

Facility Highlight

Vina Helitack Base - Tehama-Glenn Unit (TGU)

Located 12 miles North of Chico in a large native grassland known as the Vina Plains, Vina Helitack provides a valued asset to the Tehama-Glenn Unit as well as many northern CAL FIRE units.

In 1955, a fire station was established in Vina and staffed with a CAL FIRE Schedule B engine. Not long after that an additional engine was added to Vina by Tehama County Fire. In 1974, CAL FIRE established a helitack base at Vina, replacing the Schedule B engine with a helicopter and crew. For the first eight years (1974-1982), the helicopter, pilot, and maintenance were provided by a private vendor via contract with CAL FIRE while the fire crews staffed the copter. The Schedule A county fire engine remained at Vina until 1980.

In 1982, when CAL FIRE began its own Helicopter Program, the contract copter was replaced with a UH-1F model copter that was acquired by CDF on loan from the federal government. CAL FIRE hired their own civil service helicopter pilots and contracted for maintenance of the copters. In 1989 the UH-1F model was replaced with a UH-1H model from the federal excess property program. With ongoing modifications, the UH-1H is the model that CAL FIRE operates today.

Vina Helitack serves an initial attack area of around 2.5 million acres. The area is a diverse blend of grassland, oak woodland, brush, and timber covering Tehama and Glenn counties, most of Butte County, and part of Shasta County. In addition Vina responds initially into portions of Lassen, Plumas, Trinity and Mendocino National Forests.

On average Vina responds to

26,200 acres and destroyed 954 structures in 1999, the Storrie Fire which burned 55,261 acres in 2000, the Poe Fire which burned 8,333 acres and destroyed 133 structures in 2001 and the Mussolini Fire which burned 3,260 acres in 2002.

Vina's crew is comprised of four fire captains, two fire apparatus engineers and nine firefighters. Normal daily staffing includes one pilot, two fire captains and six firefighters on the aircraft with one fire apparatus engineer operating the helitender. A typical day for the crew involves a rigorous physical fitness training program in the morning, with station projects and



CAL FIRE file photos

170 incidents a year, including fires and rescues. Some of the helitack bases more notable incidents include the 49er Fire which burned 33,400 acres and destroyed 312 structures in 1988, the Campbell Fire which burned 125,892 acres and destroyed 27 structures in 1990, the Jones Fire which burned



fire training filling the rest of the day. The crew is well trained in helicopter operations and safety, short haul rescue and firefighting techniques, including tactics, procedures and strategy.

Vina Helitack operates with a UH-1H Superhuey. This helicopter has been significantly upgraded from the original UH-1F models acquired in the late 1980s. It carries nine passengers, has a 324 gallon Bambi water bucket and has an internal gross weight capacity of 10,200 lbs. and an external capacity of 10,500 lbs.

Vina was initially constructed with a lookout tower built into the station; however, this lookout has not been staffed since the late 1960s. It is still maintained and augments existing lookout shots if needed.

Vina Helitack is very involved with the local community. The base provides tours for schools,



Photos by Wes Schultz

boy scout troops, and other groups and also participates in a local high school job shadowing program.

Vina has remained prepared throughout the fire season by

training, inspecting, cleaning, and maintaining their equipment, while they work with the firefighters to fill the needs at the Helitack base. Summer is always busy for Vina as they maintain their vital role in serving and protecting California.

Animal Respirators

Each year, thousands of pets die in house fires due to smoke inhalation. For most people, the death of their pet is like losing a member of the family. On March 8, 2006, the Redding Kennel Club donated 15 oxygen masks to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). Five masks were donated to the Tehama-Glenn Unit and 10 were donated to the Shasta-Trinity Unit.

The mask set includes three different mask sizes: small, medium and large. The mask is similar to

those used by veterinarians for anesthesia. In the past, firefighters have tried to use human oxygen masks for injured animals, however, the shape of the animal's muzzle and the animal's fur often got in the way. The animal masks are cup shaped and have a rubber ring that creates a seal, allowing rescuers to pump pure oxygen into the animal's nose.

Although saving human lives will always take precedence, saving any life is

important. This extra tool will help firefighters save family pets and reduce the trauma fire victims endure.

