

"I need help up here."

"I'm getting a little disoriented and losing altitude substantially."

"I flew into absolutely no visibility." "We're in trouble."

"Mayday, mayday, Frontier eight twenty. Multiple bird strikes."

"My pilot's deceased...I need help."

"We'll get you down no problem."

"We'll get you through this."

"Glad to help."

**6TH ANNUAL
ARCHIE LEAGUE
MEDAL OF SAFETY
AWARDS**

MARCH 22, 2010

NATIONAL AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS ASSOCIATION, AFL-CIO

Contents

3	Welcome
4	Biographies of selection committee
	Archie League Medal of Safety Award winners
6	Alaskan Region
8	Central Region
10	Eastern Region
12	Great Lakes Region
14	New England Region
16	Northwest Mountain Region
18	Southern Region
20	Southwest Region
22	Western Pacific Region
24	Honorable Mention Award winners



March 22, 2010

Dear brothers and sisters and honored guests,

We are thrilled to welcome you to our annual Archie League Medal of Safety Awards banquet! It is with immense pride that we introduce you to the very best examples of skill, dedication and professionalism that our membership had to offer in an exceptional year of service to the safety of the National Airspace System in 2009.

The anticipation and excitement we have felt in putting together this program for you – named after the first air traffic controller and now in its sixth year – has been incredible. Simply put, this year's crop of winning flight assists will entertain you, inspire you, educate you and, in many cases, put you on the edge of your seat and then bring you out of that seat and leave you cheering at the safe outcome of each event. They are THAT good.

This awards program captures what our membership and our profession is all about; putting our unique skill set, mindset, training and experience to the maximum possible effect to positively influence the events under our control. In other words, going to every length possible to make it work in relentless pursuit of safety.

The ability to think quickly and remain calm under pressure while maintaining situational awareness are all unique qualities that air traffic controllers and flight service station employees possess. They all have a willingness to jump right in to resolve complex situations, offer a reassuring voice to those on the frequency and coordinate their efforts with other controllers.

While many controllers often feel that they are “just doing their jobs,” their hard work is often viewed by others as remarkable and extraordinary. Our program for you will highlight a variety of “saves” – some of which involve a team of controllers working together and others which are the result of one controller's efforts.

To our award winners, congratulations on a tremendous job well done! To all NATCA members who helped the success of this program by nominating a fellow member or helping to promote the awards, thank you! And to all of you here with us in Orlando tonight, sit back and enjoy our members' great work, and you have our gratitude for supporting your fellow members and NATCA.

Paul Rinaldi
President

Trish Gilbert
Executive Vice President



Selection Committee



Bruce Landsberg has led the AOPA Air Safety Foundation since May 1992. During his tenure, ASF has become the leading general aviation safety organization in the world and has been recognized with numerous awards on safety program excellence. He writes the monthly “Safety Pilot” column in AOPA Pilot magazine, a popular weekly blog in AOPA ePilot, and is a periodic contributor to AOPA Flight Training magazine. He represents general aviation safety interests before FAA, NTSB, National Weather Service, and various industry and international groups.

Prior to joining ASF, Landsberg had careers with FlightSafety International in Wichita, Kan., and Cessna Aircraft Company in marketing, safety education and business development.

A former U.S. Air Force officer, he holds a bachelor’s degree in psychology and a master’s degree in industrial technology from the University of Maryland. Landsberg has logged more than 6,000 hours with airline transport pilot (ATP), single-engine, multi-engine, and instrument flight instructor certificates, and has been an AOPA member for more than 35 years.



Brian Townsend has been a professional pilot for over 28 years, flying a variety of transport and general aviation aircraft. He devoted seven years to general aviation as a professional flight instructor and fixed-base/airport operations manager. He also flew business aviation operations as a member of the Flight Department of a Fortune 50 company prior to joining the ranks of a major airline. Employed with US Airways (formerly America West) since 1990, he has flown the De Havilland Dash 8, B-737, and is currently a captain on the Airbus A319/320/321.

Captain Townsend has worked closely with the FAA’s Air Traffic, Safety and Flight Standards operations and has collaborated with other carriers, general and business aviation, and the military in his efforts to move NextGen from concept to implementation. He recently served on the Leadership Committee and co-chair of the Streamlining Operations Workgroup as part of RTCA’s Task Force 5. As a former air safety representative for the Air Line Pilots Association for 10 years, Brian served

NATCA members nominated their fellow colleagues to receive the Archie League Medal of Safety. The committee listed below selected the award recipients from the nominees in each region.

as the chairman of the National Airspace System Modernization Team and vice chairman of the Air Traffic Services Group. His committee work encompassed Performance-Based Operations, RNAV-RNP Procedures and Charting, Data Communications, Unmanned Aircraft Systems, ADS-B, Environmental Issues and a host of other areas and modernization activities. He currently serves as a member of the FAA/ATA CNS Task Force.

In addition to his line pilot duties, Townsend leads the airline's NextGen initiatives and regional airspace activities. Through his efforts, the airline has become a recognized leader in the development and successful implementation of performance-based operations resulting in optimized and integrated procedures in many areas of the NAS. Most recently, he was instrumental in partnering the airline with the FAA's SBS Office for early adoption of ADS-B applications and operations in Philadelphia.



Dale Wright is NATCA's Safety and Technology Director, as well as a recently retired air traffic controller. After entering the U.S. Air Force in 1975, he began his ATC career at Berlin Center in Germany before later relocating to England AFB in Louisiana.

Joining the FAA in 1983, Dale spent 17 years serving at Charlotte and Atlanta facilities before joining NATCA as ARS Liaison and JPDO Liaison in Washington, D.C. from 2000 to 2004. After returning to his hometown of Charlotte for two more years of ATC duties, Dale retired in September 2007 after 32 years of loyal government service and took over the director position he holds today.

Dale has served a variety of regional and national-level committees including chairman of the National Finance Committee. In addition to his significant union roles and his history of ATC experience, Dale is an instrument-rated pilot and aircraft owner. Dale is also currently serving the aviation industry as FAA Runway Safety Council co-lead.



Alaskan Region

With thorough coordination and prioritization of duties, Alaskan members Richard Todd Lamb and John Michael Evans took control of an emergency situation on the afternoon of Dec. 20, 2009 to ensure a safe landing for not just one aircraft, but for two.

Fairbanks Automated Flight Service Station (AFSS) specialist Mike Evans was in the middle of assisting Rick Schikora, pilot of N3486C who had declared smoke in the cockpit of his Cessna C170B, when Todd Lamb took over Sector 15/16 at Anchorage Center.

Lamb: *Do you think I can help him or what's the situation?*

Evans: *He's gunna have to land here pretty soon...We better get him on radar contact, for if we lose radar contact we'll know where he's at.*

With no direction finding equipment in the area, Evans quickly used his ATC knowledge and experience to choose the best option for the current situation and elected to hand him off to the facility with radar coverage in the area, Anchorage Center.

Faced with an aircraft now unable to establish consistent communication due to its low altitude, Lamb was forced to relay all information through N7516K, a nearby Piper Cub coincidentally piloted by a friend of the distressed pilot. Using his 18 years of controller experience, plus his own familiarity with a Cessna aircraft, Lamb was able to successfully assist Schikora in locating a narrow dirt trail which would offer the only safe landing surface within the area.

"I don't have a transponder but I can go ahead and land next to him on Nome Creek Trail and see if I can help him," N7516K offered eagerly in hopes of assisting his friend. Lamb, aware that Schikora had since

brought his aircraft to a safe stop on Nome Creek Trail, now set in to assist this second aircraft in its effort to locate the downed plane's position.

"Advise your intentions of position on this frequency, call for overhead aircraft because I won't be able to hear you," instructed Lamb. *"Let us know that everything's good otherwise we're gunna send rescue."*

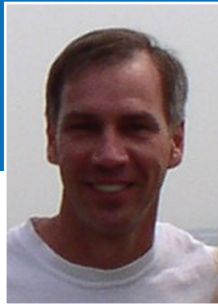
From the moment Lamb began work on Dec. 20 until the very end, he provided attentive, above and beyond assistance to the aircrafts involved. Beginning his shift with initiative, he asked another facility what he could do to help. While using all resources available, he made sure that other aircraft in the area were monitoring the situation and, after notified of a safe landing, followed up with numerous questions to the pilot of N7516K regarding any rescue assistance needed on the ground. Lamb took extra precautionary measures throughout the entirety of this situation – a situation in which he knew time was imperative as exposure to the extreme temperatures in the Alaskan area could rapidly become an issue had the pilot not be picked up.

The teamwork, attention to detail and calmness under pressure displayed here by Lamb and Evans are true examples of what our ATC system is all about. Through their decisive actions they collectively helped create a happy ending to what could have been a tragic story.

"I was just really fortunate," Schikora told Fairbanks Daily News Miner last December. *"So many things went right. I call it an early Christmas present."*

Lamb and Evans call it "just another day at work."

Richard Todd Lamb
Anchorage Center (ZAN)



Mike Evans
Fairbanks AFSS



Alaskan Region RVP Larry Lescanec:

"On the afternoon of Dec. 20, 2009, Alaskan members Todd Lamb and Michael Evans took immediate control of an in-flight emergency to ensure a successful aircraft landing and pilot rescue in a remote section of the Alaskan wilderness.

"As the first in contact with the emergency aircraft, Evans relied on his ATC training and experience to choose the best option for the current situation. He elected to hand off the aircraft from Fairbanks AFSS to a facility with RADAR coverage in the area, Anchorage Center.

"Over at ZAN, Lamb had begun work just like any other day. He walked in, hung up his coat, reported to the control room, and then, beginning with his first transmission of his day, provided exceptional assistance to two pilots involved in a life-threatening situation. He utilized all the resources available – other pilots, Fairbanks Approach, Fairbanks AFSS, RADAR and GSP – to provide a safe landing in which he followed up with numerous questions regarding any assistance needed on the ground.

"Evans and Lamb demonstrated the teamwork, calmness under pressure, and decision-making that exemplify the highest level of performance in the ATC profession. They helped create a happy ending to what could have been a tragic story."



Central Region

You already know about the “Miracle on the Hudson” event. But there was another terrifying collision between birds and an Airbus last year that didn’t get as much attention. While the aircraft involved – Frontier Airlines Flight 820, an Airbus 319 – maintained the use of one engine, the encounter was no less frightening to the 124 passengers onboard. And the safe airborne handling and emergency landing were also dramatic and memorable as an extraordinary example of professionalism took place both in the cockpit and in the control tower at Kansas City International Airport.

That’s where controller Jessica Hermsdorfer, an Air Force veteran and now a CPC at MCI for the past two years, was working departure radar all combined up in the tower cab in the early part of a Saturday evening.

Frontier 820 departed for Denver at approximately 7 p.m. local time on Nov. 14 and checked in on the departure frequency normally with Hermsdorfer.

FRONTIER 820: *Departure, good evening, Frontier 820 is two point five, climbing one-zero thousand.*

HERMSDORFER: *Frontier 820, Kansas City Departure, radar contact. Turn left heading two-five-zero, join the Salina transition. Climb and maintain one-five thousand.*

Hermsdorfer had two arrivals on the east downwind that she was also working when, suddenly, Frontier 820’s climb was abruptly interrupted. It was a severe bird strike, occurring at about 4,000 feet.

“Mayday, mayday, Frontier eight twenty. Multiple bird strikes. Number two engine is having problems. We’re going to imme-

diately return back to Kansas City.”

The aircraft suffered extensive damage. Both engines were struck and one caught fire, losing power. Hermsdorfer quickly but calmly sprang into action. “I turned the aircraft to a 180 degree heading for downwind,” she said. “I had another aircraft that was based for final approach, but then changed my mind and turned him out given the severity of the situation and I wanted to give Frontier a clean final.”

HERMSDORFER: *OK, Frontier eight twenty, expect Runway One Left and I’ll get you in as soon as possible. Expect the ILS.*

FRONTIER 820: *Thank you. Yeah, we’ve got severe damage number two engine, possible one engine as well.*

HERMSDORFER: *OK, number two and number one. And then what else do you need?*

FRONTIER 820: *Uh, that’s it. Equipment standing by.*

Hermsdorfer descended the aircraft to 3,000 feet and then went back and gave a pilot’s discretion descent “just in case they couldn’t hold altitude and wanted to wait to come down,” she said. She then told a GoJet flight that she was going to turn him out to get the emergency aircraft inbound first.

She gave the Frontier jet another instruction – a left turn heading 90 degrees. But there was nothing extraneous beyond that. Said Hermsdorfer, “I got all the information I could from the pilot without trying to overtask them, and Rob (Bratcher) who was working CIC rang out the crash phone.”

Jessica Hermsdorfer
Kansas City Tower/TRACON (MCI)



At this point, the aircraft was seven miles from the final approach fix. Hermsdorfer gave him a left turn heading 40 degrees, told the pilot to maintain 3,000 feet until established on the localizer and then cleared him for the ILS approach to Runway 1-Left. The aircraft landed safely shortly thereafter.

“She was calm and professional during the entire incident,” MCI Facility Representative Brian Barnes said. “She even had the awareness to ask the pilot if he would like to change frequencies over to

the tower or just stay with her, and she would relay the landing clearance. Doing this showed her commitment to the safety of the flight crew and having the focus on not over-tasking the pilots.”

For her efforts, Hermsdorfer was given the FAA District Manager’s Award for Safety.

One last detail not mentioned in any FAA report: Hermsdorfer was three months pregnant at the time. She is expecting to deliver her first child next month.



Central Region RVP Kevin Peterson:

“It was a foggy and rainy day when Frontier Flight 820 departed Kansas City on Nov. 14. Shortly after takeoff, just four miles from the airport and just out of 4,000 feet, a noticeably shaken voice comes over the radio: “MAYDAY, MAYDAY, Frontier 820 multiple bird strike, number two engine is having problems. We need an immediate return to the airport.”

“The pilots reported severe damage to the number two engine with possible damage to the number one engine as the cabin quickly filled with a horrible odor. Passengers witnessed as flames shot from the engines of the plane while many others wept or prayed out loud.

“Luckily for all involved, this flight was in the hands of two capable pilots and an air traffic controller skilled and professional beyond her years. At the time of this event, Jessica Hermsdorfer had only been in the FAA less than two years and a certified professional controller for just 11 months. Yet, her quick decision making and calming voice were that of a seasoned veteran.

“Jessica’s abilities and professionalism were significant qualities as she continued working her other traffic during this emergency, adjusting her traffic flow in order to get Frontier 820’s crew and passengers on an instrument approach and safely on the ground within minutes of that frantic MAYDAY call.”



Eastern Region

The pilot of the Velocity – tail number and call sign N129VA – who took to the skies above Northern Virginia after taking off from Manassas Regional Airport on July 5 last year probably is still quite thankful for his good fortune that afternoon. He received some of the very best personal care and safety service that a NATCA member can provide, courtesy of veteran Potomac TRACON (PCT) controller Louis Ridley.

Ridley, in addition to being a 22-year veteran controller who has been at PCT since 2004, is also an accomplished and highly skilled pilot as well as a flight instructor. “I grew up on an airport in upstate New York,” says Ridley. “My father taught me to fly before I could drive a car.” During Ridley’s first FAA assignment, at Columbia, S.C., TRACON, he started and ran his own pilot service business with 11 employees and also became involved in the airshow industry, with extensive experience at both Sun-N-Fun and Oshkosh until 2005.

So on this particular afternoon, Ridley proactively came to the aid of this pilot armed with an array of skills and talents and, above all, an extraordinary level of care and sense for what a pilot needs at a particularly challenging moment. Ridley keenly spotted this Velocity pilot, whom he knew just by interpreting the information on his radar scope was trying to land at Shenandoah Valley Regional Airport but was unable to do so because of an overcast layer. Ridley then dialed up the SHD Unicom frequency and listened for any aircraft talking. As soon as he could confirm a call sign, he reached out to the pilot to offer assistance.

RIDLEY: *Velocity one-two-nine victor alpha, Potomac. You on the radio?*

N129VA: *Ah, Velocity one-two-nine victor alpha has you sir.*

RIDLEY: *Alright, do you require any assistance at this time?*

N129VA: *Uh, sir, if you know where there’s a hole for me to get down, I’d be a happy pappy.*

RIDLEY: *OK, you’re not IFR capable or equipped at this time?*

N129VA: *That is correct. The pilot is not IFR capable.*

Ridley then set to work to find a way down for the pilot. He discovered the aircraft had 45 minutes of fuel remaining and then, using his calm demeanor, reassured the pilot that he could get to an airport with acceptable weather conditions for a safe landing. He went the extra mile, using his own experience in the cockpit, to ask the pilot about his navigation and terrain-awareness equipment. Number one, it would help Ridley know what the aircraft was capable of. Number two, it might offer a measure of reassurance to the pilot to know he would be OK, keeping the mood light during this serious situation.

RIDLEY: *I can sure talk you through an ILS if you’d like, or take you over to Culpepper where the land is flatter and take you in on a localizer approach, whatever you would like to do. I am a CF-Double I (CFII), I have six thousand hours, talked for over twelve hundred. I think I can talk you down if you want to do that.*

The pilot said he was comfortable with going into Culpepper, so Ridley gave him a heading and pulled up the approach plate. He also recommended that the pilot utilize the autopilot and altitude hold functions. He also formally declared an emergency for the pilot and assigned him an altitude of 7,000. Soon, the aircraft would join the localizer and Ridley would track it to the airfield.

Then, Ridley made an amazing offer of assistance.

RIDLEY: *November nine victor alpha. When*

Louis Charles Ridley
Potomac TRACON (PCT)



you get to Culpepper, the airfield will be closed. I'm sure there'll be some people around. If not, I'm based there with my airplane. I'll send my wife down to make sure you get into a hangar and get some transportation so you don't have to worry about any of that.

Soon after, the pilot was out of the clouds and on his way to a safe landing.

From Ridley, one final reassuring transmission:

RIDLEY: Nine victor alpha, radar service terminated. Go on over to Unicom, land, have yourself a nice cool drink.



Eastern Region RVP Phil Barbarello:

"There is full service air traffic control, and then there is what Louis Ridley provided to the pilot of a small aircraft the day after the Fourth of July last year. 'Above and Beyond' doesn't remotely capture what this incredible NATCA member did.

"Louis, a veteran pilot himself and a flight instructor as well, began this amazing flight assist by alertly noticing that the aircraft was stuck circling above a cloud bank over Shenandoah Airport in Virginia without an instrument flight rules rating or qualifications. There was 45 minutes of fuel left and mountainous terrain below.

"Louis made this save work perfectly by reassuring the pilot, giving him expert instructions and information and – you just can't make this up – had his wife, Carolyn, waiting for the pilot at his eventual destination, Culpepper, Va. She drove him and his wife back to Manassas, Va., so they could get their car to go home.

"What more could he have done? Get a pot of coffee going at Culpepper? Actually, yes, he asked Carolyn to do that too. Amazing. I am deeply honored and proud that Louis is representing the Eastern Region at this year's Archie League banquet."



Great Lakes Region

It was the first of the year and bad weather was moving in as 14-year veteran Kristin Danninger worked the radar approach position at Madison. A couple of VFR flights had already returned to MSN due to decreasing visibility when N6085M called in distress – a novice pilot stuck in the clouds near Baraboo Dells Airport.

N6085M: Madison Approach, Cessna six-zero-eight-five mike... flew into absolutely no visibility. I need your help getting outta here.

DANNINGER: November six-zero-eight-five mike, can you climb VFR?

N6085M: I'm gonna climb...I can't climb VFR. I'm in a zero visibility.

Knowing that a Cessna aircraft had flown VFR into Portage Airport a little while before, Danninger suggested the aircraft head eastbound.

"I still have zero visibility at two thousand seven hundred," responded the pilot after descending a bit in hopes of catching a glimpse of Portage. *"It's not gonna happen."*

"I would just suggest you continue east-bound then," advised Danninger in her comforting Midwest accent. *"Hopefully the conditions will improve."*

With the aircraft now headed towards MSN, where conditions were still VFR, Danninger went ahead and asked the necessary questions in order to assist the dis-oriented aircraft, learning that the pilot not only had zero instrument training but had just received his pilot's license the day before.

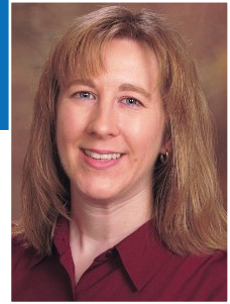
Danninger calmly made several suggestions in order to get the now panicking pilot safely back on course and consistently above minimum altitude, making certain to clarify the aircraft's intentions throughout the situation to ensure that both remained on the same page.

A few minutes later, the pilot received ground contact and Danninger successfully used her geographical knowledge of the area to point out the interstate highway below that led to the airport– a sight that brought tears to the eyes of the pilot. With the runway and approach lights set on high, Danninger oriented him for the best runway and ensured he was comfortable before transferring him to the tower.

The tears were proof enough of the emotional situation that took place on Jan. 1, 2009, as the pilot realized the seriousness of the situation and the fact that it could have so easily ended in tragedy. During what started out as a routine day for Danninger quickly turned complex due to this series of unforeseeable events; however, the end result was a safe and successful one thanks to her calm, patient and professional demeanor throughout the entire 20 minutes, as well as her undeniable knowledge of the area that enabled her to perform her job to the very best of her ability.

The next day, the pilot and his girlfriend drove back from Illinois to personally thank Danninger for her help – an act of kindness that showed the appreciation this controller undoubtedly deserved, though in no way expected for something she would describe as simply her "job."

Kristin Danninger
Madison, Wisc. (MSN)



Great Lakes Region RVP Bryan Zilonis:

“Jan. 1, 2009 marks a day that will always remind us that routine can change to complex in a matter of moments. Neither Kristin Danninger, a controller at Madison Tower in Wisconsin, nor the pilot that would later desperately need her help could have foreseen the events that were about to unfold.

“N6085M called in distress with zero visibility and requested help to get back into VFR conditions. Kristin's ability to quickly assess the situation and provide assistance based upon previous pilot reports, in addition to successfully using her knowledge of the geographic area to orient the pilot, were ultimately the difference between heroics and tragedy. This type of event has become a yearly reminder of how priceless local geographic knowledge is to a Terminal Radar Controller.”



New England Region

With daylight waning, and an aircraft stuck amidst rapidly-deteriorating weather conditions and mountainous terrain, timing is everything. And on Oct. 9, 2009, it was up to controllers Kevin Plante and Christopher Presley to help the pilot of N5151L beat the clock.

N5151L's pilot had just found himself in a tricky situation as he was quickly losing hundreds of feet of altitude while simultaneously unable to maintain a heading or constant speed; the seriousness of the situation becoming evident as controller Kevin Plante kept his eyes peeled to radar.

The aircraft initiated radio contact with Portland and advised it was VFR in IMC conditions with a transponder that didn't work. Knowing only the last position of the aircraft as the mountainous area of Fryeburg Fair, and receiving no radar return for this particular aircraft, Plante quickly scanned his scope to locate a primary radar return. Following the pilot's description of "circling," he was then able to correlate the primary return to ultimately locate the aircraft.

Plante, aware that the pilot was suffering disorientations among the clouds, maintained continuous dialog with the pilot and made a suggestion for the pilot to land at Portland using a surveillance approach.

N5151L: *It's definitely an optical illusion up here.*

PLANTE: *Looks like we kinda have you doing circles out there. I just need to figure out a way to get you on a heading and have your wings level on that heading.*

N5151L: *I'm getting a little disoriented and losing altitude substantially.*

A rated commercial pilot himself, Plante informed the pilot that there were two other commercially-rated pilots sitting in the radar room with to him in an effort to ease the shaken pilot. Reassuring phrases such as "We'll get you through this" and "We'll get you down no problem" were voiced to the pilot as he worked to get himself oriented with the current surroundings.

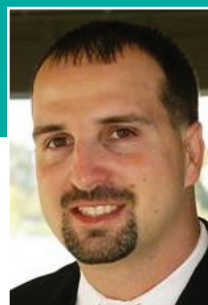
During one loss of altitude, the pilot broke out below the cloud deck and was able to spot landmarks around the town of Windham. Controller Chris Presley, who had already terminated his flight data training and handed off other aircraft in order to assist Plante, immediately grabbed a road map off the shelf to help his friend guide the pilot to Portland. Using several interstate highways, as well as pointing out lakes and various towns along the way, Presley relayed the directions through Plante until the runway approach lights were visible in the distance.

Through Plante's composure, patience and pilot experience, and Presley's quick-thinking initiative and dedicated assistance, N5151L made it in right before the big storm – a goal undoubtedly achieved through a team successfully unifying towards a common goal. The skilled efforts of these two controllers transformed a complex situation consisting of various risky circumstances into one of a safe and happy ending.

Kevin Plante
Portland, Maine
(PWM)



Christopher Presley
Portland, Maine
(PWM)



New England Region RVP Mike Robicheau:

“The flight assist that Kevin Plante and Chris Presley worked is the very essence of teamwork – a quality that sits at the heart of everything our union does.

“On a day when time was of essence, these two NATCA members took every discouraging circumstance into consideration to ultimately get this aircraft on the ground. Sharing the load, they split up duties in order to cover all aspects of the complex situation and calmly brought a shaken, disoriented pilot to safety.”

“This save is yet another example of controller/pilot experience within the radar room coming into play to save the day.”



Northwest Mountain Region

One of the trends we have seen in the six years of our NATCA Archie League Medal of Safety Awards program has been the prevalence of winning flight assists that involved a controller who also had some level of flying experience. Whether a few lessons or many years in the cockpit, those controllers have added something very valuable to their array of skills that come in handy during an emergency situation in their airspace.

The latest chapter on this was written on March 29, 2009, when Marcus Plessner saw the misfortune of encountering engine trouble with his Piper Aztec above western Montana turn into great fortune when he flew into Sector 6 at Salt Lake Center, staffed at that moment by 23-year veteran controller and accomplished pilot Troy Decker.

"Yes sir, we're having some problems with our number two engine, like to divert to nearest airport. Request vectors."

Plessner's calm demeanor was matched by Decker, who quickly came up with a plan for the aircraft. The challenges were evident; a rough running engine and the plane's location in a mountainous area where radar coverage is sketchy below 13,000 feet.

DECKER: *Four-zero-four charlie hotel, Anaconda Airport is just off your eleven o'clock and four miles. If you need information on it I can get you that or if you can make Butte. Butte is about ... just picked you up on radar sir, radar contact. One five miles northwest of (inaudible) approximately Butte Airport eleven o'clock two-zero miles.*

Plessner accepted the idea of Butte and began a descent to get an approach.

Decker gave him a detailed weather report and it quickly became apparent that Butte was perhaps not the best option as the weather was reported below minimums in the area. At that point, the situation with Plessner's engine worsened and he formally declared an emergency. Decker quickly provided other options as landing alternatives, starting with Anaconda, then Dillon where the weather seemed a bit better.

"Troy does an excellent job relaying information so the pilot could make an informed decision as to which airport he should choose," Salt Lake Center Facility Representative Doug Pincock said.

As Plessner's number two engine went out completely, Decker gave him another complete weather and situation briefing and instructed him to descend and maintain an altitude of 12,000 feet. Decker threw out Missoula as another option.

N404CH: *Yeah. How's Missoula's weather? Uh, we got smoke coming off our number two right now, four charlie hotel.*

DECKER: *OK, uh, Missoula is two-one-one-seven special. Winds three-two-zero at one-zero. Visibility one and one quarter. Light snow. Mist. Ceiling seven hundred overcast. Temperature one. Dew point zero. Altimeter two niner six niner.*

N404CH: *Alright, let's go for Missoula. Our number two is on fire at this time for four charlie hotel.*

Decker told Plessner that Anaconda Airport was actually right behind him, albeit plagued by more weather problems. Plessner said he wanted it and Decker told him it was a VOR approach. But just

Troy Decker
Salt Lake Center (ZLC)



as quickly as that option came, it went with the realization that Butte was, in fact, going to be the best final option. Decker provided updated information and recommended an alternate approach to expedite the landing.

DECKER: *November four-zero-four charlie hotel, alright sir. Anything else I can get for you right now? No NOTAMS affecting you. Any runway you want, of course. It's just the weather we're looking at sir.*

N404CH: *Alright, sounds good. Understand it is a weather issue. We are VOR Runway One-Five and we do request crash fire and rescue assistance when we get there please.*

DECKER: *They're on the way sir.*

N404CH: *Alright, Salt Lake Center Aztec four-zero-four charlie hotel we are barely legal VFR. We got the airport. We are in the ILS to Runway One-Five at this time.*

Decker then provided one last instruction, to give them a call at the center when things settled down. A safe landing ensued.

"Troy is an accomplished pilot himself and IFR rated and that experience proved invaluable," Pincock said. "He was able to anticipate the pilot's needs and used personal knowledge of the area to help produce a favorable outcome to an otherwise dire situation."



Northwest Mountain Region RVP Jim Ullmann:

"Air traffic controllers of the NW Mountain Region are well versed working aircraft in high terrain, and during the winter months there is a good chance that icing and winter IFR weather are the norm.

"The outstanding save ZLC controller Troy Decker was involved in not only had mountainous terrain and wintry weather but also an aircraft engine fire.

"Troy Decker again proves that when an aircraft is in trouble, air traffic controllers are expected to remain calm and professional at all times. The pilots expect this, and we expect it of ourselves.

"I commend Troy for his outstanding actions, and I commend all the hard-working NATCA air traffic controllers who perform in an exceptional manner day in and day out."



Southern Region

"I've gotta' declare an emergency. My pilot's...unconscious. I need help up here."

These stirring words hung heavy in the air as Doug White, passenger of the King Air aircraft, reached out for help – help from anyone that could provide it on this busy Easter Sunday.

"My pilot's deceased...I need help."

While his wife and two daughters looked on in shock, White took over the cockpit as various Miami controllers began to lighten the load of Nathan Henkels and Lisa Grimm who immediately made moves to assist the troubled passenger.

Though a private pilot, White had never flown a larger, two-engine King Air and was now in a life-threatening situation as the plane hit 5,000 feet and continued climbing.

As Jessica Anaya stepped in to coordinate the rerouting of all aircraft in this high traffic area of Southern Florida, Grimm worked to calmly explain the specifics of the aircraft to White as he frantically sought to turn off the autopilot.

"Number five delta whiskey, disengage the autopilot. We're gonna have you hand fly the plane," she instructed. *"Hold the yoke level and disengage the autopilot."*

"Alright, I disengaged it," stated White, surprisingly composed as he was forced to take action in order to stop the climb. *"I'm flyin' the airplane by hand."* And, in his typical light-hearted demeanor that seems to find humor in any situation, followed it up with a request for Grimm to find the longest, widest runway she could.

"You doin' alright there descending?"

Grimm asked a few minutes later, as she did repeatedly throughout the event. "I felt as long as he had some reassurance, he had enough skills to successfully manipulate the controls and bring the plane down," recalls Grimm of her actions that day.

"Oh, we're havin' a hoot, niner delta whiskey," White responded in his thick southern drawl.

He and his family lay in the hands of a team that had quickly formed an assembly line formation in order to successfully alternate between transferring control on the radio channel, advising the passenger and issuing control instructions to other aircraft. Through the pilot experience so patiently displayed by Grimm and the hard work of Henkels and Anaya, White was able to get the plane in the appropriate position to steer towards Fort Myers Airport where Dan Favio, Brian Norton and Carey Meadows were waiting to take over.

It was at this point that Favio called up good friend and veteran pilot Kari Sorenson of Danbury, Conn., for help in talking White down. Also a flight instructor, Sorenson was able to relay important details via cell phone regarding the positions of controls, switches, and how to configure the King Air for landing. Favio and Norton, set up on a single scope and a separated frequency to allow for complete focus, received the instructions from Sorenson which they carefully echoed to White. With a successful touchdown finally completed, the two handed the aircraft off to Meadows at ground control where he proceeded to assist White with shutdown instructions.

With one unfortunate and unpreventable



Jessica Anaya
Miami Center (ZMA)



Lisa Grimm
Miami Center (ZMA)



Nathan Henkels
Miami Center (ZMA)



Dan Favio
Fort Myers, Fla. (RSW)



Brian Norton
Fort Myers, Fla. (RSW)



Carey Meadows
Fort Myers, Fla. (RSW)

death, came the incredible saving of four others thanks to those who worked the skies that Easter Sunday. The teamwork was unmistakable as the experience and calm composure of the controllers in Miami joined forces with the quick-thinking skills of the Fort Myers team. Enhanced by the remarkable courage displayed by Doug White through these adverse circumstances, the ATC system worked together from tower to center, from pilot to passenger, to bring a successful end to this traumatic event that could have easily gone from bad to worse.

“The husbands and the wives of air traffic controllers have no idea what their spouses do for a living,” said White after the fact. “When something good happens, air traffic controllers don’t get the high-five and the ‘attaboys.’ I’m going to give them the ‘attaboy.’”



Southern Region RVP Victor Santore:

“This event immediately stands out as one of our greatest demonstrations of teamwork in the face of terribly unfortunate odds. This group of capable controllers came together under immense pressure to resolve a situation that cannot be found in any type of ATC manual; an amazing save that is vivid proof that a “B” pay scale has no place in our profession.

“The expertise of these six NATCA members shone brightly on April 12 as they used every resource and capability available to them, portraying not only the necessary skill, but the highest professional standards that we set for ourselves each and every day.

“I am proud to present Lisa, Nate, Jessica, Dan, Brian and Carey with this award, as performing their everyday duties on this particular Sunday went on to make them unforgettable heroes in the eyes of the White family.”



Southwest Region

"Sometimes in life, we don't always get to thank our benefactors," wrote pilot Scott Spencer in a letter to D10 TRACON.

Thanks to the actions of Douglas Wynkoop and Natasha Hodge, Scott Spencer was able to do just this.

One a VRA developmental, one a 27-year veteran; both proved skill and resolve beyond measure with the terrific work they displayed on Dec. 7, 2009 when faced with a confused and disoriented experimental aircraft in distress.

Natasha Hodge was working her certification ride on this particular evening when Spencer, on an instrument flight plan, checked onto frequency inbound to Fort Worth Meacham Airport. Hodge watched carefully as the aircraft went from an assigned altitude of 3,000 on a heading of 315, to 1,700 feet on a heading of 065 in just 24 seconds.

Witnessing the drastic flight loops taking place in front of her, she again calmly instructed Spencer to the assigned altitude, but this time, the aircraft continued to climb to as high as 5,200 feet.

HODGE: *Are you having any difficulties?*

N300SX: *I had a little problem with my, uh, GPS on the approach.*

Now with the specific problem defined, Hodge assigned headings for an ILS approach. The cloud ceiling of 600 feet overcast and the visibility of half a mile precluded anything but an instrument approach. Once again, however, she was forced to redirect the aircraft due to the pilot's series of erratic turns and difficulty tracking the localizer.

"You're way below the glide scope... the localizer two thousand five hundred down there at Cowtown," she explained to the pilot. "Climb and maintain three thousand. Cancel approach clearance. Fly present heading."

Persistent to try one more time, Hodge issued no-gyro vectors to final.

"We're... we're in trouble. It's, uh, losin' power," responded Spencer, now noticeably worried about the situation he had found himself in.

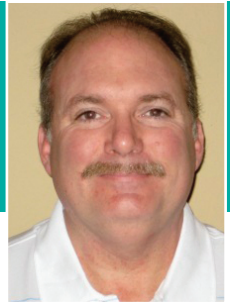
"Jet Speed thirty-five, turn left heading three-six-zero immediately," Hodge promptly advised over frequency to a nearby aircraft as she continued to work the sector in addition to assisting the experimental aircraft.

Witnessing the extensive length of time Hodge had spent thus far assisting the aircraft and taking into account the rapidly-intensifying situation, Douglas Wynkoop stepped in to take over the situation. He immediately redirected other aircraft in the area while, at the same time, turning the distressed aircraft away from an antennae which now lay in its path of descent. The aircraft was able to regain power and, after witnessing the previous three missed approaches and knowing there was less than 40 minutes of fuel with no airports reporting VFR conditions within the limit of flying time, Wynkoop suggested an ASR approach into Navy Fort Worth after exhausting all other options. With the excellent assistance of the GCA controllers at Navy Fort Worth, the ASR approach and landing was successful.

Natasha Hodge
Dallas TRACON (D10)



Douglas Wynkoop
Dallas TRACON (D10)



During his communication throughout the event, Wynkoop made sure he was clear on the pilot's intentions while patiently offering up multiple landing options for the aircraft. He professionally alerted the control tower regarding all emergency information, including pilot, aircraft and approach details, to ultimately ensure the aircraft's safety upon descent.

Wynkoop not only stayed in tune with all aspects of the situation at hand, both on frequency and behind the scenes, but this seasoned veteran remained confident in his developmental for the majority of the emergency. He allowed her to excel at her job and prove herself capable of handling extreme pressure with composure and professionalism before then taking over.

Combined, these two members worked the aircraft for 51 minutes – 30 minutes of which consisted of critical circumstances requiring precise instruction— and demonstrated teamwork and commitment at its finest during the entire ordeal.



Southwest Region RVP Tim Smith:

"The event that took place on Dec. 7 is an example of teamwork and commitment at its best as Doug and Natasha worked together to maintain control of a rapidly-intensifying situation. Taking into consideration the current circumstances and exploring all possible options, they jointly ensured a safe landing for this one very-disoriented experimental aircraft.

"Their actions not only demonstrated the crucial role our veteran controllers play in the safety of our aviation system each and every day, but prove the essential value our newer controllers have on its future.

"It is men like Doug we hate to see retire and women like Natasha that we are eager to see fill our facilities. We are proud to call them NATCA members and, on behalf of the union family and the pilots they tend to, thank them for a job well done!"



Western Pacific Region

For 22-year veteran Southern California air traffic controller Ron Chappell, who knows pretty much everything there is to know about the ultra complex and intricately choreographed airspace around LAX, nothing goes unnoticed. That is especially true for a tiny blip of a primary radar target on Chappell's scope at Southern California TRACON (SCT) that had errantly wandered unannounced and unmarked into the delicate dance of his perfectly crafted final approach lined up for Runway 25 Left.

Crystal clear days in the Los Angeles Basin provide a recipe for a traffic mix that includes general aviation aircraft flying without a transponder, along with high volume commercial aircraft. On this particular sunny day in June, Chappell was strapped into the Downey sector position (south finals into LAX).

While working, Chappell observed a primary-only target converging with SkyWest Airlines Flight 6522, a Bombardier Canadair regional jet, who was inbound on the 25-Left ILS.

Rarely do general aviation aircraft penetrate the Los Angeles Class Bravo airspace. But on this day, the Class B was penetrated by an aircraft (it turned out to be a Navion) who was simply not squawking a discreet code which would make him visible to ATC. That's when Chappell, an experienced controller who knows how to pick up a small primary target and identify it as an aircraft and not a vehicle, sprang into quick action.

"SkyWest sixty-five twenty-two, traffic eleven o'clock and two miles westbound primary target, altitude unknown."

The following transcript shows just how close the two aircraft came and the level of great communications needed to ensure a safe outcome.

SKW6522: *He's in sight, sixty-five twenty-two ... uh ... I can't tell the type yet. I'll tell ya in a second.*

CHAPPELL: *OK, is he, um, above you or below you?*

SKW6522: *Alright, uh, yeah, he's, uh, pretty clueless. He's a one, well, no, it's a Navion and he was gonna run into us. We had to descend, sorry sir.*

CHAPPELL: *SkyWest sixty-five twenty-two, glad I said something. I don't have an altitude readout on him.*

SKW6522: *Well, um, we don't have him on TCAS at all, so I don't think he has a transponder.*

CHAPPELL: *SkyWest sixty-five twenty-two, reduce speed to two-one-zero.*

SKW6522: *Bring down on the speed now sir, sixty-five twenty-two.*

SKW6522: *Just to verify the speed is two-ten, for sixty-five twenty-two.*

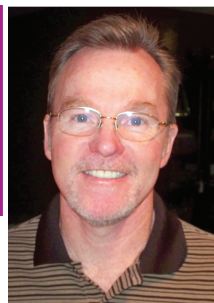
CHAPPELL: *SkyWest sixty-five twenty-two affirmative.*

CHAPPELL: *SkyWest sixty-five twenty-two, I just have to ask reference the paperwork, he was around eight thousand five hundred or so, somewhere about the time you had to descend?*

SKW6522: *Yeah, eight thousand or eight thousand five hundred, and um, it was definitely a Navion, um white. That's about all I can tell you. It looked like maybe a brown top and, yeah, we had to descend. He had no TCAS. We didn't get a resolution or anything but we had to descend to avoid him.*

CHAPPELL: *SkyWest sixty-five twenty-two, we have a radar track on him and we will follow him as long as we can keep radar on*

Ron Chappell
Southern California TRACON (SCT)



him, and file the appropriate paperwork on him.

SKW6522: I just want to say we really appreciate the fact that you said something, cause we didn't see him until you said something.

CHAPPELL: You're welcome. Glad to help.

Chappell began his FAA career in 1988 at Burbank Tower and moved over to the old L.A. TRACON in 1992. In 1994, the facility was consolidated into SCT and Chappell is now in his 16th year there. This honor marks Chappell's second Archie League award. He and Al Hurst won the first Western Pacific Archie League award for a save in 2004 involving nearly the exact set of circumstances as this 2009 event: An unidentified VFR aircraft posing a traffic and safety hazard to a SkyWest flight inbound to LAX.

Veteran SCT controller Ron Geyer, who nominated Chappell for the 2009 save, said of the quick thinking, "As you can clearly hear on the tape, Ron's awareness prevented a collision."



Western Pacific Region RVP Ham Chaffari:

"On Aug. 31, 1986, an Aeromexico DC-9 collided with a Piper Archer over Cerritos, Calif. The NTSB found that the Piper had deviated into the LAX terminal control area. The aircraft was not equipped with a Mode C transponder and wasn't in contact with ATC. The accident was largely responsible for the FAA requiring that all commercial aircraft be equipped with traffic alert and collision avoidance systems (TCAS <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traffic_Collision_Avoidance_System>), and that light aircraft operating in dense airspaces be equipped with "Mode C" transponders that could report a three-dimensional position.

"Fast forward to June 28, 2009: veteran SCT controller Ron Chappell, working the Downey sector at SCT, observed a "primary only" target without a transponder converging towards a SkyWest regional jet. Ron took action to issue traffic to the SkyWest jet not knowing the altitude of the primary target and making sure that it wasn't just a truck on Interstate 405.

"The lesson here: advances in automation, like TCAS software, are important but will never replace an experienced controller.

"I know that this was just another routine day for Ron, but I am very proud of what he did to ensure the safety of the passengers aboard the SkyWest flight and the errant small aircraft."

HONORABLE MENTION



ALASKAN REGION

Alan Zelez, Anchorage TRACON

Marcus Tomlin & Christopher Roberts, Anchorage

EASTERN REGION

April Hedstrom, Mona Iddings, Bill Davenport & Mark Ulanch,
Charleston, W. Va.

Lee Owens, Roanoke

Brian Buckley, Philadelphia

Jeffrey Weldon, Washington Center

Chad Bentz & John Blanco, Philadelphia

Patricia Harshman, Washington Center

Patrick Harten, New York TRACON; Bill McLoughlin, La Guardia

GREAT LAKES REGION

Gregory Schmarr & Travis Stamper, Indianapolis Center

John Overman, Lansing

Lou Alvarez, Chicago Midway

Derrick Rogers, Chicago O'Hare TRACON

Marc Schneider & Wendy Schneider, Indianapolis Center

Leslie Snyder, Evansville

Jay Moffat, Chicago O'Hare

Dale Taylor, Indianapolis Center

NEW ENGLAND REGION

Nancy Yeomans, Boston Center

NORTHWEST MOUNTAIN REGION

Christopher Schenk, Duane Johnsen, Jim Ullmann & Robert Normandeau, Seattle Center

Alan Gorski, Michael Sutherland & Martin Hunter, Colorado Springs

SOUTHERN REGION

Robert Hill, Sr. & Mark Boumenot, Fayetteville

Don Nikolich & David Pridgen, Memphis Center

Jonathan Graves, Orlando

Lynn Powers, Jacksonville Center

William Thompson, Jacksonville

Brandi Norberg & Lawrence Gheri, Miami Center

Eric Stein & David Miller, West Palm Beach

Michael Minlschmidt, Asheville

Kendle Anspach, Miami Center

SOUTHWEST REGION

Paul Seifert, Roswell

John Charlton, Lake Charles

Ronald Cecil & Anthony Ruffino, Houston Intercontinental

Joe Corder, Victoria

David "AU" Westbrook, Dallas/Fort Worth

Joseph E. Friend, Dallas/Fort Worth

Brian Haag, Houston Center

Larry Gardner, Dallas Addison

WESTERN PACIFIC REGION

Roger Giles, Southern California TRACON

David Clegg, Santa Barbara



