U.S. Forest Service airtanker scandal

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **U.S. Forest Service airtanker scandal** involved a scheme, called the Historical Aircraft Exchange Program,[1] in which the agency would acquire retired U.S. Air Force C-130A transport aircraft and U.S. Navy P-3 anti-submarine patrol aircraft, ostensibly for use as firefighting airtankers, but which ended up with the planes' ownership being transferred illegally to private companies and the aircraft themselves being used for other purposes or even sold for a profit. The controversy resulted in two of the involved principals being sentenced to prison and a number of civil lawsuits.

A C-119C which was operated by Hemet Valley Flying Service as Tanker 82 before being retired, now at the Milestones of Flight Museum, Fox Field, Lancaster, California

Tanker 64, a C-130A, operated by TBM, Inc. and one of the aircraft involved in the exchange program; it now serves as a flight test aircraft at the Mojave Spaceport.

Aero Union P-3A Orion taking off from Fox Field, Lancaster, California

Contents

- 1 Background
- 2 Exchange scheme
- 3 Investigations and accusations
  - 3.1 USDA and Forest Service
  - 3.2 Gary Eitel
  - 3.3 Other federal investigations
  - 3.4 Values
  - 3.5 Firefighting deficiencies
  - 3.6 Grand jury
  - 3.7 Congressional solution
- 4 Criminal cases
- 5 Civil cases
  - 5.1 Repossession suits
  - 5.2 Eitel qui tam
- 6 Aircraft disposition
  - 6.1 Drug trafficking seizure
  - 6.2 CIA-use allegations
  - 6.3 Crashes and fleet grounding
- 7 See also
- 8 References
- 9 External links

Background

The USFS had traditionally relied on contracting with private companies to provide large airtankers for fighting forest fires, the majority of which had been retired World War II and Korean War-era transports, bombers, and maritime patrol aircraft. Such aircraft were relatively inexpensive to obtain and could carry the large loads of fire retardant needed to make their use effective. In the 1980s,