of as heroes today?

Stand 6 Discussion Points

Questions

In the historical situation what conditions at this point were in Jansson's control and what conditions were outside his control?

Given the circumstances at the time, were his actions reasonable? Why or why not?

Today, how might a Ranger or FMO handle the same situation?

What would it be like to have an employee die while in your control?

How should a Ranger handle a fatality fire on his/her unit?

What might you do to handle the kinds of stress that Jansson must have experienced?

Aftermath

How did the events of the Mann Gulch Fire affect those who survived?

What methods do we utilize today to help survivors of such incidents heal? What could we do better?