

Warm Springs Interagency Hot Shot crew a national resource



Luther Clements

Every year the Warm Springs Interagency Hot Shot 20 person fire crew responds to fire dispatches all over the Northwest as well as the Southwest. It takes a special person who chooses to fight fire for a living. In the hot summer weather, temperatures reach well over 100 degrees in the shade.

Some fire dispatches have taken the Warm Springs crew away from their families as far as Alaska, Canada, Texas and other states.

This article will be used as an introduction of who this people are and why they choose to serve in the Warm Springs Interagency Hot Shot crew.

Thirty-four year old Tribal member and crew superintendent Luther Clements has three daughters and resides in the Warm Springs community. "I started in wild fire in 1984 as a fire fighter on the engine crew. I worked for the engine crew for approximately 3 months and then transferred over to the Forest crew. I worked as a fire fighter for one fire season and then started to work my way up the ranks as a squad boss, Foreman to where I'm currently at now as the crew superintendent. The organization started out as a type 2, crew in 1984 to 1986. In 1987 the type 2 crew was put on probation with the forest service to become a type one Hot Shot 20 person crew.

By the year 1988, the organization was recognized nationally as a type one crew. My duties as the superintendent vary. The two Maine duties are safety first and to get training for the Hot Shot program. While on fire assignments, it is my job to get information on the fire, crew assignments, fire location, fire objectives, fire hazards and time frames. It takes a lot of time and experience to manage a program such as a Hot Shot 20 person fire crew. As the superintendent, you have to build trust within every member of your crew. We have to work as a team in order to go out and

fight forest/grass fires in a safe environment and take care of each other. When we as a crew are out on wild fires, we have to know when it is safe to fight the fire or when we have to pull out of the area and let the fire go. As the superintendent, it is my job to make these type of decisions and make sure everyone involved is safe. When I make a call to stay and fight an out of control fire, I take the responsibility of the crew in making that call. You can't sit in a class room and learn when and where to make decisive decisions. You have to gain that trust from being out in the fire environment getting that valuable experience. A superintendent must also have confidence in what he's doing and not second guess his decisions. The things you learn inside a class room are just tools to use when you start gaining the experience and making decisions. Back in 1996 when the Simnasho fire came out of the Warm Springs River canyon and into our community, we had engine crews, helicopters, air tankers and other crews. The fire started to threaten structures in the Miller Heights area. We had to make tactical decisions on fighting the fire along with fire fighter safety. How would you feel in that position when structures or even human life were lost? Would you be willing to take that responsibility? That's just one situation out of many various situations the crew must get involved in. Even though the crew was gone on assignment during the Simnasho fire, I used that as an example because I think the community can relate to that situation. The Warm Springs Hot Shot crew lives and works through and around these type of situations on all fire assignments. I would like to encourage more younger people to take part in this program. It takes commitment and determination to endure these type's of situations. When you work for the Warm Springs Hot Shot crew, you make a lot of sacrifices.



Anthony Holliday Sr.

Speaking for myself, I don't get to spend much of the Summer's with my daughters. They have to spend their Summers with their aunts or grandparents. We have some good people working on the crew and that makes my job a lot easier. The crew also has a good foreman (Tony Holliday) and three good squad bosses Glenn Smith, Emerson Culpus and David Johnson who will introduce themselves on this same article. First, I would like you to read this poem I picked up during a fire that was written by a community member in Florida. The Poem is called, **Our Own Special Angels**.

Some say that angels come from heaven; Visions dressed in gold and white. But, the angels that God sent to Florida were a very different sight. They came from states both far and wide to fight the fires of Hell, and gratitude that we feel for their mere words could never tell. Their love ones were left behind to worry about their safe return; But, the uppermost thought in their minds was to not let our homes burn. Their faces were covered with blackest soot, their lungs with smoke were filled. Sleep was a luxury they could not afford. We are thankful that none were killed. They put their lives upon the line for people who were complete strangers. They fought against unfathomable odds with nary a thought to all the dangers. The fire licked hot at their heels but, did they ever turn and run? No, they faced the foe and turned it back. They were heroes—every one. They came in all shapes and sizes. Sex and color mattered not. They were giants all, with nerves of steel; not a loser in the whole lot. Each night beneath the red-tinged skies I'm sure their thoughts did roam from the fires raging around them to their loved ones at home. Yet they put their own needs back on hold and returned to the tasks at hand. They faltered not and, in the end, they saved our precious land. They've all earned our undying thanks, and I'm sure you don't have to be told that each and every one of them have well earned their wings of gold. Dear God, our prayers you answered when these angels you sent our way. Please continue to bless them and keep them free from harm each and every day.

Anthony Holliday Sr. is a 27-year-old Warm Springs Tribal member married, and has two sons. "To make a long story short, says Anthony; after working at numerous types of jobs (office work, Fish and Wildlife and Forestry) I found a job that I really enjoy-fire fighting! I started as a firefighter at Bear Springs Ranger Station in 1992. After working there for a couple of months, I transferred to the Warm Springs Interagency Hot Shot Crew. I started out as a firefighter, worked my way up to a squad boss position, in charge of six crew members, to the assistant superintendent in charge of 18 people.

It's a good feeling to be on an all-Indian Hotshot fire crew, because, out of a total of 68 Hotshot crews in the nation, there are only four other B.I.A. Hotshot crews."

"Each Hotshot crew consists of 20 highly skilled firefighters, each person knowing what their specific duty is. Whether it's grabbing a chain saw or tools for punching in a handline to stop the flames from devouring more timber, range land, or whatever lies in its path. You'll find it kind of ironic at times. For instance, we were in Alaska, being bused to the fire, and all the commu-



David H. Johnson

nity members were racing by trying to get away from the raging blaze, and here we were trying to get into the fire.

"In all the states we've been to this year (Alaska, Colorado, Montana, Florida and Washington), we've never been to a place where we were not appreciated after the fire was over. We've met people who have lost homes, animals etc. and were still thanking us for being there to stop the blaze.

If you're up to a good challenge, test out being on a Hot Shot crew. It's very demanding work. You must be committed and willing to stay away from home for long periods of time, work long hours which could range from 12 to 18 hours per shift. On some occasions we work over 30 hours just in one shift. You must stay in excellent physical and mental condition. We go on long hikes, if there are no woods close by. Sometimes we hike four to five miles to a fire. There are times when you think you just can't finish the hike because your feet are pounding, legs are aching and drenched in sweat. When you see the flames ripping through the trees, all the aches and pains seem to go away. The adrenaline, the natural high you get, the RUSH, overcomes all.

"Once we get done with the fire or relief crews come in, it's time to hike out again. We end up in the middle of

nowhere sometimes and spike out. Spike camp is where we stay on the safe side of the fire line. Someone will fly food, drinking water and sleeping bags to us. Sometimes we spike out for three to six days at a time. So, if you want to push yourself to the limits, and get an awesome natural high, test out being on the Warm Springs Hot Shot crew. The only down fall is being away from your family during the summer. Other than that, you make good money, you get to see the country and meet different people from different cultures."

David H. Johnson is from Burns, Oregon Indian reservation and is twenty three-years-old and married.

"This is my fifth year fighting fire for Warm Springs Fire Management. I only spent one year on the engine crew and the rest I have spent on the Hotshot crew. I started as a crew member on the hotshot crew organization and moved up to a squad boss position. Being a squad boss is being in charge of six crew members. The organization has three squads, two of the squads are in charge of the handline and the other squad is in charge of saws, the Saw Team. The saw team goes first and cuts out a trail for the hand line crew. Once the cutting is out of the way, the handline crew goes through and constructs a handline. A handline is the removal of anything above mineral soil. We have to dig down to mineral soil so the fire runs out of fuel. The width of the handline depends a lot on the different things such as fuels, terrain and slopes.

"There is a lot of training that needs to be done in class before the Hot Shot crew can be dispatched to an incident. While on the Hot Shot program, I have seen the dangers of fire and the destruction it can do not only to the forest but to our communities. Earlier this year we went down to Florida for a fire dispatch. The fire had burned into many communities and consumed many homes. While we were there it was hard to see what the fire had done to many families. Even though many people had lost their homes, the respect and hospitality was so great.

"Another fire where the hospitality was so great was the Carla Lake Fire in Alaska. The crew was flown in by helicopter into this little Christian community that was in the area of the fire. The community had many fields for the crews to sleep in. Our time was backwards, when the crew came back to camp for dinner, the crew was prepared to eat breakfast. We were unable to ride the helicopter at times so we had a three to four mile hike just to get to our assigned destination. Hiking is very common in fire fighting. The Hot Shot crew has been dispatched to 13 fires so far this year. The crew has also been to six different states from Alaska to Florida.

"When the fire season is good, the

crew is out of town a lot and away from their families. Some other things that a fire fighter has to pass up is being away from family and the powwows that they go to. It is difficult being a fire fighter but it's a living and an income."

Glenn Smith is currently employed by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs as a fire fighter on the Warm Springs Interagency Hot Shot crew. The crew is a national resource for fighting fire in the U.S.A. He is 32-years-old and resides in the community of Warm Springs.

"As a Hot Shot crew member, I'm currently a squad boss and responsible for six other crew members. I've been enveloped in the fire fighting business for the past 13 years and have enjoyed every season.

"This type of job is not for everyone. For example, the crew is away from their family for as long as 21 days at a time or maybe even longer.



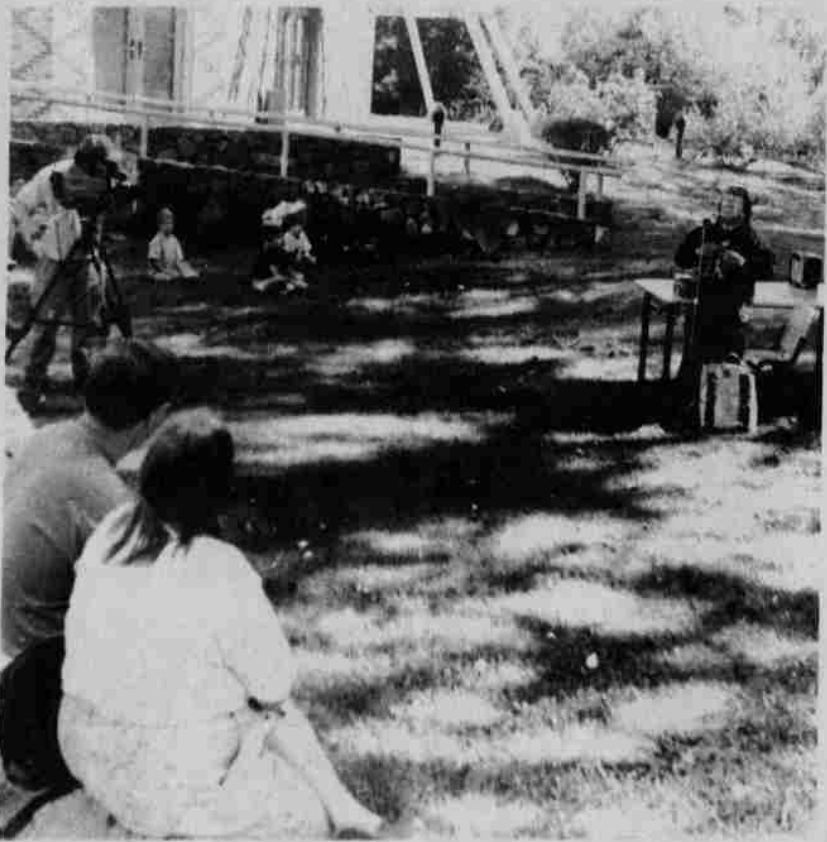
Glenn Smith

That puts a lot of stress on the fire fighters as well as family members waiting at home. This year, fire fighting has taken us as far away as Alaska, Montana, Florida and Washington.

"Being on a type-one Hot Shot crew, you're able to cover a lot of the country and work with other fire fighters from other states. We also learn to work with other type of fire suppression equipment. For example, we're around helicopters, retardant planes, dozers, chain saws and all types of hand tools.

"One memorable fire I recall this year was in Montana. That was our first dispatch of the year and we were digging handline uphill. The fire crossed the handline below us and started to come around towards where we were. The fire chased us out and we had to start another handline from the bottom all over again. Looking at those flames sure got the adrenaline going on all of us. That is one example of why I enjoy my choice of career so much. Each and every fire is unique. No two fires are alike. You never know what a wildfire is going to do from one moment to the next. This type of work can be very, very, challenging."

Story teller Edmo performs at The Museum At Warm Springs



Made possible through a U.S. West Foundation grant, The Museum At Warm Springs welcomed internationally acclaimed poet, playwright, performer and traditional story teller Ed Edmo September 12. "Edmo's performance was about Grandmother Chokecherry."

"Grandmother Chokecherry" spoke about boarding school experiences and the old Indian Rodeo days. She also tells of personal tragedy, but also tells legends of hope. "Grandmother Chokecherry loves Spam!" This free performance by Ed Edmo at The Museum At Warm Springs, brought over 20 listeners. A film crew from The High Desert Museum was also on location. The film will be used by The High Desert Museum at their new exhibit, "Native American People and Art." For more information contact The Museum At Warm Springs at 553-3331. Photos from left to right "Grandmother Chokecherry" talks of hard times while growing up, center photo shows the film crew in action while others listen on, right photo, "Grandmother Chokecherry."

