

2008 Paracargo End of Year Report

It was a good year in the Paracargo Section. By the numbers, 119,966 lbs of cargo were kicked from jumpships in Alaska this summer. By historical standards this was a pretty slow season. New users, new bundles delivered, and a couple of history making kicks eased the pain of a slow summer.

This spring brought some personnel changes and movement in the Paracargo Section. Rick Thompson left to take the AFS Air Attack Group Supervisor position, Matt Corley became a Smokejumper Squadleader, Chris Swisher took a job in the Smokejumper Training Section and T.J Gholson became the Foreman on the Craig IHC. All are missed for the wealth of experience, skill, and enthusiasm they brought to the section. We're sad to see them go but happy to see paracargo knowledge spread through out the fire world. We wish them good luck in their endeavors.

Replacing Rick Thompson as the Paracargo Coordinator is the old time paracargo hand and shy introvert Marty Meirrotto. Replacing Matt Corley as lead paracargo specialist is Jeff Stark and returning this summer from a year detail into the AFS Air Attack Group Supervisor position is Mike O'Brien.

In keeping our head count at 15, we picked up three Paracargo Rookies this summer. They are: Kurt Borcharding, Dawson Kelsey, and Matt Oakleaf. All displayed enthusiasm for doughnut eating and lifting with their backs not their legs.

Our paracargo guys once again showed hard by contributing to the rookie training program. Long time rookie trainers Jim Dibert and Gabe Lydic were joined by Jeff Stark in showing the rookies the way to pain and the mystery of the ram air. A good job was done by them all and a hearty thanks for their contributions to the base.

We had a 3 Casa / 1 Dornier line up this summer for aircraft. Casa Captains Dave Campau, Jim Tamminga, and Andy Johnston were joined by new to Alaska co-pilots Ron Chambless, Lloyd Sharp, and Greg Warwick. Pete Hassenger was the Dornier pilot. They all did a good job for paracargo combining accuracy with safe flying. They agree that dropping cargo is the most fun a jumper pilot can have.

We didn't have any Forest Service jumpers attend our Paracargo refresher this year due to scheduling and funding issues but there is interest for next year. We welcome Forest Service loadmasters and keep an open door for a couple of them each year to attend our training if there is interest and funding available.

This summer we worked with Chip Houde, AMD, and SASEB to use the State Aerocommander as a paracargo ship. This is still in the works and we hope to make progress on this next year

There were no North Slope fuel kicks this year due to a cut in the funding budget for the archeological work we had supported in the past. Our user for that program, Mike Kuntz, is a big fan of our program and will be glad to use us if he gets the funding in the future.

We made up for the lack of North Slope kicks this summer by going south of the Alaska Range rather than north of the Brooks Range. We made paracargo history in June with missions to the Bering Glacier on the south central coast between Cordova and Yakutat in June. This mission was for Scott Guyer out of the BLM state office.

We ended up doing 5 missions and kicking over 17,000 lbs of supplies to a camp located at the base of the Bering Glacier which supported their summer operations. This included almost 9,000 lbs of plywood and metal roofing which required new and innovative packaging developed for the safe deployment of the supplies. We now have manuals for this packaging and look forward to more business with new applications for this type of supply drop. We also supplied almost 1,000 gallons of helicopter fuel for their operations.

We did these drops for the State Office and ended up working closely with the folks of South Zone Operations at Campbell Tract in Anchorage. We based the missions out of Campbell tract which was a high profile introduction to our capabilities for many. The feedback from the missions was positive and the glacier folks are planning on using us again next year for fuel delivery at the very least. Scott Guyer, Nic Strohmeyer, Mike Lambright, Dave Ducet, and Amy Bauldauf were instrumental in making this mission a success. From AFS, Chip Houde, John Softich, Dave Whitmer, and Bill Cramer were also instrumental in supporting the mission.

We hope this will be the tip of the glacier in terms of opening resource user's eyes to our paracargo capabilities.. It was a coup to be used so far away with new users and complex logistics.

This year we moved forward with our long term goal of becoming operational with kicking Zodiacs from our Casas. We acquired a Zodiac (for free) last year through the generosity of the Air National Guard Para Rescue unit based in Anchorage. This summer we were able to start packaging and rigging the whole Zodiac package. This became a good example of "bro research and development."

Our Zodiac Package was comprised of an A-22 weighing around 750 lbs. This included the Zodiac, pumps, motor, paddles, PFDs, tool kit, and other accoutrements. We were also able to configure the plane with two pallets on rollertrack as well as 4 jumpers. The first pallet in this configuration is the Zodiac package A-22 and the second pallet can hold whatever additional gear or supplies that may be requested. This opens up the possibility of not only supplying the boat, supplies, gear, and fuel, but also a certified boat operator(s) and crew (not to exceed 4 jumpers total).

We see this as meeting a need in Alaska considering the number of cabins and allotments that require protection on remote lakes and rivers. We're proud to be developing this capability for AFS. There's also a whole world of resource work potential which we hope

to develop with this new capacity. In the meantime, we will be working on perfecting the drops and packaging as well as training AFS personnel as certified boat operators.

Ernie, the Fire God, smiled on us and gave us an opportunity to kick the Zodiac as a demobe vehicle on the last fire jumped in Alaska this summer. Gary Baumgartner was I.C. of a 4- manner on the Kantishna River and ordered the Zodiac for a demobe to Manley Hot Springs. Dave Jandt the Tanana Zone FMO okayed the drop and it went off without a hitch. Ward Scanson was the certified motor boat operator on the fire. The demobe was completed in one forty mile river trip. We consider this a good field test and we learned a lot about our packaging, Zodiac capacities, and boat motor fuel consumption.

Matt Corley became the BLM motor boater certifier this spring courtesy of a BLM certifier course in Homer, Alaska. As a result, Matt has been able to certify smokejumpers as boat operators for our fledgling Zodiac program. Matt ran his certifying courses on the Chena and Tanana Rivers and was able to get 12 jumpers and 1 FS certified this summer.

The Zodiac became an example of a good idea which gathered momentum and took on a life of its own. I say this because our original simple goal of one Zodiac grew into a marine division by summers end.

Through on going exchanges with the Para Rescue Unit we were able to exchange some nomex jumpsuits and excess 64- foot cargo chutes for two more special forces edition, Zodiacs along with four 40hp motors. This was another example of their generosity, not a straight-up trade. They've been very supportive of our efforts to get this program started and we look forward to more interaction with them in the future. Essentially, this was all for free.

During the BLM motor boater instructor class, Matt Corley was able to work his magic with the local Fish and Wildlife representative Tom McClain. Tom thought Matt was great and had some equipment that he was surplussing that could help our program. Equipment donated included: a 20ft Klamath flat bottom boat with multiple 115hp plus jet unit motors, various outboards from 15hp to 50hp, and three boat trailers in great shape. All of this was free and it allows us to be self-contained in running certification classes.

Hello AFS marine division. Many thanks to the Anchorage Para rescue unit, Tom McClain of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife and of course Matt Corley.

All in all we stayed busy despite a slow Alaska fire season. The extra time allowed all of the paracargo personnel to get in on new rigging and experimental drops. We look forward to continuing along the path of new challenges and opportunities in the future. Alaska is a large state with huge potential for what we have to offer. The experience and enthusiasm generated this summer makes the base stronger for future endeavors.