



PHOTOS BY CONNOR RADNOVICH / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Cody Goodnough, left, of the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training hands a pack to Audra Luther of the 173rd Fighter Wing at the Oregon Public Safety Academy in Salem.



Pfc. Patrick Connor, center, tries on his new wildfire fighting clothing along with a group of other Oregon National Guardsmen at the Oregon Public Safety Academy in Salem.



Specialist Justin Lambert with the 741st Brigade Engineer Battalion, left, selects a pair of pants with Miguel Benitez of the Oregon Department of Public Safety Standards and Training.

Fires

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"If you're in Brookings and your house is in jeopardy, that one day is important to you," said Eriks Gabliks, director of the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training.

The first group activated in early August was trained in 2015, so they only required a one-day refresher course. The next two groups had never faced a wildfire, so they needed the full four days, though some of the individuals had previous experience.

Springfield-resident and current trainee Zack Prather of Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 162nd Infantry, came across a small brush fire while hunting with his father when he was 14 years old. They were able to contain the blaze for a few hours until a local fire depart-

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ZACK PRATHER
ALPHA COMPANY, 2ND BATTALION, 162ND INFANTRY

ment showed up, using a nearby highway as a fire break and cutting it off on the other sides.

"My dad just kept telling me to dig, so I did," he said.

Prather was deployed to Afghanistan for more than a year in 2014 and 2015. He worked protection duty; a "GA" or "guardian angel" to the people he looked after. Overseas, he said, you basically know the enemy and the kinds of situations you're going to find yourself in.

That's not always the case with wildfires.

"Going to a fire, especially a wildfire, you're definitely going into the unknown," Prather said.

Master Sgt. Rebecca

Thompson, of the 142nd Fighter Wing, was deployed in Romania two years ago when wildfires last cut major swaths through the Oregon. These areas included land near her childhood home in John Day; a fire crept to within a few miles of her family's cabin.

She couldn't do anything then, but this year she will have the opportunity to defend someone else's house.

"You protect your home, you protect your state," she said. "Your home's on fire, you got to do something about it."

Contact the reporter at cradnovich@statesmanjournal.com or 503-399-6864, or follow him on Twitter at @CDRadnovich

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