Incident Name: Colorado Fire, Palo Colorado Canyon (North of Big Sur) near Monterey
Date: Accident date: 10/08/07; Death date: 10/9/2007 (CA Death Records)
Personnel: Matthew Richard Will
Age: 30
Agency/Organization: CAL FIRE
Position: Heavy Equipment Operator

Summary: Heavy Equipment Operator Will was driving a heavy bulldozer as he and other firefighters fought the Colorado Fire near Monterey on the morning of 10/8/2007. During operations, the bulldozer rolled over and crushed Heavy Equipment Operator Will. He was airlifted to a regional hospital but did not survive his injuries -- he died the next day.
Matthew Richard Will, a heavy fire equipment operator with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), died this morning as he battled the Colorado Fire in Monterey County on Monday, Oct. 8, 2007, when his bulldozer overturned. He was airlifted to San Jose Regional Medical Center with severe injuries and died the next day. Matt’s family is proud that many of his organs were donated.

It is with heartfelt sympathy that I send this message - a message that is a profound loss for CAL FIRE Heavy Equipment Operator (HFEO) - of flags at half staff at all department facilities in remembrance of Matthew Will.

Additional information will be forthcoming from CAL FIRE as it develops.

Matthew Will, a resident of Hollister, was assigned to Hollister Air Attack Base in the San Benito/Monterey Unit. He started with CAL FIRE, then known as CDF, on May 19, 2003, as a heavy fire equipment operator. He recently graduated from the department’s fire academy in Ione.

Matthew Will had also passed through the officer academy, making him eligible to become a captain, according to CAL Fire Battalion Chief Mark Edria. "He was just a great guy to be around," Edria said at a press conference Wednesday. "To know Matt was joyful and had a big heart and strong hands. He was willing to do anything for anyone, and he would go out of his way to help others."

In addition to driving the bulldozer on the front lines for CalFire, Will also worked in the air battle. Edria said as he pulled into work, Will would often be standing near the faded yellow chair with worn wooden armrests - which has been reupholstered with blue material - that is currently located in front of the Air Attack Base. It is a favorite spot that will be sure to struggle with in the wake the 30-year-old firefighter’s death.

CalFire Capt. Steve Norris, who directs air operations and flies for the state’s fire department, met Will when the two began working together at the Hollister Air Attack Base in May 2003. Will was always there when CalFire needs him and is always willing to lend a hand when he can, Norris said. "He was just a great guy to be around," Edria said at a press conference Wednesday. "To know Matt was joyful and had a big heart and strong hands. He was willing to do anything for anyone, and he would go out of his way to help others."

At one point,when Will was driving down the steep hill, Norris offered to have an airplane dump water on high flames near his bulldozer. Will told Norris he would wait. It was the last time Will was seen alive. Norris was there Monday just before Will was injured. Will told Norris that the dirt was soft on a hill and he was concerned when he was working the top part of the fire, Norris said.

"He was just a great guy to be around," Edria said at a press conference Wednesday. "To know Matt was joyful and had a big heart and strong hands. He was willing to do anything for anyone, and he would go out of his way to help others."

Matt’s family is proud that many of his organs were donated. On October 8, 2007, when his bulldozer overturned, he was airlifted to San Jose Regional Medical Center with severe injuries and died the next day. Matt’s family is proud that many of his organs were donated.

Wildlandfire.com Links:

- Read the full article in the Wildlandfire.com archive.
- Media articles and reports.
- Final report.
- Green sheet.
- Blue sheet.
- Web links.
- Photos, videos, and tributes.
- CAL FIRE Wildland Fire Bulldozer Rollover Fatality Blue Sheet (24 hour briefing) (54 KB PDF, text below).

PHOTOS, VIDEOS, & TRIBUTES

Photos, Videos, & Tributes

Family members were unavailable for comment Wednesday. Edria said Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger called the Will residence Wednesday to offer condolences. A memorial service for Will is being planned.

Elsie - and a void not only with his family, but also with the members of the air base. While Will’s passing was a personal loss for those close to him, CalFire personnel remembered Wednesday the man they say was jovial and had a big heart and strong hands. He was willing to do anything for anyone, and he would go out of his way to help others.

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2007 10/09 CA Matthew Will

Here is a link to a memorial plaque for CAL FIRE Dozer Operator Matt Will who died in the line of duty in Palo Colorado, Monterey County. Could you please add Matt Will to the Memorial page (I also added it above.)

Also, the legislature and Gov. recently passed resolution ACR-106, in Matt Will’s honor, five miles of Hwy 156, between Hollister / San Juan Bautista to Hwy 101, will be designated as CAL FIRE FIREFIGHTER MATTHEW WILL MEMORIAL HIGHWAY. The signs will be placed by Cal-Trans, but no state funds can be used. Once the signs are up, still months away, we will forward a photo of them to you for the memorial page.

The Matt Will Memorial was placed at the accident site on Palo Colorado Road on November 22, 2009 and a stretch of Hwy 156 in San Benito County -- near the communities of San Juan Bautista and Hollister -- was dedicated in his honor.

The sign was destroyed in a vehicle accident in late 2012 or early 2013, but was replaced the end of April, 2013.

Annual Memorial Desert Runs to fund the local Matt Will Scholarship, SIX so far -- 2008-2014

California Memorial Firefighter Wall in Sacramento: California Memorial LODDs by Wall Order. (84 K pdf) --see page 24

Contributors to this article: SoCal CalFire; FPO, 7/6/2010; 2881; George Haines, Unit Chief (retired), CAL FIRE - BEU; Mellie; RJM
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