



The Star inter-regional fire suppression crew has a new tool to help construct fire lines, a Hoffco Fail fire line trencher. Forest service officials estimate that it does the work of five men, but takes only two men to operate. Dave Ryn and Fritze Morrison, above, check out the new tool.



Forest fire fighting can be a hard job and crew members take their rest where they can find it. John Fontaine, Sandy Anderson, and Larry Robbins, three members of the crew, are shown taking a cat-nap.

Specialized Fire Fighting Crew

By MARGIE GOOD

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A lighted cigarette is tossed out of a passing car, a bolt of lightning hits a tree or a careless camper fails to put out his campfire — whatever the cause, a forest fire is born.

A lookout high up in a tower on top of a mountain sees the smoke, sends in a report, and the machinery for suppressing the fire goes into action.

Men and supplies are rushed to the scene.

Many forest fires are quickly extinguished. But some fires, due to winds or the condition of the forest, get out of control. The fire rages on and a request for the

inter-regional fire suppression crews is sent to the regional office in Portland.

The suppression crews are highly trained mobile units that are subject to intra and inter-state calls to fight forest fires. The main purpose of the units is to suppress fires. Usually they only stay until they are no longer needed and all that is left to do is the mop-up operations.

Fires Are Serious Problem

In Oregon, where lumber is an important ingredient to the economy of the state, forest fires are a serious problem.

In 1962, 11,288 fires were reported in the Pacific coast states and these fires burned over 395,130 acres of land. The suppression crews played an important part in controlling some of these fires by being able to go to any fire on short notice.

A request for the suppression crews is relayed from Portland to the forest service offices in Medford and Redmond. The Medford office relays the request to the Star ranger station where one suppression crew is based and trained. Within a short time the crew is ready to take off from the Medford airport.

There are only two inter-regional suppression crews on the West coast, one at Redmond and one stationed at Star ranger station on the Applegate. This is the third year for the Redmond group and the second year for the Star crew.

The crews are composed of 25 men. Most of the Star crew are local college students. Few of them, however, intend to make forestry a career. Fire fighting in the summer offers them the opportunity to have a little excitement while earning a little extra money.

Pass Physical Examination

Crew members must be 18 and pass a physical examination. Nineteen men returned to the Star crew from last year's unit. They are hired for the fire season that usually lasts from June through September.

Members of the suppression crew are given two weeks of intensive training at the beginning of the fire season, during which they learn all they can about fire fighting. Included in the two-week period are courses in safety and first aid. In the last two years there have been no serious on-the-job injuries to crew members; the extent of their injuries has been minor blisters.

Crew members are instructed by Star personnel and representatives from the Medford office of the forest service. They are instructed in the basic fundamentals of fire fighting. They are taught fire behavior, fire line construction, the use of fire tools, large fire organization, water equipment, how to travel and how to fell snags.

Camp Out Three Days

During the two-week training period the crew camps out for three days and learns how to live while they are away from the base station. This season the men were sent to a fire before the end of training.

The men are not spread out into other units but are kept as a separate crew.

When the crew is sent to a forest fire, men are supplied with a one-day ration of food. They also have a pack containing extra equipment, such as a first aid kit and sleeping bag. They also are equipped with a flame resistant shirt made of special material.

During last year's fire season, the unit traveled to nine forest fires. So far this year they have gone to five fires. The crew flies to most of the fires in a chartered DC3 forest service plane. If fire conditions were right they could possibly be gone all summer going from one fire to another.

Eager to Return to Fire

Crew members work hard to extinguish fires to which they are sent, but they are still eager to go to another fire when they return. Pete Gregory, foreman, remarked that "the men must have a little arson in their blood. Just as soon as they get back from one fire they keep asking when's the next fire."

Much to the crew's dismay, fires do not keep the unit busy all of the time. During the slack periods they are kept busy, working at building access trails, taking care of the grounds at the station, building fences and doing other district work. This is actually done to keep the men in shape to fight forest fires. While doing all this work the men hike three to five miles a day. During the day, they must be within an hour to one and a half hours from the Medford airport.

This is not a new program for the forest service. Prior to World War II, the forest service had such crews, but during the war the program was dropped because of the lack of available manpower. Because of the increase in forest fires in recent years, the program was reestablished.

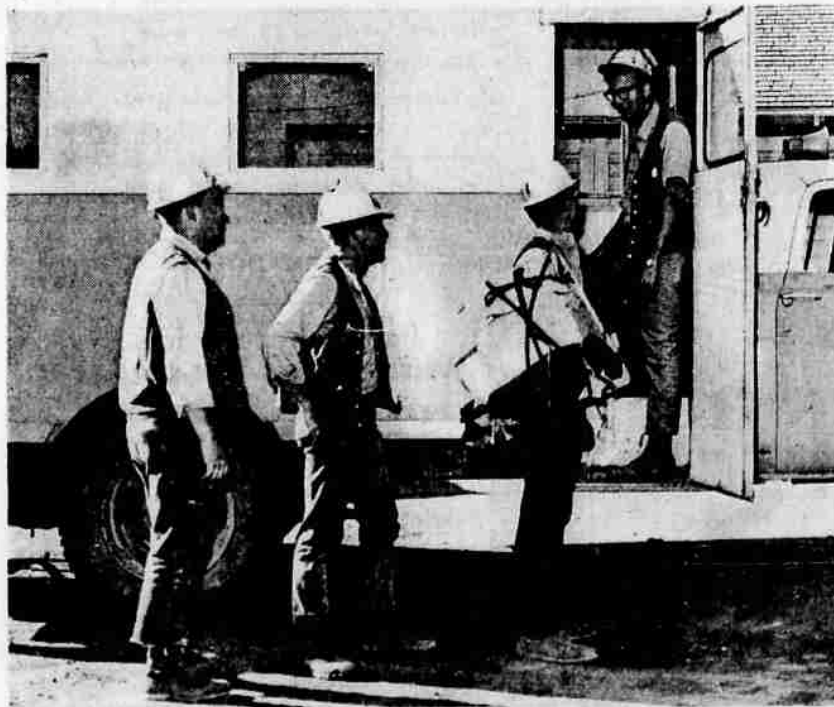
"The inter-regional fire suppression crew is a good thing. The men are welded into a pretty hot-shot crew, they know what they are doing and they do it," one forest service official stated.



John Norris, Fritze Morrison and Gary Wallace, above, check through a pack to see if everything is there. Each pack contains a first aid kit, snake bite kit, rations for one day, flashlight and extra batteries, flame resistant shirt and personal belongings.



Squad Leaders Ed Graham and Cork Cabler go over a few points with Pete Gregory, foreman. Crew members are in constant radio contact with the head base when on the fire line.



Members of the unit pick up their packs from the forest service truck before they leave for a fire. Bill Plumb, above, hands them out to Hugh Leslie, while Bill Foust and Jerry Mulkey wait for their packs.



The tools of the fire fighter must be kept in good condition. After every fire, crew members get busy and sharpen them. Above, Jim Casad, Dick Burns and Dick Zediker put their files to use while they put a fine edge to their fire tools.



Crew members work at building access trails and other district work when not fighting fires. Above, Bob Morris, Jim Schmidt, Alan Schloss, Jim Beagle, and Jim Gault, clear away some grass while Ed Graham, squad leader stands by to make sure everything is okay.