

# South Dakota National Guard

## Public Affairs Office

Phone: 605-737-6721 Email: [pao@sd.ngb.army.mil](mailto:pao@sd.ngb.army.mil)

Web: <https://sdguard.ngb.army.mil>

[www.facebook.com/SouthDakotaNationalGuard](http://www.facebook.com/SouthDakotaNationalGuard)

[www.flickr.com/SouthDakotaNationalGuard](http://www.flickr.com/SouthDakotaNationalGuard)



March 13, 2012

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## SD Guard Soldiers battle blaze in Rapid City

RAPID CITY, S.D. – South Dakota Army National Guard Soldiers from the Army Aviation Support Facility helped battle a wildland fire here Friday, March 9 that started in dry grass and timber on the hills of Hanson-Larsen Memorial Park.

The fire was reported at about 11 a.m. near Mallow and Wood streets. Southeast winds drove the fire to the north, threatening homes on the eastern slopes of the park in Scott Addition.

The call for National Guard air support came in at approximately 1 p.m. from the South Dakota Division of Wildland Fire. A UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, equipped with a 600 gallon water basket, was soon dispatched to the Mallow Fire to assist professional and volunteer fire fighters already on the scene trying to contain the blaze.

The helicopter crew of Lt. Col. Michael Snow, pilot-in-command, CW4 Christian Frank, pilot, and crew chiefs Staff Sgt Jeremy Weich and Staff Sgt. Wayne Garner began to extract water from a pond at the Executive Golf Course, just southeast of the fire area, to douse flames along the fire's edge.

“Our first effort was to start laying water down on the crest of the hill to keep the fire from spreading any further to the west,” said Snow. “We then moved on to support ground crews working north and south fire lines. They gave us instructions on where to lay down water to best support their efforts in containing the fire.”

Snow said they conducted about 48 water-bucket drops in about 3 hours, refueling the aircraft only once, and released an estimated 25,000 gallons of water on the fire.

“The water helped to drastically cool down or put out the fire,” he said. “The ground crews did a good job digging trenches and creating barriers, and we were able to get out ahead of them to support their efforts.”

As sunset approached, the flight crew had to return to the aviation facility because of deteriorating visibility conditions.

Snow said the dense smoke, terrain and power lines made this mission one of the more challenging in recent memory for this seasoned aviator.

“This was a different mission with the fire being in the city instead of the national forest. There were many wires to watch out for, and we had to avoid flying over houses or buildings if we could help it,” said Snow. “The steep terrain, intense smoke and fire on two fronts made it very challenging.”

The helicopter crew's efforts, along with about 125 firefighters on the ground, helped to control the blaze, which was largely contained just after 8 p.m. The fire was 100 percent contained by 5 p.m. Saturday. The fire scorched about 150 acres; however, no homes or structures were destroyed.

While the flight crew certainly made an impact in helping to contain the fire, Snow credits the ground crews for successfully ensuring its containment.

"I felt like we did some good on the fire and we were able to reach areas the ground crews couldn't get to," said Snow. "However, the ground crews did a great job working the fire and deserve the credit. They really helped to direct our efforts in the air to best support their needs on the ground."

The cause of the fire is reported to have been caused by heavy construction equipment doing a reseeding operation on Cowboy Hill, according to fire officials. Record setting temperatures, low humidity and shifting winds combined with the steep terrain challenged firefighting efforts.

Snow said this is one of the earlier fires he has seen for this time of the year in recent memory. This is the first state-active-duty mission of what is anticipated to be an early fire season for the Army Aviation Support Facility personnel.

"I'm worried we are going to have extreme fire conditions this year," said Snow. "The dry conditions, low humidity, high temperatures and winds, this early in the season, could make for a long summer if we don't get a good dousing of rain. Regardless, the South Dakota National Guard will be ready to respond if called upon."

Snow also said the support they provided to the Mallow Fire wouldn't have been possible without the help of another ground crew, located at the aviation facility.

Other Soldiers that assisted in the operation were CW2 Andrew Busse, operations officer-in-charge, Sgt. Thia Monteith, noncommissioned officer-in-charge, Pfc. Bri Kiewel, operations specialist, and Pfc. Kota Simonson, aircraft refueler.

-30-

High resolution photos are available at [www.flickr.com/southdakotationalguard](http://www.flickr.com/southdakotationalguard)  
Additional stories and information are online at [www.facebook.com/southdakotationalguard](http://www.facebook.com/southdakotationalguard)



**120309-A-RN486-004:** A South Dakota Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter from the Army Aviation Support Facility drops 600 gallons of water on the Mallow Fire in Rapid City March 9, 2012. (SDNG photo by Master Sgt. Don Matthews) (RELEASED)



**120309-A-RN486-001:** A South Dakota Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter from the Army Aviation Support Facility extracts water from a nearby pond while battling the Mallow Fire in Rapid City March 9, 2012. (SDNG photo by Master Sgt. Don Matthews) (RELEASED)



**120309-A-RN486-003:** A South Dakota Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter from the Army Aviation Support Facility extracts water from a nearby pond while battling the Mallow Fire in Rapid City March 9, 2012. (SDNG photo by Master Sgt. Don Matthews) (RELEASED)



**120309-A-RN486-002:** A South Dakota Army National Guard UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter from the Army Aviation Support Facility drops 600 gallons of water on the Mallow Fire in Rapid City March 9, 2012. (SDNG photo by Master Sgt. Don Matthews) (RELEASED)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Please contact Maj. Anthony Deiss at (605) 737-6721 or cell (605) 431-8753, or e-mail [pao@sd.ngb.army.mil](mailto:pao@sd.ngb.army.mil).