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**Incident Name:** taking off to drop on a grass and brush fire on Mt Baldy

**Date:** July 13, 1984, 1610 hours

**Personnel:** Ted Bell, Jr.

**Age:** 39

**Agency/Organization:** Sis Q Flying Service under contract with CDF (now CAL FIRE)

**Position:** Pilot

**Summary:** On July 13, 1984 Ted Bell in Tanker 92, the twin engine Grumman S2F air tanker, crashed three minutes after take off from the Ukiah airport. He was en route to a grass and brush fire on Mt Baldy near Clearlake. He flew up a canyon east of Talmadge he could not clear -- energy management (loss of control in flight: LOCIF). The airtanker was carrying 800 pounds of retardant and the temperature was 110 degrees which may have contributed to the crash.





## Maps

Very General Accident Location: east side of Cow Mountain, just above Mill Creek County Park

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{mosmap lat=' 39.092830'|lon='-123.337709'|marker='0'|text='very general accident location'}
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## Reports, Documentation, Lessons Learned

- July 14, 1984 Santa Rosa Press Democrat article:

Santa Rosa, Calif., Saturday, July 14, 1984

# Tanker pilot killed

## Plane crashes en route to fire

By STEVE HART

**TALMAGE** — A California Department of Forestry air tanker flying to a Lake County blaze crashed three minutes after take-off from Ukiah Airport Friday afternoon, killing the pilot and sparking a small wildfire.

The pilot, Ted Bell, 36, Santa Rosa, was a veteran firefighter who had survived two accidents in the last two years. He worked for So Q Flying Service, a firm hired by the Department of Forestry to maintain and operate the fire-fighting aircraft.

The twin engine Grumman S2F crashed into a wooded hillside a few feet from Mill Creek Road on Cow Mountain, about five miles east of Ukiah.

Department of Forestry Fire Capt. Leo Logan said he timed the air tanker as it took off from the Ukiah airport at 4:07 p.m. Friday.

He said the tanker was slow to get off the ground because of its 800-pound load of fire retardant and the 118-degree temperature at the time.

"It needed a more runway than Page 1  
**Crash**



Department of Forestry Capt. Bob Burkett surveys the plane wreckage on Cow Mountain east of Ukiah.

# Mt. Baldy fire claims heavy toll

By RAY SMITH

A raging grass and brush fire on Mt. Baldy near Clearlake took a heavy toll before it was contained Friday night.

An air tanker pilot was killed, a firefighter was injured and a fire department, Craig Sovel, suffered superficial burns on his right arm and right chest. He was treated at Redwood Hospital and released.

The injured inmates were part of a crew of 12 that left Konocti Conservation camp in the van to fight the fire. Only five were still

serious injury in the department's history, he said.

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a course to the fire, east of Cow Mountain in Lake County, Logan said he left the tower at the Ukiah

airbase and reached the ground just in time to see black smoke coming from the spot on Cow Mountain where the air tanker crashed.

The time was 4:10 p.m. Logan said there was no distress call from the pilot prior to the crash.

The 36-foot aircraft shattered when it struck the hillside above Mill Creek County Park. An explosion sparked a five-acre fire in the thick madrone woodland near the road.

Bell was dead at the scene. Nearby treestops were clipped as the aircraft approached the hillside, indicating that the plane was off course in a southerly direction and plunged steeply to earth.

Another Ukiah-based air tanker working on the Lake County blaze was diverted to the Cow Mountain fire, along with a helicopter "helitack" unit and ground crews from the Department of Forestry.

## Fire

foot Mt. Baldy. The vehicle rolled back and tipped over. All the injured were treated at Redwood Hospital and released.

The state Department of Forestry regional office in St. Helena said the fire consumed 100 acres of grass, brush and a few trees before it was contained about 10 p.m. Complete control was expected this morning.

Department of Forestry officials say they have no clue as to the cause of the crash.

First reports indicated the pilot dropped his load of retardant prior to the crash, indicating that he knew he was in trouble. However, Captain Logan said the load was still in the plane when it went down.

No one witnessed the crash, but nearby residents said they heard it go down.

Investigation teams from the National Transportation Safety Board, Federal Aviation Administration and Department of Forestry are expected to examine the crash scene today.

Bell was described as experienced in flying air tankers. The plane has been assigned to the forestry department's Ukiah air base for at least 15 years, according to department officials.

The aircraft, a reconditioned Navy submarine hunter, is more than 20 years old. Two of the craft are assigned to Ukiah. In July 1982 Bell was aboard a

DC4 over Marin County when it hit a tree. He piloted the aircraft back to the Sonoma County Airport.

Two months later he was at the controls of a So-Q Flying Service S2 when the landing gear apparently collapsed on landing at the same airport. The plane "nose over" near the terminal, but Bell was not injured.

Department officials said the Ukiah air tankers have been in use almost every day since the end of May because of number of wildfires.

The last air tanker to crash in Mendocino County was also a S2F dropping retardant on a blaze near Laytonville in August 1978.

The pilot, James Lippitt, 28, Larkspur, was killed. The fire was determined to have been caused by an arsonist, but the suspect was never tried because a judge ruled he confessed under pressure.

Another pilot later testified Lippitt crashed because he approached the fire too slowly and too steeply.

The fire started in a shed near Second Street just north of the Clearlake city limits and near Borax Lake.

Parker said the department thought it had the shed fire extinguished shortly after it started about 3 p.m. Air support was called off. However, a live ember flew into tall, dry grass behind the shed on a hill near the foot of the mountain.

The fire, about a mile north of Clearlake off Burns Valley Road and Eastlake Drive, quickly spread up the mountain and to the east.

He said he left the scene to check out some nearby spot fires, but from reports he learned the main fire unexpectedly swept over a crest to where the firefighters were lying in water trenches.

"Most of them ran laterally a downhill toward a burned area but Mike ran uphill and fell. 3 flames swept over him. It happened in a matter of seconds," he said sadly.

Mittitoda was carried in a hit to a forestry department helicopter and airlifted to Redwood Hospital. Later he was flown to a Chico burn center.

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**Crash** (Continued on Page 1)

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