**Incident Name:** Loop Fire, Angeles National Forest  
**Date:** 11/1/66  
**Personnel:** 12 lives lost  
**Age:**  
**Agency/Organization:** US Forest Service  
**Position:** El Cariso Hotshots

**Summary:**

Kenneth Barnhill, 19  
Raymond Chee, 23  
Frederick Danner, 18 (died sometime after 11/24)  
John P Figlo, 18  
Joel A Hill, 19  
Daniel J Moore, 21  
James A Moreland, 22  
Carl J Shilcutt, 26 (died 11/6)  
John D Verdugo, 19  
William J Waller, 21
Michael R. White, 20
Stephen White, 18

On November 1, 1966, the El Cariso Hotshots, a U.S. Forest Service Interregional Wildland Firefighting Crew, was trapped by flames as they worked on a steep hillside in Pacioma Canyon on the Angeles National Forest. An unanticipated upslope wind came up in afternoon and a spot fire was fanned and funneled up the steep canyon. The crew was cutting handline downhill and part of the crew was unable to reach safety in the few seconds they had. Ten members of the crew died on the Loop Fire that day. Another two members died from burn injuries in the following days. Most of the 19 El Cariso crew members who survived were critically burned and remained hospitalized for some time. The Downhill Indirect Checklist, improved firefighting equipment and better fire behavior training resulted, in part, from lives lost on this fire.

(Four US Marines were also killed on a nearby Camp Pendleton fire on the same day.)

El Cariso Hotshot Crews 1 and 2 in October, 1966; crew photos with identification compliments of the El Cariso Hotshot crew website.

Crew 1, October 1966
Left to Right, Back: Joel Hill, Steve White, Jay Shilcutt, Steve Bowman, John Verdugo, Bob Chounard
Middle: Dan Moore, Rodney Seewald, Bill Waller, Andy Silkwood, Jim Reichard, Jim Mooreland
Front: Ed Cosgrove, Jim Brown, John Moore
From Crew 1: Joel Hill, Steve White, John Verdugo, Dan Moore, Bill Waller and Jim Mooreland all died from burns they received on the Loop Fire of November 1, 1966.
Crew 2, October, 1966, photo compliments of Rodney Seewald.
Left to right, Back: Glen Spady, Pat Chase, Pete Achberger, Fred Danner, John Figlo, Joe Smalls, Mike White
Middle: Jerry Smith, Joe Beaty, Ken Barnhill, Frank Keesling, Tom Rother
Front: Richard Leak, Raymond Chee
From Crew 2: John Figlo, Mike White, Ken Barnhill, and Raymond Chee, died from burns received on the Loop Fire of November 1, 1966. Carl Shilcutt and Fred Danner died in the hospital at a later time.
Accident Location

{mosmap lat='34.331477'|lon='-118.402541'|marker='0'|text='Accident Location'}

Map of final control line from the Accident Report

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Reports, Documentation, Lessons Learned

- Forest Service: Loop Fire Investigation Report (7224 K pdf)
- Photo of mountainside with handline location (from report):
1966 11/01 CA 12-Fatality Loop

Historical Lessons Learned - Angeles National Forest: Loop Training Exercise, 1967

From NWCG Leadership Committee:
Doug Campbell, was the former supe of the El Cariso Hotshots and Gordon -- their capable leader at the time of the burnover -- was and is his good friend and colleague. Doug always said “If Gordon could be caught unaware, anyone could.” What happened to Gordon and the El Cariso crew caused Doug to seek a better method both to predict fire behavior based on old wisdom of hotshot supes and to communicate when and where fire behavior will change. CPS, the Campbell Prediction System -- or the Fire Signature Prediction Method -- was born. Trainers and trainees carry on using the method. Today there's a new generation of advocates with new technology: Bruce Schubert, working with Doug and Will, is computer modeling the prediction process using a combination of BEHAVE and Doug's CPS.

Personal Account of Rich Leak, an El Cariso Hotshot -- Loop Fire survivor.


Video of 3-D simulated progression of the fire, locations of the crew and a fine interview piece by Gordon Knight, remembering what he saw and heard that day. This was used in the 2010 Fireline Safety Refresher Training at NAFRI.

Fred Danner's story of the Loop Fire: Letter dictated to his mom who wrote it in shorthand and later transcribed it.
Rich Leak was 19 that summer, the gung-ho son of a Camp Pendleton fire captain. "All my life," he recalls "I had wanted to be a fireman." After attending a summer firefighting program at the U.S. Marine base, he had joined an elite ground crew of "hotshots" based near Lake Elsinore, second year with the El Cariso Hotshots, he was a crew foreman, traveling the West to cut fire lines and clear brush around raging wildfires and "loving the excitement and the adrenalin rush." When answered, would put both meaning and perspective into the Herculean effort of firefighters working the Sayre Wildland Fire.

With the flames too tempting a focus, nary a reporter would ask the question. A question which later succumb, in a November 1, 1966 wildfire that scorched the same area of the western San Gabriel Mountains that burned this week. (more at the link)
the Loop fire fallen and survivors are read into the Congressional
Creation of a Park: El Cariso Community Regional Park

Hotlist Thread 11/1/11

Contributors to this article:
Gordon King who presented at a hotshot meeting in the mid-2000s, Doug Campbell, David S. Westley and Scott Gorman for the memorial marker photos. Rod Seewald sent the crew photos to the webmaster of the El Cariso Hotshot site in the fall of 1966. It's unknown if he is the photographer. Firefighters who organized and produced the Staff Ride after Gordon's Hotshot talk did a great job. There were others who shared stories, too many to name here. If you'd like to be added to this list, please let me know via the Planning Contact. Mellie

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