

## **Inaja Fire and Memorial:**



Photos provided by Diane M. Smith PhD *Research Historian*, Sarah Flick *FS Librarian* and Chris Johnson *Fire Training Specialist*

### **Read the Palomar Rangers Official Report:**

- <http://www.wildfirelessons.net/HigherLogic/System/DownloadDocumentFile.ashx?DocumentFileKey=93eb72dd-dcbe-456c-80fc-dd7625f91aa7>

**In Memory of the Wildfire Fighters on the Inaja Fire of  
25, NOV. 1956**

*(NIGHT SECTOR BOSS)*

**ALBERT W. ANDERSON**      AGE: 45      U.S. FOREST SERVICE, *SHASTA-TRINITY N.F.*

*(NIGHT CREW BOSS)*

**FORREST B. MAXWELL**      AGE: 30      U.S. FOREST SERVICE, *SHASTA-TRINITY N.F.*

*(NIGHT CREW BOSS)*

**CARLTON R. LINGO**      AGE: 19      U.S. FOREST SERVICE, *SHASTA-TRINITY N.F.*

*(CORRECTIONS OFFICER)*

**LEROY WEHRUNG**      AGE: 41      *VIEJAS HONOR CAMP*

*(INMATE FIREFIGHTERS)*

**LONNIE L. SHEPPARD**      AGE: 26      *VIEJAS HONOR CAMP*

**VIRGIL L. HAMILTON**      AGE: 26      *VIEJAS HONOR CAMP*

**WILLIAM D. FALLIN**      AGE: 22      *VIEJAS HONOR CAMP*

**GEORGE A. GARCIA**      AGE: 41      *VIEJAS HONOR CAMP*

**JOSEPH P. O. HARA**      AGE: 45      *VIEJAS HONOR CAMP*

**MILES DANIELS**      AGE: 33      *VIEJAS HONOR CAMP*

**JOE TIBBETS**      AGE: 34      *VIEJAS HONOR CAMP*

**"Surely these men gave their lives in defense of this country, for without the strength of our forests, water, and other natural resources, this Nation would not be a leader in the free world today." ~ Richard E. McArdle, Chief, Forest Service, January 1957**



The Inaja Fire Memorial stands as a reminder that we must always be on the alert and ready to respond to an emergency. The morning of Thanksgiving Day at approximately 9:10 am, Nov. 24, 1956, a 16 year old local boy lit match and ignited a fire that would take the lives of 11 strong men. "Several of the firefighters who lost their lives, including the correctional officer and the three Forest Service officers, stayed with the crew until the last, helping and urging others out even though they might have otherwise had an opportunity to escape themselves". Burning a little over four days the fire consumed 43,611 acres having a 90 mile perimeter. The Inaja Fire was finally controlled at 6:00 p.m. on November 28, 1956.

**Note:** Data from here forward, is word for word segments from official Reports, written by those involved in the investigation of this Historical Tragedy!



INAJA FIRE DISASTER  
FIRE BEHAVIOR 1930 TO 2015 HOURS  
NOV. 25, 1956 - SAN DIEGO RIVER CANYON



**"THE ASSIGNMENT"**

- Complete indirect fire line downhill from the canyon rim to the riverbed below.
- Burnout the dozer line at the top of the fire and burn out along completed line crew progressed (hand line).
- Engine crew support burnout along dozer line.





### **Control of the Fire:**

Before being controlled at 6:00 p.m., Wednesday, November 28, the fire burned 43,611 acres within the Cleveland National Forest and adjoining land protected by the State. The area burned had a 90 mile perimeter. At least 5 homes were destroyed. More than 2,000 men fought the fire, 1,300 under Forest Service supervision. These included 500 Indians (local and Southwestern Region), about 500 Navy personnel, 200 inmates from San Diego County and State Honor Camps, and other organized crews. These men plus 3 helicopters, 4 air tanker planes, 2 scouting planes, 27 bulldozers, and a fleet of 90 stake, tank, and pickup trucks, formed one of the greatest arrays of men and equipment ever assembled to fight a forest fire in San Diego County.



### **READ THEIR REPORT!**

- <http://www.wfalwaysremember.org/images/incidents/documents/1956-11-25-inaja-fire-task-force-1957.pdf>

### **The Investigation Team:**

Chief of the Forest Service selected a top-level investigative team to go to the fire area. The team was headed by Assistant Chief of the Forest Service W.S. Swingler of Washington, D.C., and included Donald E. Clark, Regional Forester at Denver, Colorado; Lawrence K. Mays, Assistant Regional Forester at Atlanta, Georgia; Jack S. Barrows, Intermountain Experiment Station fire research chief, Missoula, Montana; and Mr. Lowden. Safety Officer Seth Jackson was designated as advisor

## **Key Points:**

**A. Fire Behavior.** The disastrous flare-up of the Inaja fire was caused by a critical combination of highly flammable fuels, steep topography, and adverse weather. The lull in the fire before and at the time of arrival of the night crews created a false sense of security, even though existing conditions of fuel, topography, and weather were critical.

**B. Crew location in canyon.** The men were taken down the line into the canyon owing to a lack of information to show possible danger from the fire in the canyon below. The contributing factors were:

- a. Absence of specific information on the fire status in San Diego Canyon available for the briefing at the base camp, due to poor conditions for aerial reconnaissance.
- b. Emphasis placed on the danger of the burning-out fire rather than on the main fire in the canyon below, when the day division boss briefed the night overhead personnel.
- c. Quiet appearance of the fire as viewed from the rim.
- d. The night overhead personnel had not seen the terrain in daylight.
- e. Lack of detailed scouting of the canyon on sector G during the day.
- f. Absence of contact with the bosses of the division across the canyon who had a different vantage point for viewing the situation.

**C. Trail location.** The location of the fire trail on the specific ridge where it was built instead of the spur ridge up the canyon was questionable. The previous behavior of the fire and the position above and alongside a precipitous chimney made the chosen location hazardous.

**D. Burning-out.** Sound firefighting principles call for burning out the intervening fuels between the control line and the fire edge. The effect of the burning-out fire on the behavior of the main fire and of the planned escape routes is a vital factor influencing decisions on when, where, and how to burn out, and where to place men.

### **Recommendations of the Investigating Team:**

A. It was strongly brought out by the investigation that better knowledge of fire behavior must be developed as an essential means of preventing future fire tragedies. Research studies even more comprehensive and penetrating than the past and current fire behavior research must be carried out to determine means of fighting mass fires and the behavior of fires in forested areas, especially in rough topography. In addition to progress in fire control methods already made, new and more powerful methods of attacking mass fires are needed and must be developed. Such methods, like use of aerial attack with water and chemicals, may provide the means of controlling dangerous fires with less risk to human lives.

B. More experts on fire behavior must be developed for assignment to critical fires. These highly skilled experts would evaluate situations and assist fire bosses in making decisions for safe, effective firefighting. Fire behavior is not well enough understood to firmly establish the possible effect of the burning out fire in sucking the main fire rapidly up the chimney at the site of the disaster. Other factors would have permitted the explosive run without the presence of the burning-out fire. Furthermore, the burning-out fire did not cut off the escape route. Line crews on the sector where the tragedy occurred were experienced, trained fire fighters. Moreover, on this sector there were experienced overhead personnel from the local forest and from other forests.





**How did the Inaja Fire Changed History in Wildland Firefighting?**

- FIRE CONTROL TRAINING CENTER
- THE TEN STANDARD FIRE ORDERS
- FIRST TIME AIRCRAFT WOULD BE USED TO FIGHT FIRE (The Borate Bomber)

## **FIRE ORDERS VIDEO (U-TUBE)**

- [http://wildlandfireleadership.blogspot.com/2013\\_11\\_01\\_archive.html](http://wildlandfireleadership.blogspot.com/2013_11_01_archive.html)

## **Wildland Fire Science Laboratory**

- <http://www.firelab.org/>
- <http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/pwfs/>

## **History of aircraft used to fight Wildland Fire**

- [http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/fmt/fmt\\_pdfs/019\\_02.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/fmt/fmt_pdfs/019_02.pdf)
- <http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/retardant/history.html>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvBRWTumoZI>

## **Nationwide Aerial Application of Fire Retardant(Record of Decision)**

- [http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5300914.pdf](http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5300914.pdf)

## **Formation of the smoke jumpers**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rePLC-7uqY>

## **Trends in Wildland Fire Entrapment Fatalities...Revisited**

**By James R. Cook**

- [https://www.nifc.gov/wfstar/downloads/Wildland\\_Fire\\_Entrapment\\_Fatalities\\_Revisited\\_JC.pdf](https://www.nifc.gov/wfstar/downloads/Wildland_Fire_Entrapment_Fatalities_Revisited_JC.pdf)

## **FUN FACTS**

- [http://www.readysandiego.org/Resources/wildfire\\_preparedness\\_guide.pdf](http://www.readysandiego.org/Resources/wildfire_preparedness_guide.pdf)
- <http://www.fire.ca.gov/>
- <http://www.wildlandfire.com/docs/imwtk.htm>
- <https://www.nps.gov/fire/wildland-fire/learning-center/fireside-chats/history-timeline/wildland-fire-operations.cfm>
- <http://www.foresthistory.org/contact.html>





