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
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

[Map Image]

Reports, Documentation, Lessons Learned

- Forest Service: Loop Fire Investigation Report (7224 K pdf)
- Photo of mountainside with handline location (from report):
Loop Fire Fatality Location
High Risk Tactic on topography that is in full alignment

Stop direct line construction
Wait until after dark or let the fire run and then go direct in cool fuel.

Time Tag
Direct line

Letter dictated to his mom which was then transcribed and later transcribed it.
The Loop Fire of Nov. 1, 1966, was a watershed in wild land firefighting. It led to a clearer understanding of the perils posed by narrow canyons, of the way they could, with the slightest meteorological provocation, become chimneys poised to explode with the tiniest spark.

King believed he could predict what a fire would do. He was a student of fire, attuned to the way the fluctuating forces of sun, slope, smoke, wind and heat determined its course. King believed he could predict what a fire would do.

When the El Cariso Hotshots entered a rocky ravine east of the canyon about 3 p.m., the fire was a moderate density crown fire. The men worked well together, letting King guide the attack.

At 3:35 p.m., an unexpected shift in wind caused a small spot fire to develop below the crew. The strong wind quickly fanned the flames into a fierce, uncontrolled inferno.

The 32-year-old King was a no-nonsense commander who led by example, outworked everyone and didn't say much because he didn't have to. Gordon King, the crew's leader, told his men to travel light, to grab tools but leave their portable fire shelters in the truck. Their $5 government-issue fire-retardant shirts were useless after repeated washings had leached out the protective coating. Most of the men didn't put on gloves, and they rolled up their sleeves in the afternoon heat.

Within seconds, super-heated gas had raced up the 2,200-foot canyon and exploded, trapping the firefighters in 2,500-degree heat. In 60 seconds, it was over.

In 60 seconds, it was over. It also took only 60 seconds for 12 men to die. The El Cariso Hotshots were a tight-knit crew of 31 men who worked together to stop fires. They were the best in the business, and they were the best in the world.

Twelve hotshots died, among them three 18-year-olds, three 19-year-olds and two brothers. Ten others were burned, many critically. In 60 seconds, it was over. In 60 seconds, it was over.

Just 11/7/2012 | Online Article (No longer online.)

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HOTLIST:

Newspaper Front Page Nov 2, 1966
Newspaper Front Page Nov 3, 1966
Newspaper Front Page Dec 22, 1966
Newspaper Front Page Jan 11, 1967

For 'El Cariso' was not merely chosen as a nice sounding name for the 79-acre park, but rather underlined a distinct honor bestowed upon hallowed ground to honor the memory of twelve wildland firefighters, members of the El Cariso Hotshots. Ten would die on the mountain and two would 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 of Nov. 1, 1966, was a watershed in wild land firefighting. It led to a clearer understanding of the perils posed by narrow canyons, of the way they could, with the slightest meteorological provocation, become chimneys poised to explode with the tiniest spark.

A faulty power line near Pacoima Dam sparked the fire before dawn. Fueled by 60 mph Santa Ana winds, the blaze blackened 2,000 acres around Loop Canyon and filled the northern San Fernando Valley with thick plumes of smoke.

As he led his men into the abyss, they believed it too.

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the Loop fire fallen and survivors are read into the Congressional

House of Representatives
A TRIBUTE TO THOSE CAIRO HOT SHOTS
IN THE HOUSE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR BY
HON. JERRY LEWIS OF CALIFORNIA
Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to your attention the outstanding bravery of 19 firefighters known as the Hotshots. These individuals fought the Loop fire in 1966 and bravely gave their lives in the service of their country. Over 30 years ago, these men gave their lives to protect and serve their fellow citizens, risking their own lives to save others. Their courageous actions highlight the importance of maintaining a strong and dedicated fire service.

On November 7, 1966, a U.S. Forest Fire crossed a ridge near the Loop Hotshots, resulting in the deaths of 19 firefighters. The Loop Fire was one of the most devastating wildfires in recorded history, spanning over 3,000 acres. The fire finished three years later than one would expect, claiming many lives. In this, the House commemorates the bravery of these firefighters who gave their lives to save their fellow citizens.

We also honor their contribution to our community, and as such, we pay tribute to their sacrifice and service. The Loop Fire, like so many others, serves as a reminder of the importance of maintaining a strong and well-trained fire service. In this, we pay tribute to the Loop Fire and the firefighters who lost their lives.

Memorial, dedicated 30 years after the fire, in 1996

Website with many photos and personal recollections:
El Cariso Hotshots 1966

main Website: El Cariso Hotshots
Photos, Videos, & Tributes:

El Cariso Hotshots 1966
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

Please support the Wildland Firefighter Foundation