

IN A COMPLETE BLUNDER, A HUGE AMOUNT OF TAXPAYER MONEY HAS BEEN WASTED IN AN ILL-CONCOCTED PLAN

FIRE-BOMBER FIASCO?

BY HOWARD CARTER

It wasn't that many years ago when government bureaucratic pinheads devastated the American heavy fire-bomber program by declaring numerous aircraft as antiques and banning them from further operation over of Federal lands. This came at the start of some of the worst fire seasons that North America has ever seen. It was sort of a situation of fiddling while Rome burned. Well, history has a nasty way of repeating itself.



With the retirement of the Neptune Aviation P-2 fleet, US Forest Service Exclusive Use contracts for heavy air tankers for the 2018 fire season will drop from 20 to 13 aircraft — the drop comes at a time when fires are at an unprecedented rate. (Jim Dunn)



As the years went by, the US Forest Service barely got one HC-130H into the tanker mission and the modification was temporary at best. (Roger Cain)



One of the stars of the North American edition of the Tangent Link Aerial Firefighting Conference held at McClellan Field on 12-14 March was Lockheed Electra L.188 C-FLXT Tanker 481 owned by AirSpray of Edmonton, Alberta. The Electra flew in from Chico, California, where it has been based since last year's devastating fire season — another example on how foreign resources are having to be utilized. (Jim Dunn)

In a program that many veteran fire-bomber operators viewed as “destructive,” the US Forest Service began a plan in 2013 that would have seven ex-US Coast Guard HC-130H Hercules modified into fire-bombers. This program has been a massive waste of taxpayer money with little — surprise — to show for the investment of millions of dollars.

On 27 December 2013, former President Obama signed the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act that directed the USCG to transfer the seven aircraft to the USFS. The act also allowed the USAF to spend up to \$130 mil-

lion to perform needed maintenance and convert the planes into fire-bombers. Now, over four-years later, none of the aircraft have made it all the way through the maintenance, conversion, and retardant tank installation process. How-

ever, between 2015/2017, one HC-130H was used in the fire-fighting role — flying out of McClellan Field with a temporary slip-in Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System (MAFFS) and few of the required maintenance modifications.

No permanent retardant delivery systems were ever installed. The pinheads in power dithered long and hard before awarding such a systems contract — and then cancelled the contract, never to award it again! One of the established operators brought up the point that the US Forest Service has never owned, nor operated, a fleet of large aircraft let alone four-engine heavy tankers that were also subject to *(continued on page 66)*

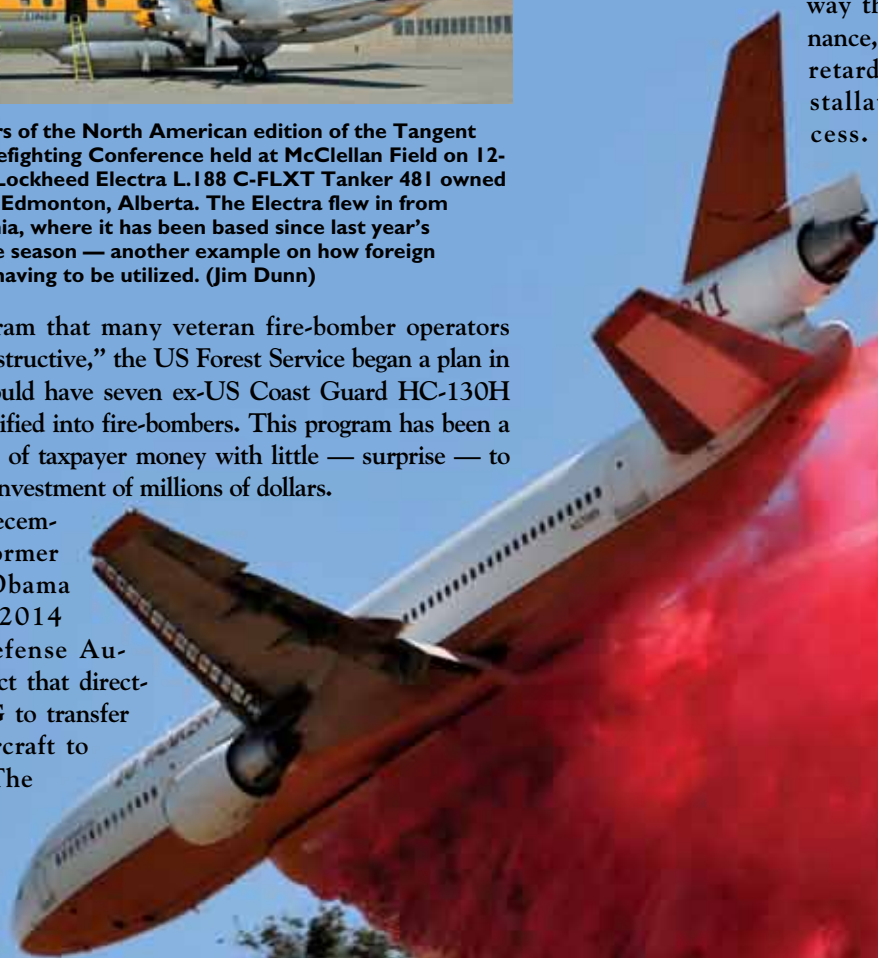
After having their fire-bomber fleets decimated when politicians declared the planes “antiques,” private operators fought back and created an entirely new fleet of fire-bombers including the DC-10 Super Ten. Tanker 911 is seen making an impressive drop. (Steve Whitby)



Even though they are not heavies, we just had to include a photo of a CalFire Grumman S-2T. The last of the Warbird fire-bombers, the S-2T has an indefinite lifespan — typical of an aircraft from the “Iron Works.” (Steve Whitby)



Boeing 747 Tanker 944 can deliver a devastating blow to a fire. (Steve Whitby)



WARBIRD & CLASSIC REPORT
KEEP 'EM FLYING!