

# CANYON AREA PRESERVATION

Information about preserving our canyons, hillsides, and the foothills.

December 22, 2003

Maya Zaitzevsky, Project Coordinator  
City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning  
200 N. Spring Street #763  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: Whitebird Canyon Hills Draft Environmental Impact Report  
ENV-2002-2481-EIR

The LA City Planning Department has issued a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for a proposed development of 280 homes within the Sunland-Tujunga-Lake View Terrace-Shadow Hills-East La Tuna Canyon Community Plan (the Community Plan) area known as Canyon Hills.

In the DEIR Summary under "Land Use - Consistency with Land Use Plans, Policies and Regulations" on Page I-33, it declares "The proposed project would be consistent with the applicable policies in the Sunland-Tujunga Community Plan" and "the proposed project's land use impacts would be less than significant and therefore no mitigation measures are recommended".

**These declarations are FALSE and NOT CONSISTENT, and the proposed project should be rejected on Land Use issues alone, though there are numerous other reasons to reject this proposal or at the least to require the DEIR to be rejected, modified, and resubmitted.**

As part of their application, the developer is required to secure the following entitlements from the City Council before receiving the necessary permits to build the project. By definition, the fact that they are requesting these amendments and variances is proof that their initial assertions about consistency are false:

- o Major Plan Review
- o General Plan Amendment to change the land use designation in the Sunland-Tujunga Community Plan on a portion of the project site from Minimum Residential, Very Low I Residential, Very Low II Residential and Open Space to Minimum residential and Low Residential.
- o Zone changes to change the zoning designations for portions of the project site from A1 (agricultural) and RE11 (Residential Estate) to RE9-H (Residential Estate Hillside) and RE11-H (Residential Estate Hillside).

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CH DEIR Crouch Land Use.doc Page 1 of 19f

RHONDA HERBEL

12-29-03 CANYON HILLS DEIR

LAND USE ANALYSIS

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10117 MOUNTAIR	0.49	240,000	04/04/2003	2	500	1920
10354 HELENDALE	0.53	235,000	04/23/2003	2	500	1925
10233 TUJUNGA CANYON	0.66	251,000	06/24/2003	2	750	1925
10532 FERNGLEN	0.81	250,000	06/27/2003	2	750	1950
10535 REDMONT	0.89	261,000	04/30/2003	2	750	1950
10536 WILSEY	0.74	260,000	06/13/2003	2	750	1950
10650 REDMONT	1.00	258,000	03/28/2003	2	750	1940
7557 VALAHO	0.22	240,000	06/10/2003	2	750	1945
10222 HELENDALE	0.35	249,000	10/24/2002	2	1000	1945
10349 HELENDALE	0.52	273,500	04/11/2003	3	1000	1950
10520 MCCLEMONT	0.78	265,000	03/20/2003	2	1000	1940
7283 LAS PLUMAS	0.67	230,000	02/19/2003	3	1000	1950
7380 VALAHO	0.47	275,000	04/24/2003	3	1000	1975
7442 SUMMITROSE	0.75	269,000	06/30/2003	2	1000	1950
7617 WYNGATE	0.48	273,000	07/23/2002	2	1000	1945

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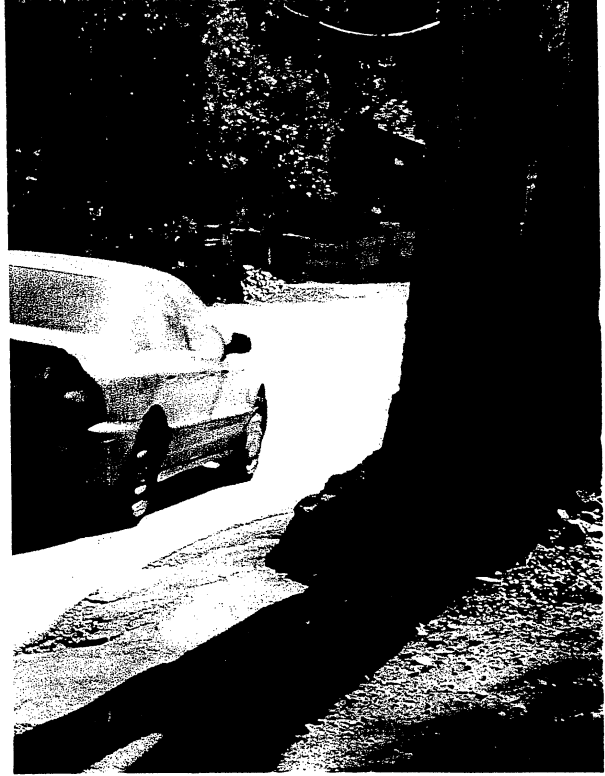
Property Address	Sort by: Proximity	Sales Price	Sales Date	Bedrooms	Square Feet	Year Built
7328 VERDUGO CRESTLI	0.04	300,000	06/19/2003	3	750	1925
9709 HILLHAVEN	0.33	292,500	03/11/2003	2	750	1925
9936 REDMONT	0.23	226,000	12/19/2002	2	750	1920
7283 LAS PLUMAS	0.28	230,000	02/19/2003	3	1000	1950
7380 VALAHO	0.37	275,000	04/24/2003	3	1000	1975
9800 HILLHAVEN	0.28	270,000	03/06/2003	4	1000	1945
9927 REDMONT	0.23	240,000	12/31/2002	3	1000	1925
10227 MCCLEMONT	0.74	257,500	03/25/2003	3	1250	1940
7334 VERDUGO CRESTLI	0.03	279,000	07/24/2002	2	1250	1925
7347 VALAHO	0.37	280,000	06/05/2003	2	1250	1950
7420 VALAHO	0.40	265,000	05/06/2003	3	1250	1985
9540 REVERIE	0.24	282,000	02/14/2003	2	1250	1945
9736 HILLHAVEN	0.32	246,000	03/14/2003	3	1250	1955
7370 VALAHO	0.33	327,000	06/24/2003	3	1500	1990
7671 MCGROARTY	0.68	329,000	07/02/2003	3	1500	1965
9611 HILLHAVEN	0.19	319,000	07/29/2002	4	1500	1995
9779 SAMOA	0.50	335,000	05/05/2003	3	1500	1990
7336 VERDUGO CRESTLI	0.03	353,000	12/14/2001	3	1750	1925
7437 TRANQUIL	0.40	329,000	07/19/2002	3	1750	1985
9628 HILLHAVEN	0.25	365,000	06/03/2003	3	2000	1990

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TUJUNGA CYN BETWEEN FOOTHILL BLVD + LATUNA CYN  
FIRE-EMERGENCY ROUTE + MAJOR TRAFFIC ROUTE

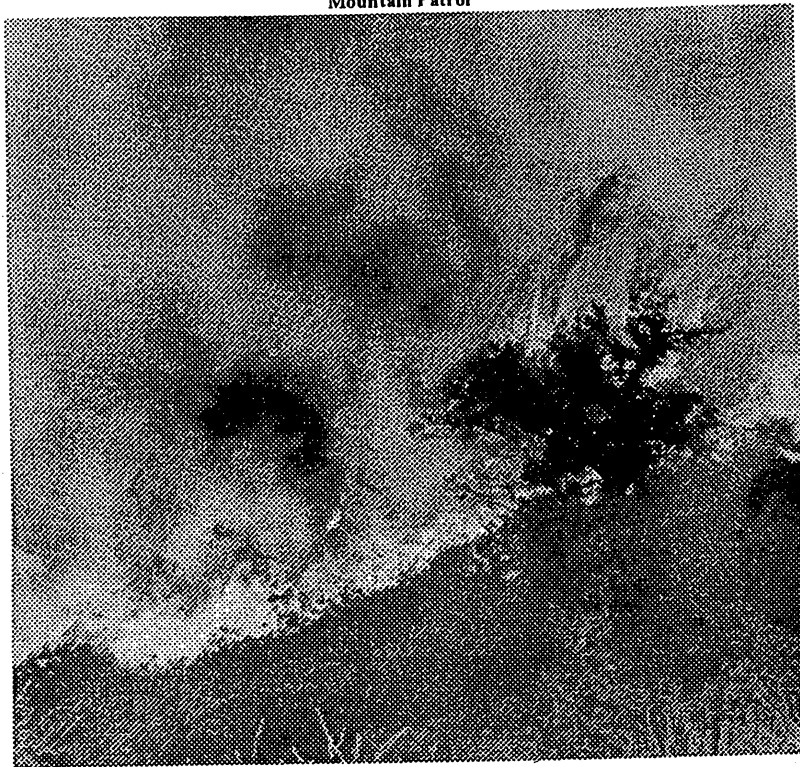
RHONDA HERBEL

November 6-12, 1955  
La Tuna Canyon Fire

In Memory of  
Auto Fireman James L. Catlow  
of  
Engine Company 39  
Who died of burns fighting  
This fire on November 12, 1955  
And Posthumously Awarded the Medal of Valor.

## The La Tuna Canyon Fire

By ROBERT T. DOVE  
Mountain Patrol



As nearly as it can be determined, the La Tuna Canyon holocaust had a very innocent and unspectacular birth. Two eight year old boys, in their own back yard in the 9600 block of La Tuna Canyon, and, without any malicious plans for the future, were preparing a noontday feast. A strong easterly wind carried enough of their fire across a clearing to ignite the adjacent hillside brush. One of the boy's father responded with department-like speed to their cry for help and valiantly attempted to extinguish the burning grass and brush with a garden hose. The wind quickly drove the fire through the tinder dry fuel and out of his reach. The father immediately called the fire department and the rest of the account of the fire is a matter of radio log history. The first-in Company reported a large, rapidly growing brush fire and immediately asked for additional help. This indication that a major brush fire was burning out of control heralded in five nightmarish days and nights of wind driven fires in the rugged western half of the Verdugo Mountains.

The 1955 La Tuna Canyon fire is actually a series of fires that burned in many directions at the beckon of wind and terrain conditions. At various times there were two or three major fire heads on the rampage simultaneously. A daily box score might help straighten out the maze of radio messages and on-the-scene reports that were issued.

Fire traveled north and east to the Shadow Island Dr. area and an attempt was made to hold along the Green Verdugo Fire Road.

**1:45 P.M. to 3:00 P.M.**

A second and separate fire in the 9800 block of La Tuna Canyon. This was maliciously set by an eleven year old boy who apparently wasn't satisfied with the fire to the north.

**2:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M.**

Fire jumps Green Verdugo Fire Road on a half-mile front and is stopped above the homes along Day and McGroarty Streets, west on Ora Vista.

**6:00 P.M. to 8:00 A.M., Monday**

Fire break constructed along east flank of the fire from the Green Verdugo Fire Road to the St. Elizabeth grounds in La Tuna Canyon.

**Monday, Nov. 7—**

**10:30 A.M. to 12:00 Noon**

Fire breaks out of the Shadow Island Dr. area and is driven north and west to Sunland Blvd.

**12:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M.**

Fire is driven south and west to La Tuna Canyon, Tuxford St. and Sunland Blvd.

**3:30 P.M. to 4:30 P.M.**

Fire front moves east to endanger homes in the Glencrest-Bluffdale area.

**5:30 P.M. to 6:30 P.M.**

Fire front moves west and south to Glenoaks Blvd.

**7:00 P.M. to 10:30 P.M.**

Fire front moves east to cross Wildwood Fire Road and south across Chandler Fire Road to the Mother Cabrina area.

**10:30 P.M. to 9:00 A.M. Tuesday**

Fire moves slowly to the east in the high hills between La Tuna Canyon and Glen Oaks Blvd.

**Tuesday, Nov. 8—**

**10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M.**

Fire moves rapidly to the east up La Tuna Canyon and sweeps over the Tujunga hill-side homes on Reverie Road and Tranquil Dr.

**2:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M.**

Fire continues east toward the Hostedder Fire Road and south toward the Verdugo motorway.

**2:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M.**

Fire moves north toward Tujunga and is stopped behind the homes along Verdugo Crestline Dr.

**3:00 P.M. to 11:00 P.M.**

Extensive back firing along the Green Verdugo Fire Road blocks any further northward progress of the fire.

**Wednesday, Nov. 9**

Cold trail and patrol operations of the fire area.

**Thursday, Nov. 10**

Continued cold trail and patrol operations.

**12:30 P.M.**

Flare up along Verdugo Crestline Dr.

**Friday, Nov. 11**

Continued cold trail and patrol operations.

Saturday, Nov. 12

SNH/28/CI

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The many directional shifts of the fire clearly indicates that erratic wind conditions hampered the Department effort to control this fire more than any other single factor. Fire fighting efforts were further compounded by an inadequate water supply and road conditions throughout the major part of the fire area.

It will be necessary to describe this fire and the fire control operations as a series of separate fires. Bear in mind this one very important fact--the control and final extinguishment of the La Tuna Canyon Fire was accomplished through the combined cooperative effort of many individuals and agencies. It is not possible to record individual or agency credit in an article of this size. Still, in fairness, it must be clearly established that the cooperation of outside agencies contributed immeasurably to the successfulness of the operation. The Los Angeles County Fire Department furnished many fully manned Engine and Tank Companies as well as the steady procession of Camp Crews and bulldozers seen in operation throughout the extent of the fire. The Federal Forestry gave us timely aid with six pieces of fire equipment with crews and a large hand tool crew. The fire departments of Burbank and Glendale added some very needed additional assistance whenever it was required.

When you consider this and the assistance contributed by the Police Department, the Board of Education, the Red Cross and other agencies, and the hundreds of hardworking citizens, the surprisingly low property loss figure is readily understandable. Now let us examine the records as it points out one fire at a time.

### **THE SUNDAY FIRE**

It has already been stated that a growing major brush fire greeted the first assignment companies as they pulled in to the fire. Their efforts were directed at curtailing the lateral movement of the fire along the north wall of La Tuna Canyon. By this time, the fire had such a speed, that catching it along the ridge was out of the question. As additional companies arrived, they were sent up Sunland Blvd. to Shadow Island Dr. and up a dirt road that is called "the airport road." The main ridge south of Sunland Blvd. has been fairly well leveled off in an unsuccessful effort to give the San Fernando Valley a fog-free airport. Though it is no landing strip, it is an ideal fire break and with aggressive hose line work, the northern and western movement of the fire was temporarily brought under control.

The eastern flank of the fire posed an entirely different problem and was later to give us no end of trouble. At this time, the directional head of the fire was to the east over rugged brush covered hills and canyons. This area has no fire breaks or fire roads and the fire gave the tractor crews no time to construct hasty breaks.

One energetic attempt to block the eastern progress of the fire was made with the net result of proving once again, that a 4-wheeled drive tank wagon will go practically anywhere that there is room for its tires. Utilization ridge lines and trails suitable only for goats or bulldozers, the tank wagon with an eager 15-man crew gave the fire a temporary setback. As it proved out, this effort was 10 minutes late and a 1000 foot of hose short.

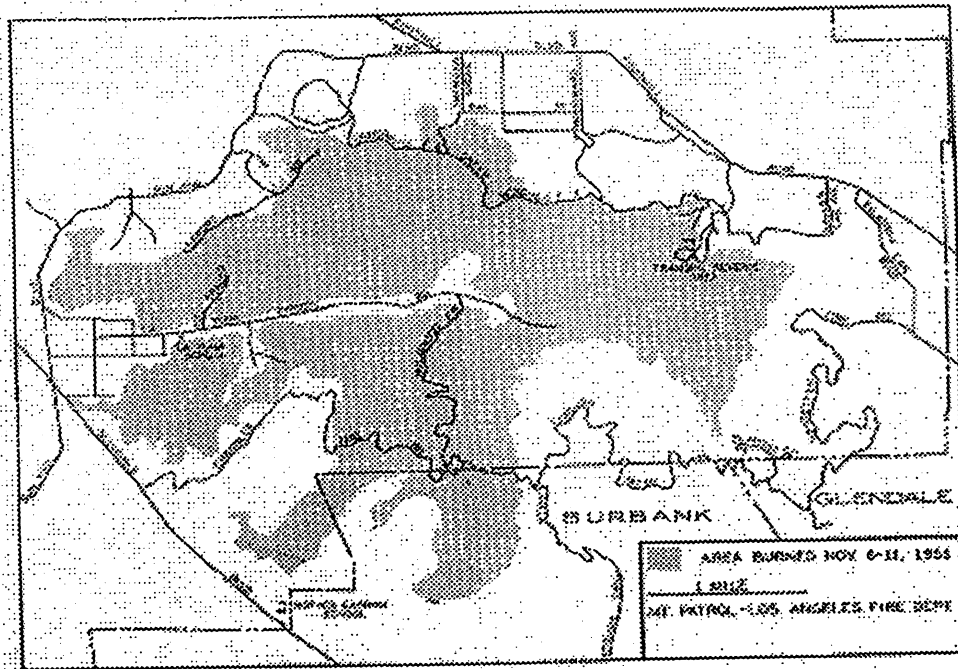
When this effort failed, a fear became a fact! Now it was clearly demonstrated that the City of Los Angeles had an uncontrolled fire burning in inaccessible terrain. Further, the fire was burning so swiftly that there was little possibility of establishing an organized position to block the fire's immediate progress. By 1:45 P.M. rugged terrain and a strong wind gave the initiative to the fire, and for the next four hours, the fire fighter fought a dangerous and heroic defensive battle. No homes were lost, but Autofireman James Catlow was so severely burned that it cost him his life.

Separating the homes in Sunland from the fire was a single brush covered ridge. Running along the crest of this ridge strategically located turn-arounds and water tanks, and has been fire tested many times in the past as an adequate defensive position. Once again the decision was made to defend along the road. Hastily, the equipment was redirected to this location. A 2 1/2" hose line was laid from the fire road down to a hydrant on the Sunland side and was immediately loaded. About 10 pieces of equipment were on hand to be spotted when a very dangerous situation developed. The wind suddenly changed toward the north and drove the fire out of the lateral canyons and up the slope toward the Green Verdugo Fire Road. Though this action on the part of the fire was anticipated, its speed and the intensity was simply overpowering. Quickly, the rigs were spotted in the closet available cover and many protective lines were laid. For a distance of 100 or more feet along the road, the fire was aggressively, though futilely fought. 1 1/2" fire streams nearly disappeared in the furnace-like heat. As the main body of the fire swept over the position, all water was directed to protect the men and the equipment from the effects of the intense heat. Men without hose lines laid in the mud and were kept wet from nearby rigs. Some men stacked up on the ground like hot cakes with the top man keeping the pile wet with a hose line.

It was during this momentary eternity that Autofireman James Catlow brought everlasting credit to himself as well as everyone in the fire service. Hose Wagon 39 was in a narrow spot in the road, as the fire hit there too fast to actually get set. He was able to get two lines into action, and by working one, he performed superhumanly in an effort to protect his equipment for future use, and to keep the road open for men who were ahead of him. His injuries were not accidentally incurred, as he could have retreated merely 10 yards to relative safety. His act of heroism required unbelievable determination and demonstrates to all to see and realize that a devoted fireman will do his full duty regardless of personal

The fire swept over the Green Verdugo Fire Road on a half-mile front and continued its relentless courses toward the many homes along Day and McGroarty Streets in Sunland. Attempts were made at both the east and west flanks to stop the downhill progress of the fire, but it quickly outdistanced the available tanks and pumpers were hurried into the Sunland community and the northern movement of the fire was stopped on the slope, before the homes were endangered. At the same time, tractors constructed hasty breaks along the flanks of the fire. By 5:00 P.M. this northern front was secured.

An hour later a mass of City and County personnel and equipment was assembled on the eastern flank of the fire on the Green Verdugo Fire Road. Three bulldozers and nearly one hundred men with hose lines and hand tools worked throughout the night to construct a fire break down into La Tuna Canyon. Proof of their good work is attested to by the fact that no amount of wind and flare ups could push the fire across the break they constructed. This type of night operation is very hazardous, and two stuck bulldozers in the burning brush, many falls, and countless crashing boulders impressed this truth on everyone's mind. In spite of the difficulties, everyone was justly proud of their work on the Sunday Fire.



### THE MONDAY FIRE

Monday was the day of big plans. Monday was also the day of big winds. The big plan phase of the day began about two in the morning. Even the most pessimistic planner could vision the final containment of the fire by noon. The "B" shift "firefighter" gave the A shift "cold trailer" the usual pep-talk routine. From all indications the day's work was going to be a routine operation of putting the fire to bed and picking up the hose. By working all through the night on the east and south flanks, the big job was done. We thought!

Around 2:00 a.m., Monday morning, the west flank began to flare up down in Del Arroyo Canyon. It was a lazy little fire without much promise for the future. With reluctance, it was determined that this flank would have to wait until dawn to be secured. Actually the terrain was so rugged and unfamiliar that a night operation was considered too risky to personnel. At the time, it appeared wisest to plan and assemble men and equipment for a daylight attack. Considering everything, it was a rosy dawn on Monday morning.

Now in this area, early morning winds are rare, seldom if ever are they gusty, and they simply never blow to the north west. Yet this was the combination that faced the fire fighter. The prepared line went down into the canyon quickly and an energetic attempt was made to halt the fires westward move. Frustratingly, the fire kept just beyond the reach of the nozzle. Soon the wind took charge of the situation and drove the fire up the north wall of the canyon toward the Sunland Blvd.-Dalc Ave. area. This flare-up was aggressively fought, and with a directional change in the wind, was soon controlled.

This change in the wind was certainly no bargain. Because of this severe and gusty north wind, the fire fighter battled one crisis after another from 10 o'clock in the morning until 10 o'clock at night. Control of the fire as utterly out of the question. Just saving homes, taxed the capabilities of the fire fighter to the utmost. For every fireman on the scene, this was certainly one day of trial by fire. With brains, guts and a little water, nearly a hundred homes were saved from destruction or damage by fire.

Tank wagons and Patrol trucks had a field day in this fast traveling fire. For the most part, the fire did not allow enough



accomplishment and a well performed task.

The spread of this fire is more easily realized by stating that two mountain Patrolmen in one rig layed hose, fought fire, picked up and moved to the head of the fire, eight separate times during a forty minute period. The success of a score of tank crews is indicated by the low structural loss figures. Ignoring an unknown amount for contents, \$12,000.00 should cover the losses of the Nursery office, two garages and the various sheds destroyed.

One illustration of fire fighting during "Operation Leapfrog" can be considered typical of the whole day's work. Envision a rig racing into the yard of a hillside from just minutes ahead of the onrushing fire. Hose lines were quickly laid and loaded by the tired but well drilled crew. The driver stuffs every available garden hose into the top of the tank and starts refilling regardless of the water level in the tank. Hurriedly the structures are closed up, then shrubbery and combustibles are cleared away from the structures and butane tanks. The long cared for cypress hedge is put to the axe, and the wail of the property owner is answered with a friendly "I'll chop-you push." Occasionally burning out ahead of the fire is started where there is time. There the fire hits and for the next 3 or 4 minutes, the fire fighter lives in a nightmare of blowing smoky heat, sparks and dirt while he keeps himself, the structure and the rig covered with water. After the main fire passes, the little fires around the house are extinguished, the roof and eaves wet down, and the inside of the house and attic is checked. Then the hose is "figure eighted" on the top of the rig and the race is on once more to get ahead of the fire. Left behind is one more example to prove that a determined crew with reasonable clearance and a little water can save someone's home and years of memories from destruction by fire.

Monday was a day of successful defensive fire fighting. The fire fighter never looked better in his whole life.

### **THE TUESDAY FIRE**

This was the day the wind blew toward the East! During the early morning hours the homes along the upper canyon floor of La Tuna were protected by a large fire fighting force as the fire moved eastward behind them. By nine o'clock in the morning the fire had crossed over and outflanked a fire break that had been laboriously constructed during the night. The wind came up early and began to push a large fire up La Tuna Canyon toward the Tujung homes that lie in a big brush filled basin at the top of Hillhaven Ave.

As in the rest of the Mountain area, this fire has been preplanned for years by the first-in company and the mountain patrol. A careful survey indicated that 43 homes would be directly threatened by a large fire in this area. By 10 o'clock in the morning this anticipated large fire was an immediate reality. Here again, the speed of the fire vastly increased the danger to the fire fighter and reduced the time of preparation. All available tank wagons, booster tanks, and all Mt. Patrol rigs were rushed to this area. The water supply in the vicinity was reinforced by a hose line up Hillhaven from Foothill Blvd. Through a combination of sound planning, good leadership and a maximum effort by all concerned, we were ready when the fire hit.

The fire had a front of approximately two blocks initially. It was the most impressive phase of the week long battle. Preceding the fire line by 75 yards was a wave of flame over 100 feet high. There was no smoke at ground level and surprisingly little heat as volumes of fresh air were being sucked into the fire. The noise of the fire and the fact that the sun was completely blotted out, contributed more to the unreality of the situation than did the heat.

For the fireman on the scene, there was little or no time to watch the awesomeness of the fire or the queer antics of the domestic animals as they were freed from their pens. It was the same old familiar rush of clearing combustibles away from structures and butane tanks and of laying the all important hose lines.

These facts can be flatly stated here and now. Every home that could be saved by the use of water, was saved. Tank vehicles should not waste any water in wetting down thick brush ahead of such a large fire--save every drop for the personnel, the structure and the rig. The mobility of a water carrying rig in this type of a fight is of singular importance. When one house is safe, pick up, refill and become available to the officer in charge.

The main body of the fire swept over the homes in the Reverie Road-Tranquil Dr. area at about 11 o'clock in the morning. The local inhabitants, who barely got out of the path of the fire with an armload of valuables were afforded a dreadful view from various vantage points. All that could be seen through the smoke and fire were glimpses of firemen working small lines and rigs moving to the various houses. Not even the bravest soul would predict even limited success for the 40 to 50 firemen battling in the area. As the smoke cleared to reveal some homes still safe and as the radio reports began coming in, hope began to push aside the gloom. As before, the combination of guts, water, and a little clearing around the structures had won another battle against a powerful fire.

The emotional impact of this discovery on the part of the home owners cannot be described easily. A person who is forced to abandon his life long possessions and memories to apparently inevitable destruction by fire is not too coherent in his praise and thanksgiving when he finds that all is not lost. Fire and smoke failed to put the lump in the fireman's throat that came with the realization that the babbling praise and tear filled eyes of the local population was not caused by smoke and

Even with all the efforts of the fireman, the fire took too big of a toll. Structure loss in this area were two homes and garages and nine sheds, all valued at \$40,000.00. This figure does not show the value of the contents of the structures, the damaged homes, or the destroyed domestic animals.

Though the main fire moved on to the east to be controlled by bulldozer and camp crews, the Tujunga community was far from safe. At about noon, the fire along the slopes of La Tuna Canyon turned north, and many homes along Verdugo Crestline Dr. were threatened. Each home was protected in turn as the fire came up to it. Even though everyone worked steadily for 2 or 3 hours, the fire nowhere reached its moving intensity.

At 3:00 p.m. drastic action was taken by the fire fighter that for once and for all was to take the initiative away from the fire. Large scale back-firing operations were commenced. It was clearly evident that the fire along the slopes of La Tuna Canyon would continue to burn northward on a wide front. In this area, the green Verdugo Fire Road is on the La Tuna downhill side, and it is not a good defensive position. It was wisely decided to back fire from the road even though a mile and a tenth is quite a fire to deliberately start.

The actual operation was a gigantic affair and smoked over 140 fire fighters and nearly thirty pieces of equipment. It required the hose and pumping duties of nine pumpers to furnish the relay line that was 2.1 miles long. Including patrol rigs, there were about 20 tank wagons used. Working with calculated movement, the job was completed in about six hours. The conduct of the operation was an organizational masterpiece. Additional men and equipment were sent up from Base Camp as they were required. The brush above the fire road was carefully wet down before back firing was commenced. Every inch of this private fire had over-lapping hand lines to keep it under control. Observers at vantage points were constantly on the lookout for spotting behind the back fire. Complete and enthusiastic cooperation on everyone's part was the order of the day. In all, it was a completely safe operation, even if it did scare the Sunland-Tujunga Civilians half out of their wits. They thought we were back firing from Catalina!

At about midnight, the main fire made its last big run. Flames estimated at one hundred feet high roared up to meet the back fire. By this time there were a hundred yards of cleared ground between the Fire Road and the main fire. Only small sparks got into the unburned brush, and in wet brush they did no harm. With the exception of one short lined flare-up on Thursday. The La Tuna Fire was all over but the shouting!

#### **PATROLLING AND COLD TRAIL OPERATIONS**

It is not fair to the firemen who successfully executed this operation to slight this phase of the fire. It's not that we pity them for the sweat they expended, but their's was an extremely important job.

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday is officially logged as "Patrol and Cold Trail Operations." What a masterpiece of understatement!! Many men swung brush hooks and shovels for hours just to insure that the fire would not eat up one more valuable square foot of ground cover. Headlights and flashlights could be seen at all hours of the night in the areas that had not yet been secured.

This job was hard, unspectacular labor. From no angle can it be considered fun. The hills were steep and rocky and in some places the brush was so thick, axes had to replace the brush hook.

One typical operation took place early Friday morning. A night crew had come out for supper at midnight from a very steep area. They reported growth too big for brush hooks, a ragged fire line with large hot spots well into the unburned brush, and, a hose line at the crack of dawn was agreed upon as the solution for this situation. Men and equipment were assembled and the line was flanked out at the top. The hill was so steep, it took only 12 minutes to get 1750 feet of 1" hose down to the hot spots. Thirty minutes later, the fire was put out for keeps. It took two hours and a half of the most strenuous work to get the hose and crew back to the top. This operation points out the thoroughness and seriousness of the work of the cold trailing crew.

The value of a good cold trail shows up in two important ways. It insures that a fire, once controlled, will not rekindle to embarrass and plague a battleweary fire department. It prevents further burning and guarantees that additional tons of mud and boulders will not be washed down on the homes below when the winter rains strike. The cold trail does nothing for the burned over area, but it can represent thousands of dollars saved from the flood damage toll. The simple log book statement of "Patrol and Cold Trail Operations" represents miles of very successful cold trails and a well performed completion for a job of fire fighting.

The La Tuna Canyon fire didn't go out --it was put out! Every fire fighter can be justly proud of an excellent record and his job well done.

*Sub: B. + CD*

## The La Tuna Canyon Fire

By ALEX SHUTZ

La Tuna Canyon is a peaceful little valley nestled between peaks of the high Verdugo Mountains which form the north side of the San Fernando Valley and separate it from the Sunland-Tujunga area of the City of Los Angeles. This valley is popular for its rural atmosphere providing country living within a highly urban community. The primary attraction is the panorama of beautiful trees and orchards lying next to lush brush-covered mountains rising on all sides.

Sunday, November 6, 1955, was a day of low humidity, high temperatures, and fairly strong winds; the sort of day not unheard of, but somewhat unusual for the month of November. The season's rainfall to date in Los Angeles was almost unmeasurable. Hot, dry days with occasional drying winds had created tinder-dry conditions which made one feel that brush would ignite if you so much as snapped your fingers.

Two small boys playing at being campers in their own back yard allowed their kindled campfire to get beyond their control. Very quickly the fire spread to the dry brush nearby. The boy's father attempted to extinguish the fire, but it was beyond his control. At 12:27 p.m., the first fire companies were enroute to a reported brush fire at 9645 La Tuna Canyon Road. It was several days later before these companies were back in quarters.

Until this time, there were many references made to the '38 brush fire in the Santa Monica Mountain area. Old-timers talked about a week or more of straight fire duty. They talked about many problems, of limited water supplies, of severe structural exposures, of wicked fire tricks. They talked about "mountain time," and of going without food and sleep for many hours. They implied, if not directly so stating, that this was the roughest, toughest, and the most unusual fire-fighting experience that a fireman could face. Rookies had little to argue such impressive tales--until 1955.

The La Tuna Canyon fire burned over an area of more than forty-five hundred acres. Two homes and two guest houses were lost, along with several out-buildings, automobiles, trailers, fences and miscellaneous improvements. The fire cost the City of Los Angeles several thousand dollars in extraordinary operating expense. It cost citizens much more than this in property damage and loss of valuable water shed. There is a good chance that winter rains, already starting, may increase the loss through flood damage. Already, plans for flood protection in this area call for expenditures of one hundred thousand dollars. But, property damage as high as it was, is infinitesimal--for a fireman's life was lost!

### APPARATUS AND EQUIPMENT

The initial report of the first-in fire company was that a major brush fire was in progress already involving about twenty acres. A second-alarm assignment was requested and very soon the greatest movement of apparatus and equipment in the history of the Los Angeles Fire Department was under way. Twenty-two calls for additional equipment were made. These ranged from a single unit to six engine companies.

Apparatus was called for and responded as quickly as the need became apparent. Thirty different engine companies, more than one-third of the total L.A.F.D., worked on the fire. Thirty-eight engine companies were involved in move-ups, all but ten of which eventually moved to the fire. Fifteen Tank Wagons, all those in service except three left in strategic locations; nine Booster Tanks, all those in service except one in the Harbor area; ten Patrol rigs; one lone Truck Company; and many miscellaneous apparatus and vehicles responded to the fire. All told, more than one hundred twenty fire department vehicles were operating at the scene of the fire. Almost everything got into the act, possible the only types of apparatus not represented were the Foamites, Water Towers, and Fire Boats.

To gain some appreciation of the potential fire fighting striking force in the wide area of operation, consider these figures:  
**Water capacity of booster tanks:**

- 30 Engine Companies ----- 9,280 gallons
- 15 Tank Wagons -----10,700 gallons
- 9 Booster Tanks ----- 3,600 gallons

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- Total Capacity -----24,380 gallons

How much water was used on the fire?

Your guess is as good as anyone's. It was plenty, yet not enough to make the job easy. This could be a good problem in hydraulics, if enough factors were known.

Bear in mind that these are all L.A.F.D. equipment. L.A. County worked with nine of their companies and other equipment; the Forestry Service with six units. Both were of inestimable value in helping control this fire.

*enb. 10/2/55*