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Siege Summary Part IV: July 2 – August 5

The 2008 June Fire Siege continued until the fall rains came for some of the complexes. The remaining portion of this report highlights the significant events that occurred during the next 34 days. During this time period a critical wind event caused a major expansion of all fires, and additional lightning ignited more fires. This segment is marked by severe tragedy with 13 firefighter fatalities directly related to the fires.

The fires continued to disrupt everyday life in the affected communities. Evacuations were initiated and rescinded, and smoke became a long term impact to health. Many 4th of July celebrations and other special events were impacted, along with tourism, travel, health and air quality. Life did not go on as usual.

The scale of the fire-fighting effort required extraordinary efforts and cooperation between a growing number of organizations. Fire-fighting resources had been working for 10 plus days and fatigue had become a factor. Fire managers were concerned about firefighter health and safety. There was an exceptional response by local fire departments from throughout California that assisted in the fire fight. Additional California National Guard were activated for training and deployment, Department of Defense air resources became involved, along with activation of international cooperative agreements.

To emphasize the importance of the effort and recognize the dedication of those involved, it is important to note that the Governor continued to visit the fires and President Bush visited with firefighters. Regional chief officers and CalMAC had to maintain an adequate reserve of initial attack

forces in the face of predicted thunderstorms and remained prepared for the remainder of a long fire season still ahead.

We end the detailed discussion of the 2008 June Siege Summary on August 5 with the tragedy of the helicopter crash that took the lives of 9 firefighters. These fires did not end on August 5th, but for practical purposes, the siege ended and the remaining fires started to blend into the other fires of a busy wildfire season.

Wednesday, July 2

The Gap Fire

The Gap Fire started July 1 in Santa Barbara County, and quickly became the top priority for resources. Structures were threatened when “sundowner” (Santa Barbara’s version of Santa Ana) winds pushed the fire downhill from the mountains to the outskirts of Goleta and Santa Barbara. Resources were re-directed from Northern California Siege fires to the Gap Fire.

Thursday, July 3

The First Life Lost

Less than two weeks into the siege, Governor Schwarzenegger acknowledged concern about the hazard of fatigue associated with the long days that firefighters were working.

“I think that they all are doing a great job, but the danger is that our firefighters get stretched thin. A lot of them are working overtime and they are staying up for more than 12 hours, sometimes 24 hours, 36 hours. So we have to be very careful that they get enough sleep and this is also why we have asked the National Guard to provide us with 200 extra personnel.”



Fire activity affected many 4th of July events.

To bring some relief to fire fighters, CAL FIRE ordered FEMA resources to work on incidents in counties that had received the Presidential declaration of disaster. FEMA resources were assigned to CAL FIRE for suppression efforts in BTU, SHU, and MEU. BTU had the largest number of resources assigned.

Two days after the Governor's statement, Volunteer Fire Fighter (VFF) recruit Bob Roland, 63, of Anderson Valley, CA passed away during the early morning of July 3, 2008 after suffering fatigue and respiratory difficulties. He was assigned to the Oso Fire in the Mendocino Lightning Complex.

The North Mountain Fire was contained today at 2,889 acres.

Friday, July 4

Fires Hamper Holiday Events

Independence Day dawned cool and clear, as a southwesterly nighttime wind allowed the marine layer to move inland. Fire behavior on the west side of the Central Valley moderated, and crews were able to make significant progress. The TGU complex was declared contained at 22,907 acres.

The impact of fire and fire suppression activity kept four major highways closed, which impacted holiday traffic. The Cub Complex closed Highway 32, inconveniencing thousands of people attending a 4th of July celebration in Chester. Similar frustrations occurred with the continuous Highway 70 closure for thousands of people attending a music festival in Quincy. The Iron/Alps Complex burned on both sides of over 5 miles of Highway 299, which caused intermittent closures. Highway 1 was closed around Big Sur. Closure of these major transportation routes contributed to the large-scale economic impact, and particularly to seasonal businesses dependant on tourism during the holiday.

Many Northern California communities canceled or postpone traditional firework shows due to limited visibility, and high fire danger. At the Corral Fire, a 4th of July Parade was held at the Incident Base. Fire personnel, including the vendors, participated in the parade and were treated to a simulated fireworks display. Chemical light sticks and vehicle emergency warning lights provided the visual effects. The great attitudes and imaginations made the holiday enjoyable.

Other special events and significant ceremonies were affected by the siege as well. Fires on the Six Rivers National Forest limited access to the Yurok and Karuk tribe's ceremonial grounds. One major Karuk ceremony was cancelled, and a Yurok ceremony was almost cancelled by the fires.

The Governor announced that he was doubling the California National Guard ground forces deploying to Northern California Wildfires. Two hundred soldiers were deployed on Tuesday. He also ordered another 200 to report on Sunday.

USE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESOURCES IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

With the wildland agencies stretched beyond their normal everyday resources, they called upon local government firefighting organizations for help. Local governments, both paid and volunteer, assisted as they had many times in the past. These agencies proved indispensable in assisting fire suppression efforts of other communities outside their primary area of responsibility.

Never before has local cooperation been more necessary than the “Siege of 2008”. Without hesitation, they responded to the needs of the state and federal agencies in California. There were times when the majority of the CAL FIRE stations were covered by a combination of local and/or volunteer fire service apparatus. In at least one case, 100% of the CAL FIRE stations in a Unit were covered by local government.

During this siege, 142 fire agencies provided assistance to CAL FIRE in Northern California alone. Over 5,400 local government personnel worked more than 187,000 hours from May through August. When all of the available CAL FIRE engines were assigned to Siege fires, local government engines exceeded 42,000 hours as they covered CAL FIRE stations to provide a response for new fires. Local agencies provided over 1,770 pieces of fire apparatus and other firefighting equipment used for station coverage and direct fire suppression efforts. (These numbers do not include the overhead and equipment or out of state resources assigned to federal incidents). Local government personnel were also dedicated members of state and national Incident Management Teams.

The rapid response of local government resources to help the state and federal agencies during emergency situations was a prime example of the cooperative efforts of the emergency services in California.



NATIVE AMERICAN CONCERNS

There are 108 federally recognized Native American tribes in California. Many tribes have culturally sensitive lands with some sites used for religious practices. The Blue 2 Fire and Siskiyou, Ukonom, and Iron-Alps Complexes threatened cultural and spiritual areas of the Yurok, Karuk, Tolowa and Hoopa tribes. In fact, the Ukonom Complex threatened the only known fully intact Karuk spiritual site. Meanwhile sacred lands of the Yurok (Siskiyou Complex) and Hoopa (Carey Fire in the Iron-Alps Complex) were also threatened by the fires.

The Yurok, whose name means “downriver people”, and the Karuk, whose name means “upriver people,” together with the Hoopa, whose name means “valley people”, form a distinct ethnographic group in northwest California, which represents the three largest tribes within the state. Although they have distinct languages, each Tribe has cultural lands and prayer sites within the area, and practice very similar rituals and ceremonies. Rituals include the brush dance, jump dance, boat dance, flower dance, and white deerskin dance.

Past experience with damage to culturally significant areas from suppression tactics heightened the tribes concerns during the 2008 June Fire Siege. For example, bulldozers caused damage to Hoopa sacred lands during the 1999 Megram Fire, and westward spread of the Carey threatened to move into this same area.

Through formal agreements with the Forest Service, the Yurok, Karuk, and Hoopa tribes have designated tribal representatives to work with Incident Management Teams ensuring Native American cultural sites are protected and concerns are addressed. Tribal resource advisors scout areas in the vicinity of a fire to determine if culturally sensitive areas are threatened.

If there is Native American presence within an area, tribal representatives coordinate with the incident management teams to mitigate fire suppression impacts. Mitigation strategies include locating hand lines well outside the area of concern or letting the fire burn through it. Due to threat of vandalism and desecration, the tribes and the Forest Service do not disclose exact locations of cultural sites.

On the Blue 2 Fire, Siskiyou Complex, Ukonom Complex, and Carey Fire, incident management teams reported that one of their primary concerns was protecting extremely important cultural sites. However, major traditional spiritual activities were expected within some of these fire areas adding yet another level of complexity as teams had only limited knowledge of exactly where these activities were to occur and how many people would be involved. Cultural leaders within the Yurok and Karuk Tribes expressed the need for better adherence to agreed-upon fire management procedures and on-site consultation for culturally sensitive areas. Hoopa tribal leaders requested long term analysis of where the Carey Fire will spread and establishment of trigger points when they were consulted on fire suppression actions. Other issues of concern were potential loss of valuable timber on tribal land and the effects of long-term smoke exposure on public health.

Meanwhile, active fire conditions heightened widespread public concern, requiring new tactics to be considered, which in turn increased concerns with tribal representatives.

“...tribal representatives coordinate with incident management teams to mitigate suppression impacts.”

Major General William H. Wade stated:

“we’re doing something that we heretofore have not done and that is to take our soldiers and put them on the fire line. We’ve always used our unique military capabilities in other ways with MPs, truck drivers, cooks, fighting fires from the air with our pilots, but this is something different. Exigent circumstances require extraordinary response measures and that’s what we’re about to do with this first time ever commitment of National Guard forces to actually fight on the fire lines.”

Saturday and Sunday, July 5 - 6

Inversion Helped Fire Fighters

An inversion moved over the fires which continued to moderate fire behavior. This gave personnel the opportunity to make progress and secure constructed fire line. Aircraft was limited by the smoke and was unable to support ground operations.

The Oliver Fire was contained at 2,789 acres and regional chief officers were hopeful that the increased containment on some of the complexes indicated the worst is over. Precautionary evacuations of the Magalia area on the Butte Complex were lifted and some engines, water tenders and dozers were reassigned to other fires or home for rest.

SoCal MAC was convened in Riverside, California in anticipation of increased fire activity as an extreme heat event developed across California.

Monday through Thursday, July 7-10

Critical Wind Event

The Corral Fire was contained on July 7 at 12,434 acres. The Blue Fire that was previously incorporated into the Ukonom Complex was separated from the complex and prioritized as an individual fire known as the Blue 2 Fire.



Many fires continued to experience active burning.

Fire activity did not stay moderated for long; July 7-10 brought an extremely critical foehn wind event. It coincided with a record-breaking heat wave and very low relative humidity. These winds produced the last big increases in acreage. Red flag warnings were issued as temperatures reached 115 degrees with minimum relative humidity inland that ranged from 5-16%. Foehn wind events of this magnitude and duration are uncommon during July in Northern California.

Demobilization of resources on the Butte Complex was discontinued on July 7 with predicted winds. On July 8, strong east winds surfaced in the early morning hours, which blew down the Feather River Canyon. On the Butte Complex, the Camp Fire exhibits sustained runs, with spotting, torching, and crowning on both flanks. The burned area increased by 17,000 acres in one day. The giant convection column was readily visible on weather satellite images. By mid-morning there were reports of 10-15 structures destroyed in the Concow area. The threat of fire crossing the West Branch of the Feather River necessitated evacuations in communities of Magalia and Paradise Pines. This was the third time this summer that these communities had been under evacuation orders.



Home destroyed by wildfire.

The nearby Canyon Complex, was also affected by the east winds. An immediate evacuation order was issued for the area southeast of Lake Madrone. Fires in this complex burned an additional 4,708 acres.

On the Shasta Complex, the Mary Fire in the Whiskeytown Complex merged with the Moon Fire. It made a rapid run, threatening the communities of Ono and Igo and prompted evacuations. The nearby Motion Fire spread to the south and southwest and threatened structures in the communities of Keswick and Shasta. Large numbers of engines were diverted from other assignments to provide structure protection for the threatened communities.

The American River Complex also experienced a significant setback, as the Government Springs Fire, was active on three flanks under the influence of strong easterly winds.

The Basin Complex displayed extreme fire behavior with group tree torching, spotting, and short duration crown runs. The fire increased in size by 5,531 acres which necessitated the evacuation of Big Sur and the

closure of U.S. Highway 1. The Martin Mars airtanker was reassigned from Lake Shasta to the Basin Fire and operated from Lake San Antonio.

Tuesday, July 8

International Assistance

International support was offered by Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Mexico. Fire fighters from Greece, already in California, were engaged in suppression activities. Amidst the critical wind event, firefighters from Australia and New Zealand departed for the Interagency Fire Center in Boise for orientation before deploying to California. Some of these firefighters remained for up to thirty days

A Canadian overhead team of 15 fires specialists was deployed to the Mendocino Complex. An order was placed to Canada for air tankers. Aviation managers worked through Customs issues for entry into United States airspace. Once in California, they inspected and carded the aircraft for use.

Wednesday, July 9

Governor Requested Additional Federal Resources

Responding to earlier gubernatorial requests, the Federal Government (FEMA resources) helped California as 40 other states send firefighters, fire engines and other resources. In preparation for additional lightning and anticipation for the rest of fire season, Governor Schwarzenegger sent the following letter to President Bush requesting federal active duty military forces, out of state federal firefighters to train National Guard forces, and the increase of the “Maximum Efficiency Level” (MEL) for the U.S. Forest Service to 100 percent.

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE: AUSSIES, KIWIS, AND CANUCKS

The 2008 June Fire Siege received an impressive level of assistance from outside of the United States. Forty-five experienced wildland fire specialists from Australia and New Zealand were deployed to fill critical mid-level supervisory and management positions on Siege fires. Following briefing and orientation, they were assigned as Strike Team Leaders, Division Supervisors, Helicopter managers, and other specialists. They provided experienced leadership to the hand and aircraft crews that were in California from all over North America

Fourteen wildland fire specialists and two hand crews, from Canada were deployed to siege fires. The Canadian crews and overhead were experienced fighting fires in steep, rugged, heavily-forested terrain. Climate and burning conditions in much of Australia, New Zealand, and Canada are comparable to California. Common language, similar command structures, and cross-training made the experience of the “Aussies”, “Kiwis” and “Canucks” highly useful.

This was not the first time that reciprocal agreements were utilized, allowing the United States to cooperate with Canada, Australia, and New Zealand to provide assistance during large fire emergencies. During the fire seasons of 2000, 2002, 2003, and 2006 firefighters from Australia and New Zealand provided resources to fires in the United States. In 2003 and 2009, US firefighters journeyed to Australia to lend a hand during devastating bush fires. In 2006, US fire overhead and crews traveled across the border to help with fires in Canada. In 2007, bomberos (firefighters) from Mexico assisted on Southern California fires.

Wildland firefighting operations have truly taken on an international flavor.

“Common language, similar command structures, and cross-training”

WHEN 911 CALLS YOU

“Reverse 911” is the proprietary name for a mass-communication system that is widely used during wildfires. These systems are equipped with mapping software and a database of phone numbers allowing them to automatically deliver a phone message rapidly to an unlimited number of people within a specified geographic area. The typed text message is translated into a robotic voice. There is often a pause before the message comes on, so it is important to educate residents to not hang up when they don’t hear a voice right away. Most of the systems also have a way to register cell phones, often over the internet.

During the 2008 June Fire Siege Reverse 911 systems were used:

- ▶ 24 times to make about 19,000 calls in Butte County between June 10 and July 9, notifying residents when precautionary or immediate evacuation orders went into effect.
- ▶ For evacuation notices, road closures and “all-clear” messages in Shasta County.
- ▶ For the first time to notify residents of a community meeting about the fire during the Slinkard Fire in Siskiyou County.

The Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District used traditional direct calling to warn residents of potentially unhealthy smoke in their area during the Indians Fire and the Basin Complex. In the future, a computerized reverse calling system could be used for these smoke-related public health advisories.

During the 2007 fire siege in southern California, a “Reverse 911” system was used to evacuate over 500,000 people in San Diego County. There were almost as many questions about the new notification system as about the fire itself.

It’s important to recognize that residents may not receive the information when hearing impaired or non-English speaking residents are called. Tehama County is required to include a Spanish translation with their emergency messages since more than 10% of their population is Spanish-speaking. These systems improve the safety of evacuations by getting notice to people sooner, and reducing the risks taken by emergency personnel. “In the 1999 wildfires, several of our emergency vehicles had to drive through flames to go door to door,” said Joy Willis of Shasta County’s communications center, recalling a time when they didn’t have “Reverse 911” systems. It doesn’t mean emergency responders won’t go into the neighborhoods; it just means they will be able to time it better.”

“There were almost as many questions about the new notification system as about the fire itself”

Dear Mr. President,

As you know, California is in the midst of battling unprecedented wildfires that have stretched our state's firefighting resources to their limit and placed thousands of Californians in immediate danger. On the heels of lightning storms in June that ignited more than 1,700 fires across the state, we now face extremely high temperatures and increased fuel loads that are exacerbating fire conditions and putting our communities and firefighters and other first responders at risk. With more lightning storms forecast for later this week, we sit at a critical tipping point in California that requires immediate federal help and aggressive pre-positioning of federal resources.

As of July 8, 2008 California had placed requests for the following assets with the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho: 302 hand crews; 41 helicopters; 616 fire engines; and 773 support personnel. In addition, we are calling on NIFC daily for additional air tankers that are critical to suppressing the flames. These numbers change daily based on the current fire status; I ask that you direct your federal agencies, working through the NIFC, to make all requested assets available to California...

Thursday, July 10

Governor Visited Shasta Complex

Record heat and critically low humidity continued. Temperatures of 100-115 degrees are recorded across the interior below 2000 ft. elevation, and extended to within a few miles of the ocean. Red Flag Warnings were in effect for most of Northern California through the following morning. Heat related illness affected suppression efforts on numerous complexes.

The Governor visited the Shasta Complex and commented on the cooperation of all agencies.

He stated, *"The way we fight those fires is if everyone works together. And I think that the world has seen how we handle emergencies in California. They've seen how well we handle it because we coordinate well between the state, the locals and the federal government and how well that the fire officials and law enforcement officials work together..."*

Despite the critical weather the past three days, the Indians Fire was contained at 81,378 acres.

Friday, July 11

Civilian Fatality and Increased National Guard Mobilization

Officials disclosed that the body of a civilian fire victim was found in the smoldering remains of a house in the Concow area on the Butte Complex. The victim was later identified as Van Scott West, 61 of Concow.

Governor Schwarzenegger ordered an additional 2,000 California National Guard troops to train for firefighting duties. The fire agencies increased the training effort and initiated a nationwide search for qualified military fire crew leaders to accompany each crew of soldiers. The training consisted of three days of classroom training on basic wildland firefighting and safety. Ten Task Forces composed of 10 (20-person) crews then moved outdoors for two days of intensive training before deployment to a fire assignment.

The additional trained troops were ready to respond to new fires as the fire season continued.

Saturday, July 12

Flash Flood in Southern California

The weather affected firefighting efforts again with the arrival of monsoonal rain over the southern portion of the state. The system arrived over the region on July 12th and remained in place until the 17th and



President Bush and Governor Schwarzenegger arrived in Redding to tour wildfires.

produced 2 to 4 inches of rain. The reduced fire activity proved beneficial to firefighters.

The Piute Fire in Kern County received 4 inches of rain in 2 days, which led to serious flooding but also effectively extinguishing the blaze. Flash floods concerned fire officers and firefighters were removed from the fire before access is severed.

The Mad Complex was contained at 3,705 acres.

Sunday through Wednesday, July 13 – 16

Critical Infrastructure Repairs

Sustained efforts and good weather continued to produce more successes. On July 14, the Humboldt Complex was contained at 1,325 acres and the Whiskeytown Complex at 6,240 acres. Then on July 15, the Yuba River Complex was contained at 4,254 acres. The total number of Siege complexes still being prioritized was down to 16 from 32.

Railroad lines were strongly impacted by the Siege. The Government Springs Fire on the American River Complex, was contained before direct contact with the rail lines. To protect their asset, Union Pacific Railroad

(UPRR) brought in a fire train for protection of the tracks. They estimate the economic impact of shutting this major rail line would be \$1,000,000 per hour.

Fires in the Butte and Canyon complexes directly impacted the UPRR line in the Feather River Canyon. The line closed for many days. Suppression personnel on the Butte Complex worked with UPRR when Tunnel #15 caught on fire. UPRR was successful in extinguishing the fire without the need for fire engines assigned to the fire line being redirected to the tunnel.

The power infrastructure (lines and generation facilities) was impacted by the Siege fires. The power companies made repairs to restore power as soon as fire officials allowed. On July 12, a Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) employee who repaired the power infrastructure damaged by the Camp Fire, Butte complex, was injured and transported to the hospital. The Cedar Fire (Iron Complex) affected 4 to 5 miles of PG&E transmission line.

Thursday, July 17

Presidential Visit

President George W. Bush arrived in Redding and toured the North Operations Coordination Center and met the employees who made the movement of personnel, resources and aircraft happen.

Accompanied by Governor Schwarzenegger, Senator Feinstein, and Congressman Herger, the President flew over the Shasta Complex fires and met with firefighters. He visited the Redding Smokejumpers who were having a record-breaking year. With 616 jumps by mid-July, they set a new record for the number of jumps in one year. One individual had over 600 career jumps. He also met with Boy Scouts who were working on a Healthy Forest Initiative project to reduce fuels.

OUT-OF-STATE RESOURCES

When out-of-state engines arrived to bolster initial attack capability and for fire line assignments, they found that firefighting in California was different. Some of the engine crews had never been on a hose lay longer than 100 feet.

The San Bernardino Unit was the reporting location for private fire fighting companies and local government agency engines from Oregon and Colorado. A second group of engines from Florida, Louisiana and Arkansas were a mix of private, local government and one USFS engine. Using a standardized Safety In-Briefing format developed during the fires in 2007 they briefed the firefighters on:

- ▶ Weather forecast, ERC's Fuels and local fire behavior conditions/predictions
- ▶ Local communications plan
- ▶ Current local & statewide fire activity
- ▶ Resource commitments
- ▶ Local fire history
- ▶ Local agreements & working relationships
- ▶ Feeding/sleeping and logistics.

They were also provided with fireline safety, urban interface tactics, and structure protection plans.

The Oregon and Colorado engine crews were experienced with comparable tactics, fuels, burning conditions, and topography and rapidly adjusted to California. However, the Engine Crews from Florida, Arkansas, and Louisiana needed significant skill assessment, training and equipment inspection to ready them for fire assignments in California. While they had extensive experience fighting wildfires in swamps, bayous and flat relatively open woodlands, they lacked experience and training in tactics used in CA. They received 38 hours of additional training that included pumps, hose-lays, and hand line construction, use of foam and gel in structure protection, and radios. Inspection and repair of equipment, pumps and personal protection equipment (PPE) was completed resulting in several mechanical defect repairs and issuance of equipment and PPE including bee veils.

The two groups of engines were dispatched to cover stations and fire assignments from San Bernardino Unit in southern California to Shasta Trinity Unit in northern California. All of the out-of-state engine crews reacted positively to the process and were able to safely and effectively carry out their assignments.

“Firefighting in California is different.”

CALIFORNIA NATIONAL GUARD (CANG) ASSETS BATTLE WILDFIRES



Daniel Swatts, 69th Public Affairs Detachment

California National Guard's Team Dozer consisted of eight D7 Dozers and 32 soldiers.

The CNG, with support from National Guard personnel and equipment from other states, provided 12 rotary-wing aircraft, eight fixed-wing aircraft and hundreds of personnel to assist in extinguishing the 2008 June Fire Siege. The eight CANG helicopters included five UH-60 Blackhawks, one UH-70 Firehawk, one CH-47 Chinook, and one OH-58 Kiowa. Four National Guard helicopters were provided from other states. Fixed-wing aircraft included one C-130J for personnel and equipment transport, and two RC-26 aircraft for aerial imagery. The North Carolina Air National Guard, the Wyoming Air National Guard, and the Air Force Reserve from Colorado Springs, CO each provided 2 C-130J outfitted with the Modular Airborne Fire Fighting Systems (MAFFS). Each aircraft carried up to 3,000 gallons of fire retardant in a pressurized tank system allowing the retardant to offload in an even flow, and prevent gaps in the retardant line. The CNG also provided two advanced mobile communications and data platforms (IC4U) to assist with command and control operations in remote areas, one Heavy Expanded Mobile Tactical Truck for refueling, and a 5,000 gallon water tender.

Team Dozer was one of the first ground elements to respond as part of what CANG dubbed "Operation Lightning Strikes" firefighting effort. A component of the 649th Engineering Company from Red Bluff, the team brought 8 transports, 8 specially modified bulldozers, and 32 people. Dozers received roll cages to protect operators in case the dozer should turn over while operating in hazardous terrain, and fire curtains to shield soldiers from the heat and flying embers. Equipment received thorough maintenance checks were inspected and serviced. Finally, the soldiers received fire retardant uniforms. The dozers were used to construct fire-breaks. It was the first time that the 649th had been tasked to actively fight the wildfires instead of transporting firefighters to assignments.

The 200-member Task Force “AXE” was the first brigade of CANG troops to deploy as firefighters. After 3 days of intensive classroom training in wildland fire behavior, suppression techniques, and safety, they deployed to Mendocino County for 2 days of on-the-job training at the already-contained Table Fire. Each of the 10 (20 person) crews was lead by an experienced agency Fire Captain. Immediately, these soldier/ firefighters engaged in spirited, ongoing competition to be the first, fastest, or best at every task. Following field training, they deployed to active-fires and took over the necessary, but unglamorous job of “mopping up” along previously constructed fire lines. Their task was putting out fire under logs, and in stump holes. After each shift they returned to the Incident Base at the Anderson Valley Fairgrounds tired and dirty. After a hot meal and showers, they retreated to their pup tents for a little shut-eye before the next shift. Even combat veterans claim they have “never worked this hard” before. These CANG crews worked effectively and were an important asset, allowing regular fire crews to be redirected to other assignments. Several fire officers commented that the performance, attitude, and conduct of these soldiers were outstanding.

Task Force “PICK” was tasked with holding and mopping up operations on the Lime Complex. One of the fires threatened our nation’s tallest Ponderosa Pine tree (240.5 feet tall, with a trunk nearly eight feet in diameter and an age estimated at 700+ years (American Forests National Register of Big Trees)) near Hayfork, CA. This was definitely a tree worth saving. The crew trimmed low branches and cleared a wide area around the tree to reduce surface fuel. They cut small trees away from the big tree, and set up a water sprinkler system to keep the cleared perimeter moist. The citizen-soldier firefighters can be proud of the work they did to save this heritage tree.

Task Force “SHOVEL” included 240 CANG soldiers deployed to the Iron complex on the Shasta-Trinity National Forest for three weeks. Their assignment was to assist in mop-up operations, and with suppression damage repair. Task Force “BUCKET” from the Air National Guard completed training at the Butte Complex before being deployed to the Telegraph Fire in Mariposa County near Yosemite National Park. Firefighting was a new mission for them, they were motivated to help in suppression efforts.

When a Los Angeles County firefighter cut his leg working on a fire in Mendocino County, he gets 21 stitches from a CANG physician’s assistant working side-by-side with Disaster Medical Assistance Team (DMAT) volunteers. DMAT was a volunteer organization under contract with CAL FIRE to provide free medical care to the fireline. DMAT personnel were volunteers with job commitments, so there was not always a doctor or PA available, especially when so many fires were burning. As they did during Hurricane Katrina and the Southern California fires of 2007, the National Guard medical personnel teamed up with DMAT volunteers to make the best use of scarce medical resources. The CANG also provided ambulance services, which projected the capability of these EMS teams closer the fireline to more quickly treat firefighter injuries.

CANG provided three critical firefighter medivac missions during the Siege. The first was the medivac of a firefighter with a concussion on the Iron Complex. The second was a firefighter with a heat-related illness from the Canyon Fire. The third mission involved transporting two of the firefighters injured in the tragic helicopter crash on the Iron Complex to the hospital.

ILLEGAL MARIJUANA CULTIVATION ON PUBLIC LANDS

One of the problems that wildland firefighters encounter is illegal marijuana cultivation. Despite the efforts of specialized law enforcement units, the illegal growing of marijuana is big business in the woods.

Marijuana farms take advantage of our national forests and parks to raise the high profit crop using free soil and water. Plants are frequently guarded by people who are dressed in camouflage and often armed, with orders to protect the crop from intruders. During the 2008 June Fire Siege, firefighters encountered pot farmers, sometimes with near tragic results.

On the Motion Fire in Shasta County, a burnout operation trapped the guards of a well-camouflaged farm. Some of the guards suffered serious burns, were treated by firefighters and transported to a hospital.

On the Soda Complex, armed pot farm guards kept firefighters at bay for several days, preventing suppression actions.

Not only do the armed guards of these illegal operations present a danger to firefighters and others, the chemicals and trash generated by growers and left on site represent a significant environmental hazard. The federal land management agencies have insufficient funding to disrupt these operations and our public lands continue to be used to grow marijuana.

“Wildland firefighters encounter illegal marijuana operations”

Governor Schwarzenegger commented on the President's rapid response from the federal agencies and the cooperative efforts that recognized that 80 percent of the United States firefighting resources are in California.

Friday, July 18

Demobilization and Redeployment

Once several of the Complexes reached containment, the regional chief officers in the MAC groups began planning for demobilization and redeployment. The long fire season ahead was still a driving factor in assuring "ready reserve forces for new fires". Discussions focused on maintenance of the logistical support for incident bases and the distribution center for the months of containment, mop-up, and recovery efforts.

CALMAC began the planned release of the MAFFS air-tankers to their home bases. The military helicopters provided by the Navy and Marine Corps were also released.

Sunday, July 20

The Fire Fight Continued

The Mill Fire (Soda Complex) in the Sanhedrin Wilderness Area crossed protection boundaries. A Unified Command was established between the Mendocino National Forest and the Mendocino Unit of CAL FIRE.

A south-southeast wind on the Bear Wallow Complex, pushed the Caribou Fire north, with spotting up to ¼ mile. One spot fire burned 30 acres.

Mandatory evacuation orders were lifted in the area affected by the Motion Fire (Shasta Complex).

A main concern on the Lime Complex was road closures and construction activities on Hyampom



NorCal MAC met in Redding.

Road while firefighters conducted burnout operations. The Cub fire was contained at 19,718 acres.

Monday through Thursday, July 21 – 24

Additional Lightning

On Monday, scattered thunderstorms were predicted for Northern California and Eastern Oregon with drier air following behind the storms. The regional chief officers deployed additional heavy helicopters in the northeastern part of the state in preparation for new fires. By afternoon many of the fire complexes in Northern California were extremely active, and the convection columns from the Lime Complex fires were clearly visible from Redding. Additional resources to meet anticipated needs were coming available as several of the complexes neared full containment.

By Wednesday, many of the large fires reported active burning with continued threats to communities. The Basin Complex near Big Sur displayed active fire behavior with backing, upslope runs and isolated torching. Voluntary evacuations and road closures remained in effect. The Basin Complex reached 142,617 acres burned with 72% containment. Of the 4 active



Many firefighters had been assigned to the siege for more than a month.

fires within the Iron and Alps Complexes, the Cedar Fire was once again threatening structures in the communities of Del Loma and Big Bar with mandatory evacuation orders in effect for communities along the Highway 299 corridor. Communities along the Trinity River were threatened and evacuated numerous times beginning June 25th. Evacuations recurred in July due to threats from various fires within the Iron Complex. Low visibility, due to smoke, limited the use of aircraft. The Iron and Alps Complexes burned 68,292 and were 62% contained. The Lime Complex had 10 uncontained fires, continued to burn in heavy fuels and rugged terrain, and was 65% contained at 130,936 acres. Progress was expected to remain slow.

Of the 174 new fire starts that occurred throughout California during this period (July 21 – July 24) only one, the Panther Fire, escaped initial attack. Located 15 miles south of Happy Camp, it started by lightning on July 24 and burned in steep terrain and heavy timber. Fire fighting resources from the Siskiyou Complex provided an initial attack response. By afternoon it had burned more than 100 acres and

was 16% contained. This new fire on the Klamath National Forest would take the life of one firefighter.

Addressing firefighter safety and fatigue remained the highest priority for regional fire chiefs as they develop strategies to rotate and rest fire personnel. Many engine crews, strike teams, and overhead personnel had been assigned to the siege for more than a month; some firefighters have been away from home for more than 50 days.

As part of the California National Guard's response to the Governor's order for an additional 2,000 National Guard personnel to boost firefighting forces, 240 members of Taskforce Shovel were assigned to assist with mop-up and patrol of the Ironside, Ziegler, and Denny Fires on the Iron/Alps Complexes.

Friday, July 25

Fire Fighter Fatality

On July 25, 2008 Andrew Jackson Palmer, an 18 year old firefighter from Olympic National Park in Washington, is fatally injured when he is struck by a falling tree. Palmer's engine crew was assigned to the Iron Complex as a falling team to remove hazardous trees along the fireline ahead of mop-up crews.

The Telegraph Fire, a human-caused fire, started in Mariposa County.

The Shasta Lightning Complex was contained at 86,500 acres. The Piute Fire was contained at 37,026 acres.

Saturday, July 26

A Third Fire Fighter Fatality

The Panther Fire took the life of Daniel Packer, Chief of East Pierce County Fire and Rescue in Lake Tapps, Washington. Packer, while scouting fireline locations

PIUTE FIRE/FLOOD EVENT

An influx of monsoonal moisture to the Piute Mountain Range led to thunderstorm development and significant rainfall over the Piute Fire. On July 12th, locally intense rain fell on portions of the fire resulting in flash flooding in the Erskine Creek and Thompson Creek drainages. Road access washed out, stranding approximately 60 firefighters for the night in the upper end of Erskine Creek. The following morning dozers were sent in to open the road allowing their exit.

The afternoon of the 13th brought more rain, and the automated rain gauge on Piute Peak recorded 3.2 inches of rain for that day alone. Several local roads were closed, and some residents along Erskine Creek were evacuated by a hoist rescue from Kern County Fire Helicopter 408. Unsettled weather continued through July 16th, with Piute Peak having received a total of 5.16 inches of rain during the 5-day period.

Although the Piute Flood Incident was managed by Kern County Fire Department separately from the Piute Fire, resources were shared in order to minimize the damage and mitigate the danger to the citizens in the impacted areas. These included a strike team of engines, dozers, hand crews, and a helicopter.

There were no injuries reported due to the flooding, but numerous roads, structures, and other improvements were damaged. The primary damage was located in the Kelso Creek, Erskine Creek, and Thompson Creek areas. Flooding and/or mudslides were anticipated to be a problem downstream from the fire for the next few years. On the plus side, however, the rain brought a quick end to the Piute Fire.



Flooding and mudslides closed roads downstream from the Piute Fire.

HOOVER CABIN

Fires in the Ukonom Complex threatened critical natural and cultural resources, including the Hoover Cabin and other structures at Wooley Camp. Over the course of several days, helitack crews constructed fire lines, and installed sprinklers and pumps to secure the historic log cabins and outbuildings at Wooley Camp.

Wooley Camp is situated in a large meadow at the confluence of Wooley Creek and Haypress Creek in what is now the Marble Mountain Wilderness. The site was highly valued by the local Indians for fishing and hunting. In the early 1900's, the camp consisted of a ramshackle log house and some outbuildings presumably built by a local Karuk Indian. In 1925, the 80-acre camp was purchased by a small group of fisherman. Herbert Hoover (US President 1929–1933), an avid fisherman, became a member of the newly formed Wooley Creek Association in 1926. Shortly thereafter, the Wooley Creek Association built a lodge and 6 small log cabins, one for each of its members including Hoover. Hoover visited the cabin often over the years to fish for steelhead on Wooley Creek and nearby Salmon River. It is believed that Hoover's attraction to the area was partly responsible for protecting the Marble Mountains as a Primitive area in 1931.



Active fire behavior threatened cultural and natural resources.

as a Division Supervisor, deployed his fire shelter when fire activity increased and succumbed to fatal injuries from burns and smoke inhalation.

The Panther Fire doubled in size as it spread. It moved into a snag patch previously burned during the 1987 lightning siege. Standing dead trees greatly increased the transport of embers, which heightened the potential for spot fires.

The Soda Complex was contained at 8,652 acres.

Another 200-member task force of the California National Guard and their instructors arrived on the Breakneck Fire in the Butte Complex for 2 days of additional training after having completed wildland firefighting classroom training at the Wildland Fire Training Center in McClellan, CA.

Sunday through Monday, July 27 – August 4 **Progress in the Fire Fight**

As containment increased on remaining siege fires, requests for additional resources diminished. This prompted the reduction of the California Preparedness Level to 4, which shifted CalMAC to an information-only role. CalMAC directed NorCal and SoCal MACs to collaborate on priority setting and forward the information directly NMAC.

The Basin Fire on the Los Padres National Forest was contained on July 27th at 162,818 acres. Resources were released and redeployed to other fires.

The Telegraph Fire (a non-siege fire) located near Yosemite National Park in Mariposa County, became the number-one priority fire. It grew to more than 26,000 acres and destroyed thirty-seven structures.

The Panther Fire continued to double in size daily.



Rock slide slowed the movement of fire suppression resources.

Hyampom Road was closed by a rock-slide for a few days which hampered fire suppression force access and logistical support to the Miners Fire (Lime Complex). The fire spotted across Little Creek and burned up to the indirect containment line above the community of Hayfork.

On July 28, the Canyon Complex (PNF) experienced a 30-acre sloopover in a streambed on the Little Fire. This complex of 6 fires burned 37,753 acres and was 90% contained. The last 10% was difficult to achieve, with the active fire lodged in steep, rugged terrain that was nearly inaccessible.

The Gap Fire was contained at 9,443 acres and the Hell's Half Complex was contained at 15,146 acres.

On July 29, the Rich Fire (non-siege fire) was reported around 3 p.m. along Highway 70 on Plumas National Forest. Upon arrival of the first units, it was 80 acres and burning with a rapid rate of spread. Evacuations were ordered immediately for many residents along Rush Creek Road. Highway 70 and UPPR rail line was closed again. The extreme fire behavior continued through the night. The fire reached more than 2,400 acres by morning.

The fires in the Yolla Bolly Complex continued to burn actively in the remote wilderness area. Due to the rugged terrain and long travel times, most crews spiked out in remote camps, which made logistics and communications difficult. Progress was slow.

The Butte Complex was fully contained at 64,955 acres.

On July 30, 2008, more than 200 California National Guard were deployed to the Telegraph Fire. Task Force Bucket was the fourth wave in support of “Operation Lightning Strike”, the military term used for the siege fires.

The American River Complex was contained at 20,541 acres.

From July 31st through August 4th, the uncontained siege fires continued to burn actively. Favorable weather conditions allowed significant progress by resources available from contained fires. Several complexes were more than 85% contained.

The fires with less than 70% containment were located in rugged, remote areas including the Panther Fire, which was 8% contained at 9,806 acres. Resources

remained assigned as these fires were expected to burn until sufficient rainfall occurred in the Fall.

The Rich Fire, at 6,517 acres and 50% containment, continued to threaten communities and evacuations were in effect.

The Craig Fire started twelve miles east of Oroville in Butte County, burned more than 1,000 acres, and destroyed one residence the first day. A heavily augmented suppression force achieved 30% containment by morning.

Tuesday: August 5

Final Tragedy of the Siege

In anticipation of predicted thunderstorms, many fire fighters were pulled off the line for safety. Crews spiked out in the rugged Trinity Alps Wilderness were shuttled off the line by helicopters.

At approximately 7:45 p.m., a contract helicopter, ferrying firefighters from a helispot on the Buckhorn Fire in the Iron/Alps Complex crashed and caught fire, killing 9 of the 13 occupants. Aboard the helicopter were the pilot, copilot, FS pilot-inspector, and 9 contract firefighters from Grayback Forestry of Medford, OR. The surviving copilot and 3 firefighters were hospitalized with moderate to severe injuries. The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating the accident.

The multiple tragedies during siege represent a devastating blow to the firefighting community. Meanwhile, wildfires continued to burn. August 5th - 6th brought an additional 1,200 lightning strikes to Northern California, and the firefighters attacked the new and ongoing fires with even greater resolve.

Status of uncontained siege fires (as of 8/4/08)

Siege Complex	Acres	Contained
Bear-Wallow	12,567	19%
Blue 2	6,955	62%
Canyon	37,357	93%
Iron/Alps	84,788	87%
Lime	63,192	95%
Siskiyou	57,890	60%
Ukonom	42,785	66%
Yolla-Bolly	78,548	60%

CONDOR CHICK SURVIVES LIGHTNING FIRES

The Basin Complex on the Los Padres National Forest in Monterey County burned 163,000 acres, including much of the habitat of the endangered California condor. This is the home of the 43 birds in the central coast flock, located around Big Sur and Pinnacles National Monument. The fires damaged or destroyed many of the facilities including two condor field pens where condors are held, conditioned, and prepared for release. Much of the equipment used by the Ventana Wildlife Society to reintroduce captive-bred condors into the wild and to monitor the activities was damaged or destroyed.

While two of the condors' radio transmitters have been silent since the fires and those birds are presumed dead; at least 3 condor chicks in nests in the fire area did survive. One, dubbed a "miracle" chick, was born in a nest located in a cavity of a 200 feet tall redwood tree. The tree showed evidence that the flames had shot up the tree more than 100 feet, and several trees nearby were severely burned. On September 3, 2008, biologist Joe Burnett was able to climb the tree and confirm that the approximately 5-month old chick had survived the fire without injuries.



Condor 231 perched at the entrance to the nest guarding the young chick. Redwood miracle chick. First "true" wild laid and reared chick for the Big Sur flock.