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Incident Name: Hull Mountain Fire near Medford, Oregon

Date: 8/25/94

Personnel: Sidney Maplesden, Jr

Age: 25

Agency/Organization: under contract with Oregon Department of Forestry

Position: Dozer Operator

Summary: On August 25, Sidney Maplesden, Jr, a contract bulldozer operator was attempting to cut a fire break around a spot fire on the Hull Mountain Fire near Medford, on Oregon Department of Forestry lands. Fire behavior became extreme: 90 degree temperature; relative humidity was 22%; and it was burning in oak, madrone, ponderosa pine. The fire began spotting up to one-quarter mile. Fire intensity quickly grew and the fire became a large plume dominated event. Sidney Maplesdon and his dozer were overrun by the main fire and he was killed.



Maps

The Hull Mountain Fire was near Medford, OR in Sam's Valley

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{mosmap lat='42.491112'|lon='-122.975536'|marker='0'|text='Sam's Valley, Oregon'}
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Reports, Documentation, Lessons Learned

- Comments in a brief report: "Burnover - dozer - critical fire behavior predictions not available to victim. Individual working alone, no communications, no lookout, no dozer boss. Victim had no wildland firefighter training."

- Oregon Death Index: [Sydney Bruce Maplesden](#)

- USFA Memorial Database: [Sydney Bruce Maplesden Jr](#) and on the [National Fallen Firefighters' Monument plaque](#)

under

- Sydney's name, death date and brief bio are included in the USFA [Firefighter Fatality Retrospective Study](#)

published April 2002 (2,888 K pdf) Oregon

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Media Articles and Reports.

Sawtooth Herald-Tribune, Aug 27, 1994

Volunteer bulldozer driver killed as fire continues

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CENTRAL POINT, Ore. — A volunteer bulldozer driver killed as he led a sudden fire up a 5,000-acre forest fire last October, fire officials said Friday.

Sydney Bruce Maplesden Jr., 25, died Thursday night when the fire about two miles from Santa Valley, where more than 100 homes had been evacuated.

Wildly swirling winds kicked up in the early evening, breathing new life into the blaze and sending it racing through the rugged canyons where the firefighters were trying to dig lines to contain the blaze. As the fire leapt out — covering a quarter mile in less than 10 minutes —

the firefighters fled. A supervisor had ordered a group of bulldozer drivers out, but Maplesden took off from the pack and headed in a different direction, said fire captain Mike Templeton.

"Most of the bulldozers headed south, but Maplesden and one other headed north," Templeton said. Maplesden, 25, apparently tried to run. His burned body was found about 100 yards from the back of the bulldozer, said Deputy Medical Examiner Spencer Smith.

Authorities believe the fire was set, and if so, the arsonist could face felony murder charges for Maplesden's death, Jackson County Sheriff C. W. Smith said.

home, but few did so as about 1,200 firefighters continued to fight the wildfire. There was no estimate of cost.

In five Western states, more than 23,000 firefighters were battling 29 major fires Friday. The fires had burned 365,700 acres, according to the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho. ...

Oregon Department of Forestry cited:

Agency faces fine in forest fire death

By The Associated Press

CENTRAL POINT — The Oregon Department of Forestry will be fined for safety violations in the death of a bulldozer driver in a forest fire last summer.

The citation from the Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Administration will echo the findings of a report on the Aug. 25 death of Sydney Maplesden Jr., department spokesman Doug Decker said Wednesday.

Decker said the amount of the fines and specifics of the citations aren't known yet. The report said shortcomings in communications, training and supervision combined with volatile fire conditions to set the stage for Maplesden's death in the Bull Mountain fire.

The report was prepared by investigators from the Forestry Department, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Oregon Fire Department and Oregon State Police.

"There were many things that happened," said lead investigator Steve Eitland of the Forestry Department. "When you added them all together, they resulted in the fatality."

State Forester James Brown has appointed a task force that will make recommendations for improving safety before the upcoming forest fire season.

Maplesden's father and widow were upset with the report, saying they felt it inaccurately blamed the bulldozer driver for his own death.

Blamed on an unknown arsonist, the fire burned 7,800 acres and destroyed eight homes and 36 other buildings near Santa Valley.

Maplesden had left his assigned area to use a borrowed bulldozer in an apparent attempt to save the homes of friends from his fast-approaching fire, Eitland said.

As volunteers, neither Maplesden nor Mike Davis, a bulldozer driver he worked with, was familiar with general safety rules and practices, and at the time of his death, Maplesden wasn't aware that the fire was burning in intensity, Eitland said.

Pushed by strong afternoon winds and burning through dry oak and grass, the fire surrounded Maplesden and blew up into a swirling mass of flames that left no chance for survival.

Working within 700 feet of Maplesden, Davis also was trapped by flames, but was able to get out a safe area and wasn't confronted by such intense fire, Eitland added.

The Forestry Department had hired Davis along with his bulldozer to fight the fire, Maplesden, a friend, was hired to help him as a supervisor, whose job is to serve as a scout and helper on foot. They initially were assigned to clear access roads and water holes in areas not directly threatened by the fire.

On Aug. 25, Davis and Maplesden were working near Davis' home on the southeast flank of the fire.

About noon, the division supervisor told Davis to work on a lower access road and not to go too high up the hill, where the fire was burning.

Maplesden took a bulldozer owned by Davis' neighbor and started working around the two homes. Meanwhile, Davis left his assigned area to work closer to his home with his bulldozer.

PHOTO BY AP/WIDEWORLD



Photos, Videos & Tributes on Today, Vol 55, No. 1, 1995 "In Memoriam":

Photo: Associated Press; Video: M. Farnham/Wide World; Fire Management Notes: USDA Forest Service; In Memoriam: Oregon Department of Forestry; Oregon Memorial: Tribune editing on-line; Please request the photos from the editor.

In MEMORIAM
Half-staff flags. Grieving families and friends. Redless hoses. Purple ribbons. Flag-draped caskets.
These images became sadly commonplace in 1994 as the firefighting community lost 28 of its members.
The first tragedy occurred on July 6 when 14 Federal firefighters—13 employees of the USDA Forest Service and one employee of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management—died while assigned to the Storm King Mountain Fire near Glenwood Springs, CO. Most of these individuals were from Oregon.
Kathi Beck
Tamara Bickett
Scott Blacha
Levi Brinkley
Robert Browning
Doug Dunbar
Terri Hagen
Bonnie Hobbly
Robert Johnson
Jon Kelle
Don Mackay
Roger Roth
James Thrash
Richard Tyler
Six days later, two more Forest Service firefighters and a contract pilot died when the helicopter in which they were flying between fires on the Gila National Forest crashed near Silver City, NM. They were on an initial attack mission on the Guide Fire.
Robert Boomer
Sean Gulleruez
Sam "Tragum" Smith
On July 30, two contract pilots died in an air tanker crash west of Missoula, MT, while working on the Butler Creek Fire.
Bob Kelly
Randy Leno
A water tender driver suffered a fatal heart attack on the Tyee Fire in the Wenatchee National Forest, Wenatchee, WA, on August 3, he was on standby in a staging area at the time of the incident.
Paul Hodges
On August 13, a contract air tanker based at Ryan Air Attack Base was hoisted to drop fire retardant on fires in Kern County, CA, when it crashed in a remote area on the Angeles National Forest. All three crew members died.
Robert Buck
Joe Johnson
Shawn Zarenaba
An owner-operator from Quincy, CA, who was driving a water tender died in a single vehicle accident while enroute to the Danny Fire, Plumas National Forest, on August 19.
David Castro
A contract dozer working on a spot fire on the Bull Mountain Fire near Medford, OR, was overrun by the main fire on August 25 and the operator was killed.
Sidney Maplesden, Jr.
On September 14, a Bureau of Land Management employee of the fire cache at the National Interagency Fire Center died following a vehicle accident while delivering cache supplies to a fire.
Robert Johnson
A military helicopter crashed on the Pugette National Forest killing one military flight crew member on September 22.
John C. King
Fire overran a firefighter on the Cedar Mountain Fire in the Mark Trail Wilderness on the Chattahoochee and Decree National Forests in Georgia on November 29.
Mary Jo Brown

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Oregon Memorial to Fallen Firefighters:

Sydney B. Maplesden
Oregon Department of Forestry
Date of Death: August 25, 1994

On August 25, 1994 Firefighter Sydney Bruce Maplesden, Jr., of the Oregon Department of Forestry died when he was overrun by a wildfire while attempting to cut a fire break, with a bulldozer.

Contributors to this article: Mellie



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