



15th ANNUAL
ARCHIE LEAGUE
MEDAL OF SAFETY
AWARDS

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 18, 2019

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WELCOME

As we celebrate the 15th annual Archie League Medal of Safety Awards and the Region X Commitment to Safety Award, we are reminded that our members' work ensuring that our National Airspace System is safe and efficient is nothing short of heroic.

Named after the first air traffic controller, Archie League, this award represents the core function of our membership and profession: using our unique skills, mindset, training, and experience to positively influence the events under our control.

Our program honors dedicated men and women who demonstrated the very best examples of skill and professionalism this year. Each of our award winners faced a unique situation in which their ability to think quickly and remain calm under pressure was tested. These 11 events represent our members' relentless commitment to safety.

To our award winners and all our nominees, congratulations on a job well done! And to all of our NATCA members who nominated these deserving individuals, thank you for your commitment to this program and to our profession. Enjoy the banquet!

Paul Rinaldi
President

Patricia Gilbert
Executive Vice President

SELECTION PANEL

NATCA members nominate their colleagues to receive the Archie League Medal of Safety. A selection panel chooses award recipients from the nominees in each region.



The 2019 Archie League Medal of Safety Awards selection panel included (from left to right) Air Line Pilots Association, Int'l (ALPA) Aviation Safety Chairman Capt. Steve Jangelis, NATCA Director of Safety and Technology Jim Ullmann, and General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA) President and CEO, Pete Bunce.



REGION X COMMITMENT TO SAFETY AWARD

Michael Collins

Michael Collins retired last year after having served the National Airspace System (NAS), the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and NATCA with a deep commitment to improving safety.

Collins was a founding member of both NATCA's Aircraft Certification (AIR) bargaining unit and the Seattle Local Engineers Northwest Mountain (ENM) safety committee. He was on the NATCA negotiating team with National Safety Committee (NSC) Chairman Steve Hansen and ENM retired member Mike McRae for the AIR voluntary safety reporting process. He also served over five years as NATCA's Region X AIR representative on the NSC. In that capacity, he participated in monthly NASA safety team meetings and authored and coordinated submissions on NATCA comments to aircraft Airworthiness Directives (ADs), exemptions, and proposed rulemaking.

He also drafted and coordinated comments to numerous FAA regulatory proposals, pointing out safety issues that should be addressed on transport airplanes.

AIR member Tomaso DiPaolo from the Engineers Great Lakes Region noted that Collins was one of two founding NATCA reps on the Safety Review Process (SRP) panel that reviewed and made safety determinations on all aircraft certification SRP reports. The SRP replaced the FAA's Safety Issues Reporting System (SIRS) for NATCA-covered AIR employees.

"Dozens of safety recommendations were created by SRP and forwarded to FAA top management for implementation," DiPaolo said. "He was instrumental in helping to improve the air safety system in AIR these past few decades."

AIR member Della Swartz from the Region X local in Anchorage, Alaska, said Collins "advocated tirelessly for safety within the FAA, even when that conflicted with his management."

As the AIR representative on the NSC, Swartz said Collins brought safety concerns within AIR to the attention of NATCA leadership. "He wrote white papers to explain the issues, as well as taking the lead in writing comments to FAA rulemaking on

behalf of NATCA to ensure our safety concerns were heard,” she said. “Mike never forgot that safety is the reason we are here and come to work every day. His unwavering passion for safety is truly inspirational.”

AIR Rep Scott Odle noted that while Collins was on the NSC, he worked on the initial development of some of the new safety training programs that AIR employees now enjoy. This includes the Aircraft Accident Investigation Safety (AAIS) Program, and employee fall protection and hearing conservation programs for AIR employees.

Odle said Collins was also a member of the Federal Aviation Regulation (FAR) Part 21 Safety Management Systems Aviation Rulemaking Committee (SMSARC). His duties within the FAA were to ensure the safety of aircraft designs. He did that, Odle said, by ensuring that the final design was an FAA AIR Service-approved design that complied with the FARs.

Added Odle, commenting on Collins’s eight years as the lead Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Rep for NATCA AIR: “He worked extensively in service to his fellow co-workers on the Northwest Mountain Regional Office move and the building issues associated with the move. That included such safety-related items as water and indoor air quality at the new building.”

The Region X Commitment to Safety Award is given annually to a Region X member who has shown a profound dedication to ensuring the safety of the NAS. The award is peer-nominated, and any Region X member in good standing can be nominated for work done in their role as an aviation safety professional.



» Region X Regional
Vice President Curt Howe:

Mike quickly identifies and comprehends the science and other aspects of safety management systems. He boldly presents his case for safety, whether to make an aircraft safer, improve work conditions for his co-workers, or improve the safety of the NAS.



ALASKAN REGION

Gabriel Zeifman, Juneau ATCT

On the night of April 9, 2019, recently certified professional controller (CPC) Gabriel Zeifman was alone in the tower cab at Juneau International Airport (JNU). The pilot of a 1979 Mooney M20J, N201N, was on one of the last legs of a cross-country trip from his home in Hartford, Conn. He departed from Fairbanks, Alaska, and was near completion of the four hour, eight minute flight through unfamiliar terrain.

An Anchorage Center controller cleared the aircraft for the LDA X approach to Runway 8 at Juneau when communications were transferred to Zeifman at JNU. The pilot checked on, saying he was, “on the visual approach to Runway 8,” contrary to the clearance given. Zeifman immediately recognized that the pilot appeared high for the visual on a six-mile final at 5,000 feet, and that he was approved to join the downwind if necessary. His location put him about a mile north of the approach course and in close proximity to terrain.

With no moon to illuminate the terrain and clouds obscuring the landscape, Zeifman feared that the

pilot did not have the airport in sight and would be unable to orient himself to complete the visual approach. The pilot stated that he was “cleared for visual and lost track of time.” At this point, Zeifman began to question if he was in fact cleared for the visual as he appeared confused, disoriented, and tired.

The pilot of N201N questioned what traffic pattern was needed, and Zeifman instructed him to fly the right downwind, joining at midfield to avoid the high terrain. The pilot didn’t respond and Zeifman immediately tells the pilot that there is high terrain off the left. Zeifman made a quick call to ZAN to confirm the clearance. The controller at ZAN confirmed Zeifman’s instinct and stated that he had not been cleared for a visual approach.

With a confused pilot in the dark, Zeifman had to work to understand his situation and determine the best course of action to get the pilot on the ground safely. Pilots and controllers must work as a team to ensure safety, and when one side of that team is unable to communicate effectively, the other must

work harder to determine the best course of action and give clear instructions that can be executed properly.

Zeifman asked the pilot if he had the airport in sight and he responded that he did. After a back and forth discussion about where to join, the pilot was struggling on the visual approach to maneuver to the airport without getting too close to terrain. Zeifman continued to give suggested headings for the pilot to avoid the terrain, and suggested he fly over the field to ensure he had it in sight. Zeifman advised the pilot to make a 180 degree turn to the left to rejoin the lead-in lights for the approach. The pilot reoriented the aircraft and joined the final for Runway 8.

After hearing about this incident, Miami Center Vice President and Disaster Response Committee Chair Tom Flanary nominated Zeifman for the Alaskan Region Archie League Award. “This example is the exact textbook situation that leads to controlled flight into terrain (CFIT) in so many cases,” Flanary said. “Pilots think they know where they are, but they’re usually around unfamiliar places. They’re tired and get behind the power curve and then start rushing to make up for it. When they rush, they start making mistakes, usually descending too quickly, and end up colliding with an obstacle. Luckily, Gabe’s attentiveness to the operation and situation allowed him to recognize the confusion early on, and because of that, he was able to clarify things and issue control instructions to the pilot before the situation unraveled, saving the pilot’s life.”



» Alaskan Regional Vice President Clint Lancaster:

Sometimes a controller's intuition and willingness to look further into a situation can be the deciding factor in a potentially unsafe event. By staying focused and asking a few extra questions, Gabe likely saved the life of a pilot that was unfamiliar with the airport and the often harsh southeast Alaskan terrain.



CENTRAL REGION

Andrew Crabtree, Kansas City Center

On August 14, 2018, Andy Crabtree was working the Controller in Charge position (CIC) in the Flint Hills Area at Kansas City Center (ZKC). At approximately noon, the controller working Sector 62 noticed a possible problem with an aircraft under his control.

N2744Y, a Cessna 340, was traveling at Flight Level 230 deviating around thunderstorms trying to get to South Greenwood airport in Indianapolis, IN. The controller working sector 62 issued multiple control instructions to the aircraft, trying to vector him around a line of thunderstorms. When it was clear the pilot of N2744Y was not following the control instructions and still headed toward a line of storms, the controller asked Crabtree for help.

Crabtree quickly grabbed a headset and started listening to the aircraft in question. Based on the sluggishness of the pilot responses, Crabtree inferred that he could be suffering from hypoxia. Crabtree has been a pilot for 20 years and has been trained to recognize the early warning signs of hypoxia. Andy sprang into action to help the sector 62 controller aid this pilot in need. Crabtree instructed the controller to relay life saving measures to the pilot. He was told to put on an oxygen mask, and the controller started issuing descent control instructions. As the pilot regained composure from increased oxygen and a descent to 10,000 feet, he was able to avoid the line of thunderstorms and keep control of the aircraft.

The pilot continued to his destination and landed without incident. He later called Kansas City Center to express his gratitude and said without the help of the controllers looking out for him, the outcome may have been much different. Crabtree used his experience as an aviator while working the CIC position to spearhead a team effort to save this pilot's life.



» Central Regional
Vice President Aaron Merrick:
The situational awareness and experience of Andy no doubt prevented what was quickly becoming a dire situation for the pilot of N2744Y. Andy's experience and professionalism was on display and likely saved a life that day.



EASTERN REGION

Brian Rabinowitz, New York TRACON

It was a routine takeoff from Westchester County Airport (HPN) in White Plains, N.Y., for N142KR on Dec. 13, 2018. The single-engine 2009 Mooney Acclaim Type S (M20) departed Runway 16 after obtaining clearance from New York TRACON (N90), which had coordinated with HPN ATCT on a 90-degree left hand turn and a climb to 3,000 feet.

Things started to get busy for controller Brian Rabinowitz, a 10-year veteran at N90. He immediately observed the Mooney pilot not adhering to the pre-coordinated instructions. The aircraft was flying erratically, initially turning to the northeast, then to the south-southwest, and then back to the east. HPN ATCT called, reporting that the aircraft needed to return. It was solid instrument meteorological conditions (IMC), with 1.5-mile visibility and moderate snow. HPN then switched control of the aircraft to Rabinowitz. The pilot was at 1,500 feet and requested a “re-landing” at HPN.

“I could tell from the pilot’s voice that something was wrong, but at that time didn’t know the severity of the issue,” Rabinowitz said. “I asked the M20 if he was declaring an emergency which he did by saying he lost his autopilot and GPS.”

Rabinowitz said that he treated this as an emergency situation from the tone of voice that the pilot had.

Rabinowitz broke off the aircraft that he had on approach and spun them out of the way. He then instructed the Mooney pilot to climb to an altitude of 2,000 feet. But the pilot declined to do that because he said he didn’t want to fly into the clouds.

“I found this odd to be an issue if he was just having GPS and autopilot issues,” Rabinowitz said. “At this point, I asked the pilot where it looked clearer – off his left or right, and he said left. He also told me he was in the clouds. I calmly told the pilot I was gonna set him up for a left base to (Runway) 16 when he

told me he couldn't do an ILS (instrument landing system approach). I turned him northwest-bound to get him lined up towards the airport and away from the clouds."

Rabinowitz then told the pilot to start "a nice shallow descent" of about 300 feet per minute and get the aircraft slowed down. He turned him in for a straight in approach for Runway 16 on about a three-mile final when the pilot reported that he still didn't see the airport.

The pilot continued in, slowly descending, when he finally saw the airport about a mile ahead. Rabinowitz cleared him to land on Runway 16 after the N90 controller in charge coordinated with HPN Tower.

Rabinowitz later found out the extent of the pilot's difficulties after speaking with the HPN tower controller. The pilot had a total electrical failure and was just using a compass for the headings Rabinowitz was issuing him.



» Eastern Regional
Vice President Rich Santa:

Brian exemplified the qualities that are expected of the highly trained and highly qualified controllers of NATCA. Users of the NAS depend upon this kind of work to ensure they safely arrive at their destination. The professionalism and commitment to safety exemplified by NATCA controllers day in and day out is awe-inspiring.



GREAT LAKES REGION

Nicholas Ferro and Charles Terry, Indianapolis Center



On Feb. 6, 2019, Dr. Bernard Heckman and his wife were flying their Cessna T210N (N5132C) from Montgomery County Airpark in Gaithersburg, Md., to Lake Cumberland Regional Airport in Somerset, Ky. They were on an instrument flight rules (IFR) flight plan and were flying in high terrain (037 minimum IFR altitude) with many obstacles. The weather had started to deteriorate.

A controller working the flight at Indianapolis Center (ZID) noticed the track of N5132C change to a southerly heading. When asked if he was deviating for weather, Dr. Heckman said no, and assured the controller he was correcting his course back towards Somerset (SME). But then the SME airport manager called ZID to inquire about a low-flying aircraft. She

had been called by 911 operators with reports that an aircraft was flying dangerously low.

Dr. Heckman missed his approach to SME due to the weather and then seemed disoriented and was having trouble flying the aircraft. ZID controller Nick Ferro assisted Dr. Heckman in identifying London-Corbin Airport (LOZ) as a suitable alternative for landing. Ferro called for fellow ZID controller Charles Terry, who is also a pilot, and asked him to plug in on the D-side. They soon traded places at Terry's request. Ferro worked hard on the D-side, managing resources and helping Terry prioritize and manage the other aircraft in the sector.

Terry noticed short turns left and right followed by altitude inconsistencies. He asked Dr. Heckman if he had the aircraft on auto pilot and if it was coupled with his GPS. It was. Terry then attempted to vector the aircraft to get him established on a portion of the approach at LOZ. The aircraft was again pointed away from the airport and had a ground speed of only 49 knots.

Terry issued multiple corrective headings and a minimum altitude to maintain. Dr. Heckman seemed to be circling when he said “almost VFR, just a bit more descending to get there.” Soon after, with the aircraft at only 3,300 feet and only 31 knots, Terry declared an emergency for Dr. Heckman. “I think the 31 knot ground airspeed was an anomalous readout due to the pilot spiraling the aircraft down (the 210 stalls at 60 kts IAS [indicated airspeed] clean, with flaps and gear retracted, and 53 KIAS landing configuration),” Terry said. “While there was wind aloft affecting the ground speed, it was only 10-15 knots. After all the random turns and lack of altitude control, it was my impression that the pilot likely hadn’t gone through the landing checklist, and the most important item for the 210 is the landing gear.”

Dr. Heckman cancelled IFR flight and said he was out of the clouds. Terry called visual flight rules (VFR) conditions but Dr. Heckman’s VFR altitude was only a few hundred feet above terrain. Terry knew from experience there were many un-lit towers in the vicinity, so he stood up and correlated sectional chart information with video map location and called obstructions. “There were a few low altitude alerts issued and a low speed advisory,” Terry said.

Finally, Dr. Heckman confirmed that he had ground contact and that his landing gear was down. Terry asked that he call in to ZID so they could make sure he was safe. Soon after, the aircraft was safely on the ground at LOZ.

ZID learned later that the aircraft had some work done on the engine block heater the day before the incident. Dr. Heckman said it seemed he had popped a bolt or two loose and was sputtering oil all over the windshield. But neither problem was raised on frequency during the flight or during the phone call with ZID afterward.



» Great Lakes Regional
Vice President Drew MacQueen:
Nick Ferro and Charles Terry's quick thinking and tremendous teamwork was the clear difference between one of two outcomes; an almost certain fatality, or a routine safe landing. Not surprisingly, this type of professionalism and work ethic is nothing new for Nick and Charles. They have made the impossible look routine, and are an absolute credit to their profession.



GREAT LAKES REGION

Shane Boulds and Justin Dokken,
Minneapolis Center



On April 2, 2019, this particular sector at ZMP was staffed with a partially-certified radar controller, Shane Boulds, and a partially-certified radar associate controller, Justin Dokken. They had worked a Cessna 172 Skyhawk (N9181P), with a student pilot at the controls, south through their sector and had initiated a handoff to Grand Rapids (GRR) approach. GRR called back via the landline and advised that the pilot of N9181P was having some difficulty navigating in the windy conditions and was turning back to return to Traverse City (TVC).

When the pilot checked back in, she indicated that she had hit her head in the bumpy conditions, was having some trouble navigating, and wanted to

land at a nearby airport. Boulds began to describe available airports with the weather sequences. It was determined that the pilot was flying a solo flight and was not fully comfortable with her situation.

The pilot decided to land at Big Rapids (RQB) which had a strong crosswind component. Boulds used his own flight experiences to help keep the pilot focused and calm. He used several techniques to limit the amount of stress for the pilot and helped her to stay engaged in her training and rely on the lessons she had learned.

As the Skyhawk neared Big Rapids and was making a visual approach, Boulds maintained radio contact

with another overflight aircraft (N671EA, a TBM8 about to leave his airspace) to use as a relay for when the Skyhawk dropped below radar and radio coverage. Boulds asked that they remain on the frequency to ensure that N9181P landed safely and passed along the facility phone number to the student pilot.

Additionally, SKW7410, en route from Detroit to Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., was on the frequency during the event. Jack Forrest, the captain of SKW7410, called ZMP FacRep Tony Walsh the next day and also wrote a note.

“About halfway through the flight, we were in contact with Minneapolis Center. Seemed to be a relatively quiet day for them,” Forrest wrote. “Halfway through briefing our approach into CIU, we hear the controller begin to give assistance to what seemed to be a low-time student pilot. We couldn’t hear her, however it was clear she was having trouble. The controller did an AMAZING job at calming her down, walking her through what seemed to be an approach with strong winds/gusts, and low ceilings, as well as giving her multiple options for alternate airports.

“How he helped her keep the aircraft under control was spot on. Suggesting flap settings/speeds for her aircraft, and other great pointers. From what I know, she eventually landed safely somewhere. A big kudos to that controller for keeping his cool, and helping out the pilot.”



» Great Lakes Regional
Vice President Drew MacQueen:
Shane Boulds and Justin Dokken performed like well-trained, confident, seasoned veterans, despite being only partially certified when they assisted N9181P. Shane and Justin’s incredible teamwork, combined with Shane’s years of flying experience, undoubtedly helped prevent an almost certain tragedy. While some might say their actions on that fateful day were nothing short of heroic, they’ll simply tell you that they were just doing the job they’ve been trained to do – ensure the safety of the NAS.



NEW ENGLAND REGION

Christopher Corcoran, Providence ATCT

Instrument flight rules (IFR) conditions were in place across a large area of southeastern Massachusetts on June 24, 2018, affecting air traffic of all types and altitudes.

The pilot of a single-engine Cessna 182 Skylane, flying with two passengers to New Bedford Regional Airport (EWB), located between Providence, R.I., and Cape Cod, found himself stuck above heavy cloud cover. Making matters much more serious, he was having instrument problems and was unable to navigate. He was unable to maintain either altitude or speed.

The pilot, who was IFR-rated, made three unsuccessful attempts to land using the Runway 5 instrument landing system (ILS) at New Bedford. All three failures were due to navigational issues. After the third attempt, in which the pilot approached the runway at 600 feet below the published altitude due to unreliable instruments, Providence ATCT (PVD) controller Chris Corcoran, working in the facility's terminal radar approach control room, instructed

the pilot to land at Providence – the airport with the most favorable weather of all airports in the immediate vicinity.

But the pilot stated that he did not have approach plates – printed charts for instrument approach procedures – for Providence, and he was continuing to have navigational issues causing speed and altitude fluctuations. The probable cause was an air leak in his plane, creating inaccurate altimeter readings of 600 and 800 feet, different from the altitudes showing on Corcoran's radar screen. Corcoran declared an emergency for the pilot and vectored him toward Providence.

“I put him on a heading and almost right on final started slowly stepping him down,” Corcoran said. “I asked him at every stepdown what his altitude was indicating. He broke out of the clouds. We switched him to the tower, and he landed safely.”

Corcoran, a 10-year veteran air traffic controller, had support from PVD Operations Supervisor Andrew

Martinez throughout the event. Martinez cleared the airspace as the pilot, at times disoriented, struggled to follow navigational instructions from Corcoran over the hour-long event. He also provided weather information for adjacent airports. Corcoran disseminated pilot reports of actual weather conditions encountered by aircraft in flight – which proved helpful in decision-making during the emergency.

Together, Corcoran and Martinez ensured the pilot had the most up-to-date weather for the area. Martinez utilized other air traffic personnel in the operation with precision approach experience to help aid the controller in the step-down of the aircraft. Martinez and Corcoran worked together to point out aircraft in adjacent airspace that had potential to stray into Providence airspace and present a potential hazard. Martinez also ensured emergency personnel were ready to respond.

“Our teamwork at Providence showed this day through Chris and Andrew,” said NATCA PVD FacRep Pete Geddis. “Day in and day out, we all work together, whether in the tower, TRACON, or off position. These are the events that make all of us proud of our job as controllers.”



» New England Regional
Vice President Mick Devine:

None of us know how we'd react in a moment like that, and Chris was probably no different. However, when all around him became chaotic, Chris became the calm that moment needed to create a safe landing of what otherwise could have been a catastrophic event. A true example of pure professionalism!



NEW ENGLAND REGION

Neil Cospito, Michael Jacobson, and Jeffrey Aulbach, Boston Center



On a snowy Tuesday afternoon, Nov. 20, 2018, Boston Center (ZBW) air traffic controller Neil Cospito was working low altitude airspace over northern Vermont and New Hampshire.

Cospito was working an F-16 (VENOM01) from the 158th Fighter Wing of the Vermont Air National Guard, based in Burlington, Vt. The jet had been holding outside of Burlington (BTV) due to poor weather conditions. The weather spanned from the Canadian border down through the Catskill Mountains in southeastern New York and over to the Atlantic coast. It didn't appear to be improving.

Cospito searched the region for airports with suitable weather conditions. The pilot of VENOM01 informed Cospito that he would be diverting to Syracuse, N.Y. (SYR). Cospito cleared the aircraft direct SYR and issued a climb clearance. He asked the pilot on his estimated time en route and his fuel remaining. The pilot replied, "15 minutes en route and 15 minutes of fuel."



After the pilot told Cospito his ETA and fuel remaining were the same, Cospito knew that this was an emergency aircraft. It was considered that when Cospito handed off the aircraft to fellow NATCA ZBW members Jeff Aulbach and Mike Jacobson, who were working busy airspace over northern and central New York. Aulbach was also working a flight of two KC-135 tankers (BISON21), which were maneuvering in a refueling track to eventually rendezvous with another receiver. Jacobson worked the D side when Aulbach took the handoff and did all coordination with SYR to ensure the weather was suitable to send VENOM01 there.

Aulbach asked VENOM01 if he would like to rendezvous with the tanker on his way to SYR and asked the tanker flight if they would be able to assist the fighter with refueling. At this point, the fighter was in an emergency fuel situation.

“I don’t know if we could arrange that, if you can, or if you want, be interested in getting a little refuel prior to going to Syracuse,” Aulbach asked.

“Yes!” came the immediate and resounding reply from the fighter pilot.

Aulbach then provided intercept vectors to the tanker and relayed vital communications and position information to both aircraft.

VENOM01 would have one shot to make an approach and landing at snowy SYR. A successful approach was not a sure thing, with the SYR weather not that much better than anywhere else in the Northeast. “It was my opinion that the emergency refueling was the best option over a risky approach in marginal weather,” Aulbach said.

After BISON21 and VENOM01 joined together to refuel, the pilot of BISON21 informed Aulbach and Jacobson that the flight would need to stray out of the refueling area to ensure that VENOM01 would successfully “get on the boom.” The flight strayed into a busy flight corridor between Utica and Albany, N.Y., causing several flights to be vectored away from the emergency aircraft. Jacobson assisted Aulbach by coordinating with adjacent sectors about the flight.

After the refueling, BISON21 stayed in the area (BISON22 left to return to Niagara Falls) until VENOM01 made a successful landing at SYR.

The VENOM01 pilot expressed his appreciation.

“Thanks for your help today,” he said. “That was a nice job with getting that tanker involved.”

“VENOM1 no problem, my pleasure,” Aulbach said.



» New England Regional
Vice President Mick Devine:

*The quick thinking, astute
situational awareness, and
incredible teamwork by our
brothers at Boston Center
saved the life of VENOM01.
This is typical of the actions our
brothers and sisters at ZBW
show each and every day.*

NW MOUNTAIN REGION



Joseph Asmundson, Devin Carlisto, Nicole Coffey, and Matthew Rhea, Seattle Center



Midday on Saturday, April 6, 2019, near the border of Washington and Idaho, Shane Daily was piloting his two-seat, single-engine Lancair 320 when he encountered instrument meteorological conditions (IMC) while flying visual flight rules (VFR). Daily was not instrument flight rules (IFR) certified.



“I’m on the autopilot, still trying to climb out of this, but unfortunately I am in the soup and have no visibility at all,” Daily reported on frequency.



Seattle Center (ZSE) air traffic controller Joe Asmundson was working a low altitude sector. He declared an emergency for the aircraft. He then assisted Daily in trying to re-establish visual meteorological conditions (VMC) but Daily was stuck on top of the clouds at altitudes of up to 20,000 feet.

Asmundson, with the help of other controllers, was able to split a sector off to better serve the emergency and obtain weather information to assist the pilot in finding an airport with VMC conditions. In all, he worked with the aircraft for over an hour, eventually guiding him to a hole in the clouds 50 miles south of Daily’s airport of intended landing in Lewiston, Idaho.

“It’s getting larger and looking very welcoming,” Daily said on frequency in describing the hole.

Asmundson was assisted by Matt Rhea, who split off two low altitude sectors so Asmundson could focus more closely on the emergency, and also Nicole Coffey, who signed on to the D-side to help find VFR airports, and Devin Carlisto, who eventually relieved Nicole after getting

a weather briefing from the Center Weather Service Unit (CWSU). Carlisto also coordinated visible satellite images on the Weather and Radar Processor (WARP) monitor to assist Asmundson in guiding the aircraft to areas of apparent breaks in the clouds.

Said Asmundson to Daily: “Lewiston Tower said that there is a clearing right above the airport right now. How does everything look for you?”

“Everything’s looking really good. I’m just east of the airport now. I found a large hole,” Daily reported, adding that he was expecting to come out the bottom of it “real shortly.”

Daily said he had a good view of the ground and Asmundson worked to help set him up for his approach.

In an email to ZSE Air Traffic Manager Candice Larson after the event, Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport Federal Contract Tower (LWS) Air Traffic Manager Wendy Fredrickson praised the team:

“I wanted to share my deepest gratitude and appreciation to the Sector 8 team for their outstanding customer service. I can tell you without reservation that the pilot landed in good hands when he arrived at LWS shaken and anxious from being caught in the clouds with a VFR rating because of your staff. The ZSE Sector 8 team went above and beyond exemplary customer service with their kindness, patience, sincere care for this gentleman’s well-being, wealth of experience and knowledge as professional air traffic control specialists. Please pass along our gratitude; we are very thankful to get to work with such a great team!”



» Northwest Mountain Regional Vice President Alex Navarro III:

I am honored to be able to call these extraordinary controllers my peers. In a situation that could have ended in tragedy, they banded together and exemplified teamwork to utilize all manner of National Airspace System assets and experience in order to ensure that Shane could make it home safely that day. Only through constant vigilance, utmost professionalism, and pride in their craft were these controllers able to maintain the excellence that was displayed that afternoon. We in the Northwest Mountain Region, as well as NATCA, could not be more proud.



SOUTHERN REGION

Paul Ray Keeling, Memphis Center

On Feb. 23, 2019, a single-engine Socata TBM 930 (N897TF) departed Paducah, Ky., en route to Houston. But about 50 miles south of Paducah, the pilot experienced problems in controlling the aircraft and was not responding to air traffic controllers.

The high-altitude controller at Memphis Center (ZME) was able to regain communication with the pilot and coordinated a lower altitude clearance with Ray Keeling, the ZME R7 (McKellar Low Altitude) controller. Shortly afterward, the pilot was switched to Keeling's frequency. The pilot checked in with Keeling but seemed disorientated and was having difficulty maintaining altitude control of the aircraft. Keeling questioned the pilot about the situation and discovered that the aircraft lost pressurization. Initially, the pilot requested a clearance to 10,000 feet to stabilize the cabin pressure.

Keeling advised the pilot of the position of McKellar-Sipes Regional Airport (MKL) in Jackson, Tenn.

- a NATCA-represented Federal Contract Tower
- and also of the line of thunderstorms and heavy

precipitation to the west of his position. While the pilot weighed his options, Keeling contacted MKL Tower and advised them that he had a potential emergency aircraft inbound. At that point, the pilot requested a clearance to MKL. Keeling cleared the aircraft to 3,000 feet, advised the pilot of the location of the airport, the current weather conditions and winds, and advised him of the approaches available at the airport. McKellar was experiencing marginal visual flight rules (VFR) conditions at the time, with a broken layer at 1,000 feet and an overcast layer just below the minimum instrument flight rules (IFR) altitude in the area. Keeling gave more updates on other potential landing options in case the pilot wished to avoid the approaching storms, or find an airport with VFR conditions.

Keeling coordinated with adjacent controllers in an attempt to find better weather conditions. When he gave the pilot the information about other options, the pilot chose to continue to McKellar. Keeling continued to provide updates to the pilot. During this exchange, the pilot stated that he was “having

a little trouble ... controlling the plane for some reason.” Immediately thereafter, the aircraft descended below the minimum IFR altitude (MIA). Keeling immediately informed the pilot of nearby obstructions and provided guidance to avoid them. He also gave an update on the McKellar weather, since a special observation had just been published, and provided navigational guidance to assist the pilot in aligning himself with the final approach course at McKellar. Keeling stayed in constant communication with the pilot until he was established on the Required Navigation (RNAV) for Runway 20.

The pilot landed safely at McKellar Airport. Keeling’s composure in this situation helped save the pilot’s life. He immediately understood the effects that the pilot was encountering. With a loss of pressurization, disorientation, and an aircraft that was difficult to control, Keeling was able to step in and advise the pilot when he descended to a dangerously low altitude in close proximity to obstructions.



» Southern Regional Vice President Jim Marinitti:

Ray worked the situation like a conductor leads an orchestra. He coordinated with other sectors, kept the pilot abreast of changing weather conditions and alternative options and, most importantly, was able to reassure the pilot that he would get him safely on the ground.

You never know when you will have to respond to an emergency situation. Ray did not hesitate; he reacted to the moment at hand and was the calm, cool, and collected voice that pilots depend on. He utilized all of his resources at his disposal. Ray showed how the intense training that controllers endure comes to life in situations like this. That, along with his professionalism and knowledge of the area, showed that failure was not an option.



SOUTHWEST REGION

Michael Schawinsky, Houston TRACON

Over the 15 years of the Archie League Medal of Safety Award program, we have seen a few controllers win multiple times in their region. But one controller handling two separate emergencies in the same airspace at the same time? This is unprecedented.

That's precisely what happened on Feb. 15, 2019. Controller Michael Schawinsky, a 12-year veteran who has worked the past five years at Houston TRACON (I90), was working the SanJac satellite position (B). The weather in Houston was instrument flight rules (IFR) with low ceilings, although reports indicated that there was better weather closer to the coast.

Shortly after sitting down, Schawinsky accepted a handoff on N1221U, a Cessna 172. The pilot appeared to be in distress, making tight circles and descending in the IFR conditions. After the transferring controller was able to get the aircraft level and on a radar vector, they were switched to Schawinsky's frequency. He then vectored the aircraft for a Required Navigation (RNAV) approach

into Ellington Airport (EFD), located southeast of downtown Houston. It didn't take long before it became evident to the team at I90 that the aircraft was still in trouble. He had trouble flying headings and maintaining altitude. At one point, the airspeed seemed especially low.

"I'm showing 50 knots across the ground there now," Schawinsky told the pilot, reminding him to check his airspeed.

"Roger that, I'll pick it up," the pilot replied.

Unfortunately, the aircraft was unable to successfully join the final approach course for EFD. Schawinsky declared an emergency for the aircraft and the pilot requested to go to Scholes International Airport in Galveston (GLS) and attempt a visual approach. The pilot was unable to fly an instrument approach and the weather was simply too poor at other closer airports to try an approach.

After giving the pilot an initial vector for GLS, another aircraft also declared an emergency. It was N733ZZ, another Cessna 172, which was doing practice

approaches in the area when they experienced a fire in the cabin and appeared to be losing altitude. Without skipping a beat, Schawinsky gave the pilot information regarding the closest airport and prominent obstructions in the area. Fortunately, the pilot was able to extinguish the fire and regain control of the aircraft.

After initially requesting to go to La Porte Municipal Airport (T41), Schawinsky advised that they go to Galveston, where the weather was better, and attempt a visual approach. He read the weather to both aircraft, starting with N1221U. Both emergency aircraft were then successfully vectored to Galveston for visual approaches.

“I generally transmit at a much quicker cadence on the radio, but once I realized N1221U was under distress, I began to speak very slowly, plainly, and calmly to him,” Schawinsky said. “I did not want to alert to the pilot that I also felt that his situation was as dire as he might have felt it was. I wanted to make him feel as comfortable as possible.

“N1221U was very hesitant entering the clouds. So I allowed him to stay just above the cloud layer en route to GLS to keep him more comfortable. I got him lined up exactly where I wanted him to be before descending him down into and through the clouds as late as I could to avoid any turns in IFR conditions and minimize his time in IFR flight, getting him to the bases as quickly as possible.”

Schawinsky’s expertise, calm demeanor, attention to detail, and professionalism throughout the events were exemplary. His performance may have saved several lives that day.



» Southwest Regional Vice President Andrew LeBovidge:

So often, maintaining composure is the most critical aspect of our job when encountering pilots in distress. On this day, our brother Michael Schawinsky provided a measured and positive connection to two pilots in need, and guided the six souls on board those aircraft to safe landings. It is this type of performance that makes us all proud to be air traffic controllers.



WESTERN PACIFIC REGION

Michael Tamez, So. California TRACON

Those familiar with the Los Angeles Basin area of Southern California are used to plentiful sunshine. But icing? That's a rarity.

But in the middle of winter – Feb. 17, 2019 – moderate rime icing was reported throughout the L.A. Basin, with a freezing level of 4,000 feet reported. And that's not all. Instrument meteorological conditions (IMC) with low ceilings were prevalent, along with moderate turbulence. Add in high terrain, and conditions were very challenging.

N737EC, a Cessna Skyhawk 172, departed Chino (CNO) on an instrument flight rules (IFR) plan to Apple Valley Airport (APV). The relatively short distance normally is covered over Interstate 15 and the San Gabriel Mountains. But on this day, a re-route was needed due to the significant weather to the north along with normal route. The new route required a minimum en route altitude (MEA) of 11,000 feet.

Southern California TRACON (SCT) air traffic controller Michael Tamez, who has spent his entire

12- year career at SCT, attempted to climb the aircraft several times to 11,000 in compliance with the MEA. He soon noticed that the aircraft was not climbing above 9,000 feet and had difficulty maintaining a constant heading. Though established on the airway, Tamez issued a vector heading of 180 for a climb and to avoid higher terrain.

“There's icing everywhere so use caution and maintain one-zero thousand,” Tamez said to the pilot.

But again, the aircraft was unable to maintain the assigned heading and altitude. Pilot reports were previously issued to the aircraft for reports of turbulence, icing, and precipitation. One pilot reported light to moderate icing. There was turbulence over the mountains in the Palm Springs area.

Tamez is also a pilot. He used that experience in this episode. He questioned the pilot of the possibility of experiencing icing. The pilot stated “affirmative.” Tamez immediately descended the aircraft to 6,000 feet in an attempt to prevent further icing. He asked

the pilot's intentions and provided several alternate destinations. The pilot ultimately decided on landing at Riverside (RAL), approximately 27 nautical miles northwest of his current position. He was issued the PDZ VOR frequency and instructed to proceed direct when able.

Tamez saw that the aircraft turned away from the PDZ VOR and back towards higher terrain. Again, with his experience as a pilot and a controller, Tamez determined there was a need to issue no gyro vectors. Through no gyro turns, Mr. Tamez was able to direct the aircraft towards lower terrain and descended the aircraft further, to 4,000 feet.

Upon reaching the lower altitude, the pilot made several comments suggesting they were "thawing" and started seeing the return of both their heading indicator as well as ground speed indicator. While being vectored for the RAL instrument landing system (ILS), the pilot reported the airport in sight and was cleared for a visual approach. After the aircraft safely landed at RAL, the pilot confirmed they had a malfunctioning pitot tube heater and lost several instruments due to icing.



» Western Pacific Regional
Vice President Joel Ortiz:

Mike's professionalism and calm demeanor in the face of adversity were truly commendable and the reasons a potential catastrophe was avoided. I had the privilege of working with Mike at SCT for over eight years. His performance is a reflection of the hard work and dedication I witnessed on a consistent basis. Mike, thank you for representing the NATCA brothers and sisters of SCT and the Western Pacific Region in such an incredible manner!



HONORABLE MENTION

NAL ★ Jonathan Eisenmayer, FAI ★ Mike Myers, A11 ★ Monique Stowers,
MRI ★ **NCE** ★ Jeff Volski, ZKC ★ Andrew Cullen, ZKC ★ Jason Cowden,
ZKC ★ Caryn Truscinski, ZKC ★ Dale Turner, ZKC ★ Michael Gardner, ZKC ★
Andrea Wolf, STL ★ **NEA** ★ Casey Whittaker, PCT ★ Sunil Chatani, PCT ★
Mathias Fridgen, PCT ★ Joe Mash, PCT ★ Jose Cruz, PCT ★ Bryan Carroll, PCT
★ Richard Quiggins, PCT ★ Andy Rhodes, PCT ★ Jeff Anderson, PCT ★ Sean
Mueller, PCT ★ Adam Olshanski, PCT ★ Robert Smolen, N90 ★ **NGL** ★ Ryan
Schile, ORD ★ Andrew Rice, ORD ★ Jerah Kavoosi, FCM ★ John Rappe, FCM
★ John Lesnak, ZOB ★ Alan Thomas, ZOB ★ Richard Capizzi, ZOB ★ Curtis
Josefick, ZOB ★ Sean Watson, ZOB ★ Randall Anderson III, ORD ★ Michael
McCabe, ORD ★ Nate Miller, MDW ★ Jacob Reddin, MKE ★ Anthony Luca,
MKE ★ Matthew Laiter, MDW ★ **NNE** ★ Scott Trafton, A90 ★ Lisa Orff, PWM

★ Elisa Muise, ZBW ★ Carlos Lebron-Thachar, BOS ★ **NNM** ★ Eric Steffen,
ZLC ★ Jake Zakrzewski, ZDV ★ Royce Bockelman, ZDV ★ James Ferguson, HIO
★ Jeffery Principe, BIL ★ Derrek Shroyer, BIL ★ Andrew Drury, S46 ★ Matt
Barsness, S46 ★ Candace Bond, S46 ★ Kim Brooks, S46 ★ Steve Hernandez,
S46 ★ Nick Hoggan, S46 ★ Kyle Hoover, S46 ★ Wayne Hygema, S46 ★ Amitesh
Sami, S46 ★ Matt Sharp, S46 ★ **NSO** ★ Taylor Ledger, ZMA ★ Adam Prinz,
CVG ★ Kevin Vaughn, ZJX ★ Craig Oldis, SDF ★ Mike Ryan, A80 ★ Joe Vargo,
A80 ★ Aaron Rathburn, A80 ★ Clint Cottrell, A80 ★ Bryan Hamm, ILM ★ Eric
Brake, BHM ★ Kelsey Barfield, BHM ★ Brian Liddle, A80 ★ Elena Nash, SRQ ★
Ryan Roberson, SAV ★ Travis Hans, DAB ★ Joe Koziuk, DAB ★ Don Nikolich,
ZME ★ Paul Behan, ZJX ★ **NSW** ★ Joel Brown, BTR ★ Tim Schneider, ZHU ★
Bryan Roberts, ZFW ★ Frank Ward, ZFW ★ Ben Parker, ZFW ★ Crystal Lingle,
ELP ★ Daniel Watson, ELP ★ **NWP** ★ Michael Gottfried, BFL ★ Joseph
Seimas, FAT ★ Annie Pen, CMA ★ Maurice Pitts, LAX ★ Kyle Shaw, LAX ★ Wendy
Postema, LAX ★ Christopher Finley, ZUA ★ Adam Yudman, SCT ★ Melissa
Benge, SCT ★ Ian Lewis, SCT ★ Stewart Merrell, PAO ★ Melanie Chipkin, SCT ★

