

Staff Ride

Resources



Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program

Mann Gulch Fire – Tactical Decision Games

Tactical Decision Game #1

Location

TDG to be handed out at the end of Stand 1 and done at Stand 2, so that participants have some time to think about this one en route.

Major Themes

Briefings, Situational Awareness, Tactical Decision Making, Leadership and Team Building

The Game

The time is the present, and 5PM on a hot August day. Like Harrison, you were the first to arrive on the fire and it is burning on your district ground. You will be the IC, at least to start with. At this point you have scouted the fire and surrounding area, put in a bit of scratch line, and been taking periodic weather readings. The fire is behaving as it did historically, approximately 60 acres, with flames that make it impossible to get closer than 100 feet from the burning edge. However, you have modern tools and protocols at your disposal. A ten-person crew meets you, where we stand. They have just come down from a helicopter shuttle. This is the first time you've been able to establish communication with the crew, and get your radio channels right, so you take care of that first.

Now you have two minutes to write down the most important things you think about the current situation and to prepare a briefing for the crew.

No talking, please.

Tactical Decision Game #2

Note to Facilitator: No participant handout for this TDG

Location

The route between Stand 2 and Stand 3, with the main activity occurring at a point just prior to Stand 3 and immediately upon arrival at Stand 3.

Major Themes

Split Second Decision Making, Leadership, and Communication

The Game

PART A—At the point where the crew begins to hike from Stand 2 to Stand 3

Facilitator Suggestions

- While role playing may be desirable, be aware that we are not sure of things that were said or specific actions or behaviors that took place during this time among the actual Mann Gulch firefighters. Coach participants that you want them more to use their imaginations than to actually act out behaviors in the name of each person's POI.
- Inform the participant who was assigned Hellman as a POI that he/she is in charge of the crew and needs to move them quickly down canyon to access the heel of the fire from a safe approach.
- Secretly coach a couple of crewmembers [Maybe hand them 3x5 cards with instructions] to stay at the back and have a difficult time keeping up or making sense of anything. They have two seasons' previous experience on a Type II crew, but one of those seasons there weren't many fires. This is their first fire this season.
- Facilitator tells the assembled Staff Ride participants:
 - "Hellman" (POI), get the crew organized, lined out, and marching to the fire as if you mean business."
 - Have the participants assigned as Dodge and Harrison follow the main group by some distance. Coach them to be ready for your cue to rejoin the group.
 - Set a fast pace, slightly uncomfortable, so that the participants perhaps become separated and will be breathing hard. However, don't break their ankles, knees, etc.
- PART B (At a point approximately 200 yards before Stand 3)
 - You may try to do this part on the move or you may need to briefly stop the participants.
 - Orientation to Historical Event: While back at the cargo spot Dodge and Harrison saw the fire "boil up," and determined to get the crew out of the canyon as soon as possible. They quickly moved down canyon, and tied back in with the crew around 5:40 PM. Dodge went to the head of the crew and sent Hellman to the rear to keep the men into a tight line. Dodge then hurried them down toward the river and safety.
 - Have the (POI) participant assigned as Dodge take over the leadership of the crew. Rapidly assign the Hellman POI to the rear to tighten up the formation while also speeding the crew down to the Missouri River and safety. Have the (POI) participant

assigned as Harrison join in at the middle of the group. Keep the participants moving the whole time.

- PART C—Immediately upon arrival at Stand 3
- The turnaround point is simply a sudden audit of where people are emotionally, and an opportunity to address some of the Strategic Discussion Points, especially the Recurring Question. This is meant to be a short Stand with big impact, and to show how much their options had narrowed by this time.
- When facilitator reaches Stand 3 (took historical smokejumpers about five minutes, and hopefully some people will be breathing hard) she/he stops suddenly and talks to whoever else has ended up at the front of the group. The facilitator says:
- “You have just seen this [show TDG Photo of spot fire below, found in the Facilitators Support tab] on your side of the gulch 150-200 yards below and slightly down canyon from you. The fire is blowing up, burning at 10 mph toward you in light grass, brush, and through the stringers of trees. Act now!”
- Feel free to select a different photo of your own to represent the spot fire that cut off Wag Dodge and his men from the river below. Suggestion: laminating an 8x11 color photo.
- Allow the situation to develop. Each group will handle things in different ways. Allow them to take the actions they see fit, so long as they stay safe. Stop the TDG within two minutes and gather the participants. At this point, solicit gut level responses from the participants (those witnessing the spot fires below them, and those who didn't see the fire and only witnessed the reactions of the crewmember ahead of them). How did they each react, based on their assumptions?
- Be aware... some participants may make a run for it. You'll want to have a plan for not letting them get so far, as to not be able to rally them all back to the Stand 3 location for discussion following a couple minutes of reaction.
- You may choose to do this part in the format of a “chainsaw style” After Action Review, by asking participants to:
 - “Give me one word about how you felt at a gut level when you crested the hill and saw the fire situation below you or realized your other crew members were reacting to an emergency situation. What do think your POI may have been feeling at this point?”
- To eliminate confusion... You have just completed TDG #2 ... and are now about to begin Stand 3. TDG #2 will link to Stand 3 closely.

Tactical Decision Game #3

Note to Facilitator: To be done at Stand 5.

Major Themes

Moral Courage, Rapid Decision Making, Leadership

Game

- You are an experienced Squad Leader, in modern times, and as far as you know half of your crew has been working a fire in Mann Gulch since this afternoon. Thinking it would be a quick mop-up job, and knowing that there would be other initial attack needs in the area, the IC had thought half the crew would be enough. But when the fire began to get active in the early evening the IC ordered the rest of your crew up from Helena. You and your half crew traveled by bus and boat to come help fight the fire.
- By the time you arrived at the mouth of Mann Gulch it was 2AM, August 6, and you are told that the fire “blew up.” Your mission has been changed from fighting the fire to helping to rescue survivors. After searching into the dawn, you realized that the few survivors have already been helped to the river and all you are left with is dead bodies.
- 6AM and the IC calls you over the radio:
- “I need you to use your stretchers to start moving remains down to the boat dock immediately. Break. One of those missing firefighters has parents who live in Helena and have been alerted. They want their son’s body brought down immediately, something to do with their religion. Break. The Governor and the District Ranger want those bodies off the ridge as soon as possible.”
- You are exhausted, already nearly puked once at the site of a burned body of an unrecognizable co-worker, and want badly to do the right thing here.
- You tell the IC: “Standby.”
- You have two minutes before you have to call the IC back with a response. Write down what your main thoughts are, what you intend to tell the IC, and what you intend to tell your crew.

Tactical Decision Game #4

Major Themes

Moral Courage, Rapid Decision Making, Leadership

Game

- It is 2AM August 6, modern times. You are a unit Duty Officer/Line Officer (or as appropriate for participant group). The IC of a fire on your unit calls you from their satellite phone to tell you that 12 firefighters have died on your unit, in similar circumstances as those we've been studying in Mann Gulch.
- Take two minutes to write down some thoughts about how you would like to proceed from here. Be prepared to discuss your ideas with the group.

Does your unit have a plan in place for circumstances like this?

What do you understand the actual official and non-official roles for you to be, under a circumstance like this involving your personnel, or on your home unit?

What do you know about the concepts of Critical Incident Stress Debriefings and/or Critical?