

THE INTERREGIONAL SUPPRESSION CREW

DIVISION OF FIRE CONTROL, U.S. FOREST SERVICE

The recruitment, training, development, and organization of men into well-conditioned, highly skilled, versatile firefighting crews has always been an objective of the Forest Service. The "40-man," "Hotshot," and similar crews have been examples. A crew with high mobility along with the other criteria mentioned that can reach a large fire and do effective work during the first burning period has long been a dream of Fire Control people. The ability to move a crack firefighting crew to a critical fire situation on short notice adds a new dimension to a local unit's plan for control of a wildfire. The Forest Service had five commando-type interregional fire crews for the 1961 fire season and increased these to nine for the 1963 season.

Men for these crews have been recruited and trained in the western United States and are used primarily as reinforcement to initial attack forces. Crew headquarters have been carefully selected. Ideally, they are located near large airports and available to high priority fire work. This enables rapid transport by large aircraft to critical situations. When not actively engaged in training or suppression, they perform hazard reduction, maintenance, or construction duties.

Movement and use of interregional fire crews among the Regions has been coordinated by the National Fire Control Coordination Center in Washington, D.C. This permits a central office, which has the national fire control picture, to analyze and estimate potential situations and assign priorities when the demand for crews is greater than the supply.

A crew is normally composed of a foreman and 1 alternate, 3 squad bosses with 1 alternate, and 24 crew members. Men must be from age 18 to 45 and pass a yearly physical examination. They must be willing to fly and be away from home base for extended periods. Some crew members are required to have had previous firefighting experience. A few are trained in special skills such as operating power saws, trenchers, pumpers, and radios. Emphasis is placed on handline construction, mopup technique, use and care of hand tools and specialized equipment, organization, fire behavior, and safety. Each crew member is equipped with a fireman's pack and can be self-sufficient for 48 hours. Crews can be broken into several smaller units if conditions warrant, or can be combined with another crew if the going is slow and a larger crew is needed.

Experience has already shown that assignments to the interregional crews are highly prized. In some cases, the experience is used as a steppingstone to selection for smokejumping. It is customary for these "high-production" crews to be assigned control of the most difficult sectors of project fires. Outstanding performance under difficult conditions is expected and obtained. High morale and a certain esprit de corps are present in these groups, which consider themselves "the best." Performance to date indicates that they are meeting their objectives and giving the Forest Service a crack reinforcement force not previously available. Experience and training on these crews should also encourage students and other young men entering the Forest Service to consider careers as fire control professionals.