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Incident Name: Canyon or Canyon Inn Fire

Date: August 24, 1968

Personnel: 8 lives lost

Age: most were teenagers

Agency/Organization: Los Angeles County Fire Department

Position: firefighters

Summary:

George Thomas, age 36, Fireman Specialist of Crew 4-4

Duane Battle, age 17, Crewman Crew 4-4

Earl Walzer, Crewman Crew 4-4

William Rodriguez, Crewman Crew 4-4

Arthur Mendible, Crewman Crew 4-4

Robert Rivera, Crewman Crew 4-4

Gregory Banks, Crewman Crew 4-4

Larry Carlin, Crewman Crew 4-4

On 8/23/68 the "Canyon Inn Fire" started above Glendora, CA. On 8/24 members of Los Angeles County Fire Department Crew 4-4 were burned over. Seven juvenile crewmen and a Fireman Specialist lost their lives. Before the fire was over it burned 19,100 acres. As a result of

the loss of juvenile firefighter lives in this fire and the [Hacienda Heights Fire](#) , the practice of using juvenile probationers to fight fire was re-evaluated and stopped. The Downhill Indirect Checklist was another result of this fire.

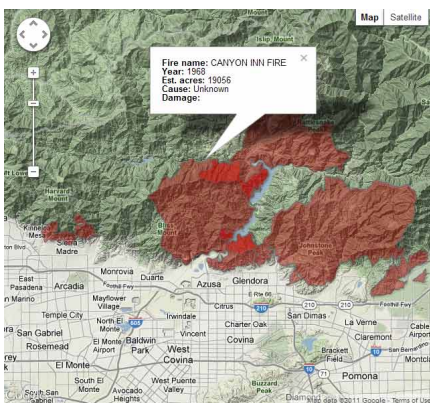


Maps

Incident Location

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Canyon or Canyon Inn Fire perimeter



Topo Map location of Canyon Fire fatality site (Section 24) relative to Angeles NF Boundary; location is the tiny red dot below the "heel" and about 1/2 mile outside the forest



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Reports, Documentation, Lessons Learned

The Calgary Herald, Aug 26, 1968

7 Teens, Fireman Die In Brush Blaze

(Los Angeles Times, copyright)

LOS ANGELES — Seven teen-agers and a fireman were trapped between two masses of flames and killed Saturday while battling a huge brush fire north of Asusa, Calif.

The victims were among more than 1,000 county, state and federal firefighters attempting to curb a 4,000-acre blaze in San Gabriel Canyon.

Flames exploded on a funnel canyon, trapping a Los Angeles County probation department cap crew between the main fire above them and a new fire below them, County Fire Chief Keith E. Klingler explained.

Five of the 15-member crew died through the flames. Two

were burned, two of them seriously.

Seven of the boys and George A. Thomas, 26, a county fireman assigned as foreman of the crew, fell on the canyon slope where the heat and smoke from the lower fire caught them. They died of heat and smoke inhalation, firemen said.

"The team was in a burn-over area, extending a hose-line up a hill from a pumper truck below, when a sudden shift in wind caused the fire to spot in a canyon below the group," Chief Klingler said.

It was then, he said, that the spot fire exploded through unburned brush below the team and rushed up a funnel-like canyon adjacent to the steep slope, on which they

[Online Wildfire Smoking 1926 \(pdf\)](#) and Range Experiment Station: [Fire Weather and Fire Behavior](#)



[Wildlandfire.com Links](#) from Smokey307: [CA-ANF-Colby \(1/18/2014\)](#) and [Followup](#)



Media Articles and Reports.

The Spokesman Review, Aug 26, 1968

Killer California Blaze Resists Firemen's Efforts

GLENDORA, Calif. (AP) — irious condition. Two others were burned less seriously.

More than 1,000 firefighters — including 60 teen-agers — battled a raging fire Saturday where seven youths and their fireboss were killed Saturday when flames rushed up a dry canyon. Despite protests, the Los Angeles County fire department said it would continue using teen-agers to fight the fire, ramping out of control since Friday in the San Gabriel foothills.

The youngsters are in fire-crews from forestry camps run by the county probation department. Most of them were assigned to the camps after being arrested as delinquents.

The fire department poured fresh men around the 20-mile perimeter of the fire as it spread over 14,000 acres and temperatures rose in the hills 30 miles northeast of Los Angeles.

Seven airplanes dumped chemical fire retardant on the flames and five helicopters ferried men from one hot spot to another.

"All these young boys!" said Betty Hicks in an interview. "Don't you think they could find some other way of punishing them?"

Her son, Mamel, 17, and four others survived the searing flames as they exploded up a funnel-like canyon when wind shifted Saturday.

The Hicks boy suffered second-degree burns and was in se-

rious condition. Two others were burned less seriously.

"Half those kids don't know what they've been sent up there for anyway," Mrs. Hicks said. "And they don't know why they're out there fighting those fires. They're too young for that kind of thing."

"These things are terrible," agreed Fire Capt. Clyde Wing. "But those boys know what they were doing is dangerous. We all know that."

John Sanford, 17, who was in the county probation department as soon as he was sent to the camp after being arrested as a delinquent seven months ago.

"You can choose kitchen duty, maintenance or forestry, but I liked the fire crew," he said.

He described the tragedy this way: "We were cutting a line around it when suddenly the fire came over the hill behind us. I heard the fireman (Capt. George Thomas) of the county fire department tell us, 'Run! Run! Run!'"

Thomas, assigned as foreman of the juvenile crew, died of extreme heat and smoke inhalation.

Jesus Berumen, 16, burned on the left hand, ran in a different direction from Sanford. He made it through the flames too, but said: "I could hear the screams of the other boys. I never saw them after that."

Spokane Daily Chronicle, Aug 26, 1968

Program of Using Boys to Fight Fires Attacked

LOS ANGELES (UPI) — The use of juvenile probationers as volunteer fire fighters has come under attack following the deaths of seven teen-agers in the Canyon Inn fire Saturday.

County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn called for a reevaluation of the program whereby wards of the court may volunteer for hazardous duty on the fire lines. But he stopped short of recommending abolition of the program which has been in effect since 1932.

"There's no telling how many lives have been saved through the efforts of youths working in this same program over the years," Hahn said, "and I know the boys prefer the forest work to the cement floors in the detention camps."

He noted that there was talk of halting the program in 1955 after five young probationers died in a similar tragedy in the Hacienda Heights fire.

He said the findings of an investigation at that time showed that the 80 hours of training received by the youths was adequate and that the program was beneficial for the youngsters.

The parents of the victims said the two weeks of fire fighting training was not enough for their boys' safety.

Ruby Battle, mother of Duane Battle, 17, said, "I wonder why they had to fight fires. He did not have that much experience to fight fires and certainly not such a big one as that."

Caesar Carlin, father of Larry Carlin, 16, said, "How can you expect a 16-year-old kid to handle a job like that?"

"In two weeks it is impossible to train them. I don't see why the hell they took those innocent young kids and made them do that."

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