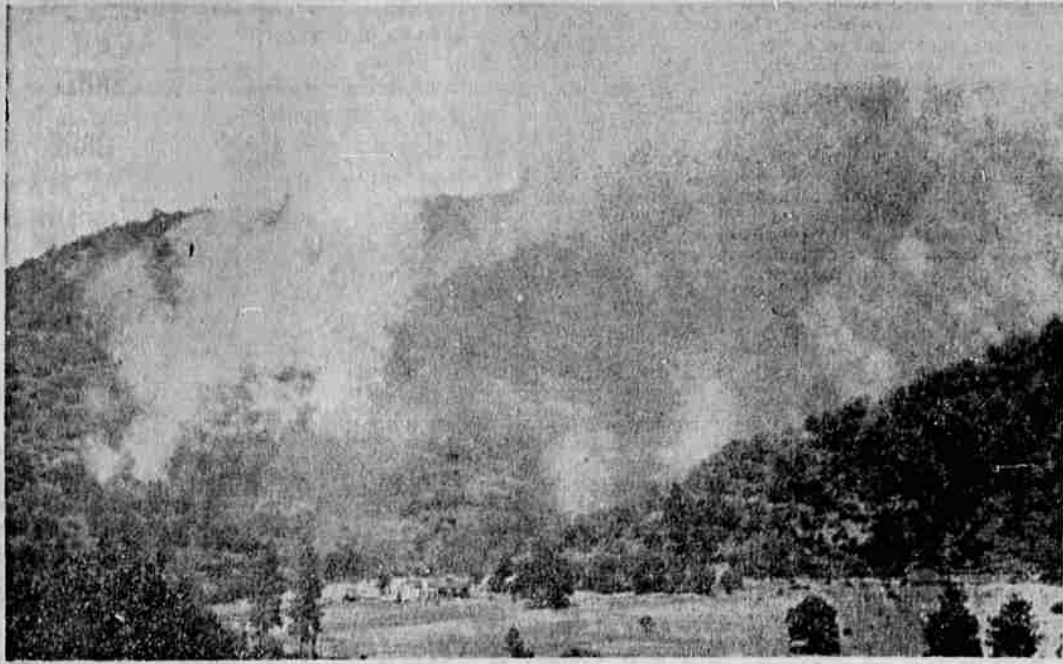


Activity Behind Forest Fire Lines Vital



SMOKE RISES—Here is a general view of the 80 to 100 acres charred by flames just across the river from Gold Hill last Wednesday. The fire started just beyond the house in the center-left foreground.

Gold Hill Area Blaze Small, But Typical of Work

(Editor's note: This is the story of a fire. It is not a large fire, as these things are reckoned by professional fire fighters. And in some ways it was typical of the blazes which are fought or prepared for, all season long in southern Oregon—or as typical as anyone fire can be in terrain and weather as varied as that in Jackson and Josephine counties. No such story can be complete, for many people are involved, and no amount of newspaper space could tell in full how such a fire affects their lives.)

By ERIC W. ALLEN JR.
Mail Tribune Managing Editor

A few minutes after noon on Wednesday, Sept. 21, Allen Hilkey was using his old tread-tractor to haul a stripped-down Chrysler auto body across a field behind his home.

Hilkey is a logger, but because a "Cat" had broken down in the woods operation of Lou Varner, for whom Hilkey works, he was at home.

The car body had been abandoned by a "couple of kids" from Texas a week or so before, and Hilkey was taking it to a junkpile, mostly of wrecked cars, which he and his neighbor, Eddie Volmer, used as a source for metal scraps.

Live Across River

The Hilkeys and Volmers live on Route 1, Gold Hill, across the river from the town, in that point of land around which the Rogue river runs, and the main features of which is a knob-like hill listed on maps as Gold Hill.

Hilkey says that after he hauled the auto body to the dump area, he recrossed the dry, ankle-deep grass with his tractor, and was talking with Volmer when they both noticed a blaze coming from under the rear axle of the wheel-less car. They grabbed shovels, Hilkey reported, and attempted to put out the fire through the tinder-dry grass to prevent it from spreading. But it got away, he said, and he ran back to his tractor, and tried to use its dozer blade to trail the fire.

But the fire rushed through the dry grass. He trailed it to the west, where it was sweeping toward his home, but it "took off" to the east, and up the slopes of the hill.

Lookout Sees Smoke

At 12:50 p.m., Rosco Smith, the lookout on Buck Rock, near Shady Cove, saw smoke rising from behind a ridge toward Gold Hill. He took up his radio microphone.

"Five-thirty-eight to two," he said. "Two" came the reply. And he said:

"There's a small column of light-gray smoke coming up over toward Gold Hill. It's bearing is azimuth 212 degrees."

"Ten-four," (received and understood) came the reply.

The air was silent a moment. Then a feminine voice, this one owned by Mrs. Ida Stone on Anderson Butte lookout, gave a cross-bearing.

On Table Rock rd. in the office of the southwest district office of the state department of forestry (better known locally as "the forest patrol"), Doyle Stockton, assistant district warden, plotted the site, checked to make sure the smoke was from no known source, picked up another microphone, and over the loudspeaker ordered a crew on its way.

Crews Are Sent

As additional reports came in, other crews were rounded up and sent. A bulldozer (a TD-14 International), ready on a transport vehicle, was ordered out. And soon Stockton himself, veteran of many a fire and, in the words of his boss, "one of the best fire-control men in the state," left to take personal charge.

A headquarters was set up in the brown, grassy field where the fire started. Hilkey himself joined in the fight with his tractor, and the forestry department's bulldozer was sent on its lumbering way to build trails to contain the blaze.

Fire crewmen (mostly youngsters under the direction of more experienced foremen) were deployed, and set to building hand-trails—a hot, dry, dusty, exhausting business on the steep slopes, and through the manzanita, madroña and oaks, and the tall, dry, "fox-tail" grass. At one point, a pump-truck, station in a field on a rise below the higher hill, was threatened as a fast-moving



WHAT CAUSED THE FIRE?—Curtis Nesheim, district warden for the state department of forestry (at right), questions Allen Hilkey, route 1, box 13A, Gold Hill, who later was cited for operating an improperly equipped vehicle on forest land. The fire started beyond Hilkey's home. Hilkey, a logger, said it originated when he was using a tractor to pull an old car body, which hit a pipe. But forest investigators said the cause of the blaze was a spark from Hilkey's tractor.



FIRE IS HOT—The windshield and windows of the car where the fire started were melted and broken by the intense heat of the blaze. Interior of the car was burned almost clean. Melted glass can be seen at left, and at rear.



HOT WORK—Jay Wyman Alsenz Jr., a member of one of the state department of forestry crews ("Be sure and say it's Crew No. 2," he said) is shown as he was hacking a hand trail through a manzanita clump to prevent the fire from spreading. He and a helper, Jim McCoy of Gold Hill, used an ax and a "hazel hoe" to clear the trail.

point of flame started to encircle it.

Wheels Only Spin

The driver, Vohn Steel, climbed in and started to pull out to a safer spot. But the four-wheel-drive vehicle's wheels only spun in the loose, dry soil. The fire crept nearer. The driver sprinted out, got to another vehicle, and then to safety. After the rushing blaze passed the stalled

truck, the second pumper returned and put out a fire which had started to burn the truck. Gasoline from the tank was blazing, but miraculously did not explode. (It will be repaired and returned to service within a few days.)

Meanwhile, the fire, first fanned, then retarded, by a hot, dry, east wind, had spread up toward the adjoining ridges. Parts of it were

being trailed by bulldozer and sweating foremen. But here and there it would jump the fire line, and a new start would have to be made.

In the burned-over area snags continued to smoulder and smoke, and occasionally a brush-patch would flare up with a mighty flame and a column of black smoke from the oil-rich vegetation.

Borate Bombed

Early in the fighting a "borate bomber" from Rosenbalm Aviation Inc., had been ordered into action, and dropped one load, which slowed the blaze, but only temporarily.

By 5:30, Stockton estimated that the blaze, now covering about 80 acres, was 90 to 95 per cent "contained" (that is, surrounded by fire trails), but he still expected a few more "slop-overs", and wouldn't promise "control" (assurance that the fire's spread had stopped) until later that evening or morning.

Between 45 and 50 men were on the fire lines, most of them building trails around the last uncompleted sections of the perimeter.

Hilkey's old tractor had heated up and thrown a tread, and, while it cooled, he walked back to fire headquarters.

He was questioned by District Warden Curtis Nesheim, who took his statement and then asked Hilkey to sign it.

The cause of the fire? Hilkey thought it must have come from a spark caused by dragging the car body across a pipe, or rock.

Spark from Tractor

The forest patrolmen thought it must have started from a spark thrown by Hilkey's tractor.

He was cited into district court on a charge of operating an improperly equipped vehicle on state-protected land. The tractor had no spark arrester.

As the dusk began to fall, the smoke, which before was a tall column into the sky, became thinner. The flare-ups became fewer. Stockton ordered a night crew of 25 men to continue trail-building and protection through the night, and prepared to feed and then release the men who had fought the blaze through the afternoon. Many of them—about 20—would return the next morning to begin the "mop up"—spotting and extinguishing small blazes, burning snags and so on, inside the fire line.

On For Several Days

When would it be "completely out"? "Oh," Stockton said, "we'll have one or more men here for several days, or a couple of weeks, depending. Maybe until the rains come."

Then he turned to his "headquarters," a bright-red Jeep station wagon, to answer a call from a crew foreman on top of the ridge, whose crew was building a trail along the top to connect up with the one built by the dozer. The foreman was using a "peanut" — a "handie-talkie" radio.

The two exchanged information, and then Stockton asked, "How far have you come?"

"Seems like about 18 miles," came back the tired voice.

Stockton grinned, and replied, "You'll meet up pretty soon." He turned and said, "That's hard work."

Other Radio Chatter

There was other radio chatter. Three boys on the crew asked that their parents in Grants Pass, be notified that they would be home later than expected.

They made the request to the foreman, who relayed it on the "peanut" to Stockton's car-radio, "302," and he relayed it to "2" (Medford headquarters), which relayed it to "13" (Grants Pass headquarters), which telephoned the home of one of the parents, who were then asked to call the parents of the other two.

Finally satisfied with his job, and with his arrangements for the coming night and morning, Stockton prepared to let the night fire boss take over.

And how much did the fire cost?

In terms of actual loss, not much. Little commercial timber was burned.

Damage to Truck

But there was the damage to the truck. There was the cost of the extra labor—boys who are not in the regular suppression crews. There was gasoline, oil, and wear-and-tear on nine state vehicles. There was the expensive borate, and the plane rental, which amounts to more than \$200 per hour.

Warden Nesheim made a "horseback" estimate—the net cost to the state probably would wind up at "more than \$1,000."

And who would pay for it? Well, it's in grazing land, and owners of grazing land pay a regular fee on a per-acre basis for fire suppression. The costs would come out of that. If they go above the

amount in the fund in any one year, the assessment goes up the following year.

And, of course, if there is any chance of recovery, the state can make a claim against the person responsible for starting the fire, and if he won't pay, can go to court to obtain it.

But, Nesheim pointed out, sometimes you just can't recover—not if the responsible party doesn't have anything. The owner of the land also can sue, if he feels his loss is actionable.

As he turned to leave, Nesheim glanced up the hill where Hilkey had succeeded in getting his old tractor going again, and was bringing it down.

"I knew I'd seen him somewhere before," he remarked.

Helped Fight Fire

Hilkey had mentioned earlier that he had helped fight another fire, in almost exactly the same spot, June of 1957. That one had been started by a youngster who was "camping out," and who set his "campfire" in dry grass, and was lucky to escape with his life when it "took off."

Nesheim looked at the tinder-dry field, much of it chewed up by bulldozer and truck tracks, where it stretched away without a break to the modest homes of Volmer and Hilkey.

He shook his head and climbed into his car.

Radioactive Drugs Subject of Show

Questions on the uses of radioactive materials in medicine and research will be discussed by a panel of three local physicians at 5:30 o'clock this evening on "Adventures in Medicine" over station KBES-TV.

The bi-weekly program is presented by the Jackson County Tuberculosis and Health association in cooperation with the Jackson County Medical Society.

Dr. Ralph E. Hibbs, specialist in diagnosis and internal medicine, and Dr. Alan S. Markee, radiologist, members of the radioisotope committee, will appear on the panel, along with Dr. Thomas J. Tinsley, pathologist.

The committee is a requirement of the Atomic Energy commission, and such committees function wherever radioactive drugs are administered.

The physicians will explain some of the ways in which radioactive drugs are administered, and will demonstrate an electronic instrument for detection of radioactivity, which is used in connection with diagnostic procedures. Precautions used in the manufacture, shipment, storage, and handling of radioactive materials also will be noted.

NROTC Exams Are Scheduled

The 15th annual national competitive examination for the regular Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps will be given to eligible high school seniors and graduates Dec. 10, the Navy has announced.

Application forms are now available from most high schools and Naval recruiting offices and must be mailed by Nov. 18.

Designed to supplement the officer output of the Naval academy, the NROTC program makes it possible for young men to earn a regular commission while studying at the civilian college of their choice with an NROTC unit.

High school seniors who are between 17 and 21 on July 1, 1961, may apply for the aptitude test. Those who make a qualifying score will be given a physical exam early in 1961. From the number of qualified persons, at least 1,600 will be selected to begin their Naval careers next September.

The NROTC college training program is also open to enlisted men on active duty with the Navy and Marines.

OSE Scholarship Given Ashland Boy

Ashland — George Converse, 19, son of Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Converse, Ashland, has been awarded the Oregon State Employee's scholarship to continue his education at Southern Oregon college. It was announced recently. Converse is a state employee at SOC.

Converse, a sophomore in mathematics, plans to teach college level mathematics.

Scholarship recipients are judged on their academic record and activities. Close relatives of Oregon State employees are eligible for these scholarships.



FIRE HEADQUARTERS—This group of state department of forestry vehicles served as headquarters for firefighters on the "Gold Hill fire" last Wednesday. Doyle Stockton, kneeling in foreground, is the assistant district forest warden who was the fire boss. Flames swept over all the bowl-shaped gully visible in the picture.



WHERE IT STARTED—The old Chrysler auto body at right is where the Gold Hill fire last Wednesday began. From there it swept through tinder-dry foxtail grass into the brush and trees on the hill beyond.



FIRE CASUALTY—This state department of forestry pumper truck was trapped in the fire when it couldn't get traction in the soft, sandy soil as the blaze approached. The driver escaped, but the truck caught fire, and was badly charred on the right rear end. It will be repaired and returned to service.

Poster Contest Planned To Find 'Woods Hooligan'

Portland—A "Woods Hooligan" poster contest for both elementary and high school students recently was announced by the Governor's Red Hat Days committee here.

Contestants will submit poster ideas on 11 by 14-inch material to illustrate one or all of the "Woods Hooligan" family. Members of the "family" are Pyro Hooligan, the fire setter; Klepto Hooligan, the thief; Destructo Hooligan, the destroyer of property; and Dummo Hooligan, "too dumb" to read so he trespasses and shoots signs.

A weekly prize will be awarded in each division, and the winning posters will be entered in competition for the grand prizes according to committee officials. Judges will be cartoonists from the Oregon Journal, the Oregonian, and the Oregon State Game commission.

Contest spokesmen said no entries will be returned, and they may be in color or black and white. The contest runs from Sept. 24 through Oct. 31; those postmarked after Oct. 31 will not be eligible. The name, address, age, and school of the entrant must be included on the back of each poster submitted, and there will be one weekly prize and three final prizes in each division.

Entries should be sent to "Woods Hooligan," post office box 4138, Portland 8, Ore.

Police Department Receives Reward

A check for \$100 has been forwarded by the Jewelers Security Alliance of the United States to the Medford police department for the arrest and conviction of the person who burglarized Brophy's jewelers, 209 East Main st.

The JSA is a crime detection and prevention organization which has operated exclusively for the jewelry industry since 1883. They report spending more than \$1,350,000 in "tracking down" jewelry thieves and paying rewards for the protection of its members.

The \$100 reward was paid to the local department for the arrest and conviction of Harry Howard Gray who broke the window of the jewelry establishment in July and removed \$300 worth of jewelry. He was sentenced to four years in the state penitentiary.

Brophy's is currently displaying the check, before being presented to Medford police in a few days, jewelry officials say. The money will be placed in the police benefit fund, nominally maintained by monthly contributions from the officers themselves.

Civil Service Posts Available; Exams Set

The U.S. civil service commission has announced new examinations for filling positions including those of cartographic technicians, draftsman, and aides; employment service advisor; and social insurance research analyst.

Further information may be obtained from the local civil service office at the Medford post office.