



Little Tujunga Hot Shots **ANGELES NATIONAL FOREST**

ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

Edited and Arranged by
Rod Wrench

Spring 2010
Volume 1, No. 2

You can now view the Early History of the Little Tujunga Hot Shots at www.californiahotshotcrews.org with more to be added later

Well everyone!....It's Spring Time and the 2010 Little Tujunga Hot Shots are gearing up for another fire season here in "Sunny Southern California"! We wish them a safe fire season and ask the Lord to guide each and every step they take!

For all the "Old Timers" Spring signals us in it's own way and we stop whatever we are doing and often remember our time as Little Tujunga Hot Shots especially when summer comes knocking and we happen to catch that first convection column out of the corner of our eye.

On March 9th Walt Sniegowski, Doug McCoy (70, 71, 72), Stan Lamb (70, 71, 72) and Larry Sall (70, 71) got together with Little T Superintendent Robert Garcia, Greg Stenmo, and Harry Oh at Little T Station. Doug was down from Alaska and Stan Lamb took time out of his very busy schedule, as Flood Control Supt. for LA County, to see Walt and tour the station. Larry Sall was there for the coffee and donuts. The main purpose of this meeting was to discuss the new Little Tujunga Hot Shot Web-site that is being developed by Greg Stenmo and Harry Oh. When the web-site gets up and running, everyone will be able to visit it and connect with each other by the year or years they were on the crew, read past and present newsletters and view photos. Maybe even while listening to music of the era. Very Cool!

Oh!...one more thing!...a final date for the Little Tujunga Hot Shot 40 year reunion was selected. The date will be on **Saturday, October 23rd 2010 at Little T Station**. If we decide to extend our reunion into Sunday then we might issue paper sleeping bags, Tylenol, toilet paper, fresh socks, and some inmates to cook breakfast. We can decide that when the time comes.

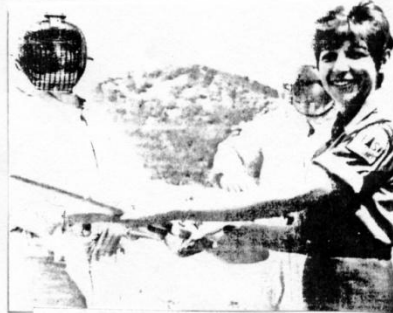
This Springs newsletter will continue to recount each consecutive year starting with 1970 and continuing through 1980. The length, detail and continuation of the newsletter will depend on the interest shown and stories submitted by crew members and overhead of each year. Recent and on going interest from **Marilyn Rea, Dave Herrand, Dave McCandliss, Mike McGeragle, Jeff Luff, Doug McCoy, Stan Lamb, Robert Olson, Gary Glotfelty, Chet Ogan, Frank Howell, Larry Hayes, Lorenzo Valdez, Steve Vitez, Chuck Koeller, Monte Satern, Bob Dorman, Walt Sniegowski and Rod Wrench** with guest appearances from **Mike Rogers and Dave Provencio** are what keeps this newsletter warming fire burning.

Thanks you guys!
Larry Sall

LITTLE TUJUNGA STATION GROUND BREAKING JULY 22, 1969

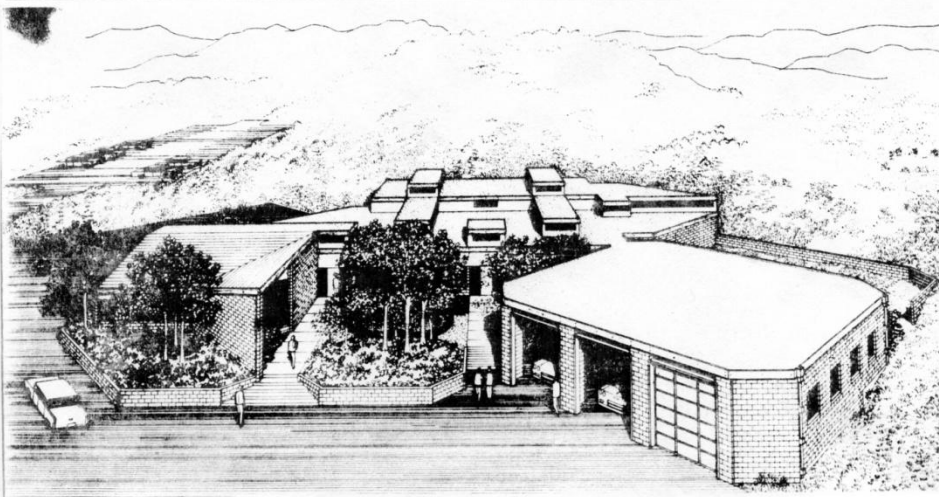
THE ANGELES NEWS FOR YOU! THE JULY-AUGUST 1969 **ANGELES GROWS!**

**GROUND BROKEN FOR NEW
LITTLE 'T' FACILITY ...
CONSTRUCTION BEGINS !**



*Tujunga District helitack foreman
John Bowser hands "Chief" clerk
Marilyn Wrenne a gold shovel at
the ground breaking ceremony*

**\$420,000 Fire Station to Be
Constructed Above Tujunga**



*Artist's conception of the new Little Tujunga Hotshot Crew Station shows how
low-maintenance construction features can be used in the design of a unique and
esthetically pleasing, as well as utilitarian, structure.*

A quote from the Region 5 architect upon viewing the finished structure said
"It looks like a ski lodge in Aspen"

GROUND BREAKING AT LITTLE TUJUNGA HOTSHOT STATION ON THE ANGELES

Ground-breaking ceremonies for the Little Tujunga Hotshot Crew Station complex on the Angeles took place Tuesday, July 22. Local government officials, members of community fire services, and representatives of the project contractor, El Rey Builders, Inc., of Van Nuys, the Southern California Watershed Fire Council, and the Los Angeles County Watershed Commission all participated, with Angeles Forest Supervisor Bill Dresser serving as host. A local troupe of Girl Scouts, the "Betsy Rosses," performed the flag ceremony.

The highlight of the ground-breaking ceremony occurred when a Forest Service helicopter hovered nearby to drop gold-colored ceremonial shovels. Two Forest Service helijumpers followed and delivered the

shovels to "ground-breakers" Bill Dresser, "Ham" Salsbury of the Watershed Commission, Bob Radford of the Southern California Watershed Fire Council, and Tujunga District Ranger Jess Barton and Chief Clerk Marilyn Wrenne.

The attractively designed Little Tujunga Station complex, above San Fernando, will include a 30-man barracks, mess hall, kitchen, recreation room, and three mobile home sites. Floors of quarry tile and walls of concrete block are among the construction features which will help reduce maintenance costs and provide durable service. To be ready for the 1970 fire season, it is strategically located for fire protection of the foothill watershed areas, adjacent to the existing Little Tujunga Fire Tanker Station.



Marilyn Rea, our District Clerk at the time and later the Business Management Assistant gives her accounting of the Hot Shot station ground breaking and the effect of a new fire suppression resource on the District.

Thanks Marilyn!!!!

What a shock - a phone call from Larry Hayes telling me that Walt Snięowski was looking for me. Oh my god! Then an e-mail from Larry Sall, and a call from Walt, and then there was Rod. I guess I was their last chance to find out what happened forty one years ago with the conception and start up of the Little Tujunga Hot Shot Crew. They wanted to know what I could remember.

Here goes - and it's not much. It was an exciting time at our little office in San Fernando when we started talking about building a new station at Little Tujunga and having a Hot Shot crew. I didn't know what that would involve, but I'll get to that later.

The ground breaking ceremony took place in July of 1969. We had invited local dignitaries, the building architect and the contractor, the Regional Forester and Engineer, Forest Supervisor, Forest staff and of course District employees. There were speeches, and refreshments at the old "tanker" station. It was a hot day and the speeches were too long. The symbolic ground breaking was not done at the building site due to logistics.

I remember that John Bowser, the Bear Divide Helitack Foreman jumped with a shovel, from a hovering helicopter. Everything went as planned with Cal Yarbrough guiding in the helicopter. There was another jumper with John, but I don't remember who it was.

For the next year, when any of the District staff weren't in the office, they could usually be found at Little T watching the progress of the Station. We were a proud and boastful bunch.

I didn't know on that July day in 1969 what having a hotshot crew would involve. First of all I didn't know that the Superintendent was going to call these kids "goons". I didn't know how much poison oak a Hot Shot crew could and would come in contact with. I didn't know how many stitches a hotshot crew would require. I didn't know that a Hot Shot crew could respond to a half a dozen fires in a pay period and produce tons of crew time reports. I assumed that the kids on the crew would always show up for work and that no one would ever turn up missing.

I would have kept notes if I had known that forty one years would go by and I would be asked what I could remember about the beginning of the LTHS crew. I didn't meet Rod, Walt or Gary until 1970. More on that later.....

/S/ Marilyn Rea

HERE IS THE STORY THEY DARED US TO PRINT!

By Walt Sniegowski

This Spring issue (our second) about the Little Tujunga Hot Shots (LTHS) will highlight some of the many people and events of the LTHS's first year. Future issues will cover the careers of other supervisors, lifers, and crewmen. Your newsletter staff thought it most appropriate to begin with that individual most responsible for it all...Rod Wrench.

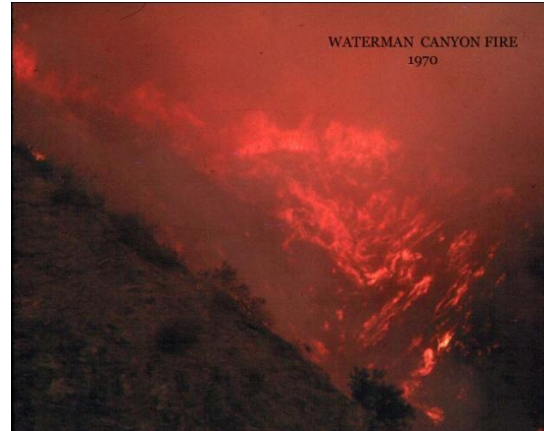
Rod is a native Californian, growing up in North Hollywood, just a short distance from where he would lead the first LTHS crew, and then moving to the mountain community of Wrightwood in the San Gabriel Mountains in 1957.



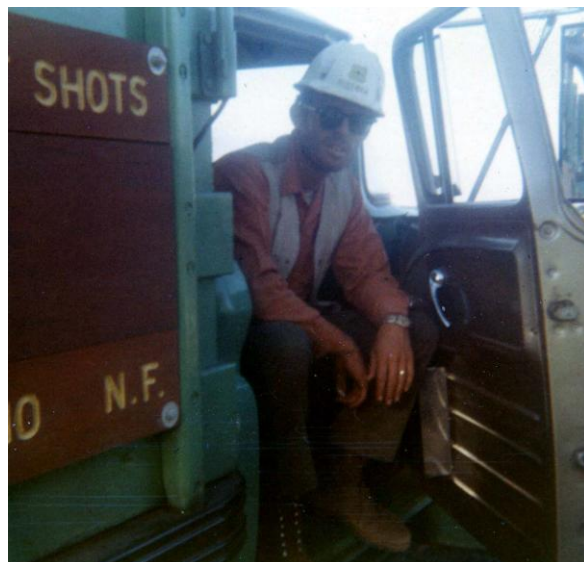
Following graduation from Victor Valley High School in 1960 and sowing a few “wild oats”, Rod began his USFS career in 1961 as a crewman on the Lytle Creek Engine on the San Bernardino National Forest. Following assignments were as Tanker Truck Operator (TTO) at Sycamore and Cajon Stations. As a Fire Prevention Technician in the Cajon Pass and Wrightwood, Rod began living too close to the edge, he was drafted into the United States Army in 1964.



After serving his Nation and keeping it safe for two years, Rod returned to accomplish three things in 1966; 1) Marry his sweetheart Mary at Fort Rucker, AL one day after his discharge, 2) rejoin the USFS and; 3) receive a new appointment to Tanker Foreman at the newly built Waterman Canyon Station (note: we all would later get to know Waterman Canyon well).



From 1967 until selected as LTHS's first superintendent in 1970, Rod was a crew foreman of one of two 16 man modules of the Inter Regional Del Rosa Hot Shots. Del Rosa has the distinction of being the first Hot Shot crew in the Forest Service established in 1946. Most of you may or may not have heard of this crew. It is located in an obscure washed out gulley somewhere north of San Bernardino, CA.



Prior to moving to the Angeles National Forest, Rod's career was spent on the San Bernardino National Forest. We often asked...

WHY DON'T YOU GO BACK WHERE YOU CAME FROM!

Rod served as the LTHS first superintendent from 1970-1973. From 1974-1980 he held the position of Assistant Fire Management Officer for the Tujunga District, Angeles National Forest.



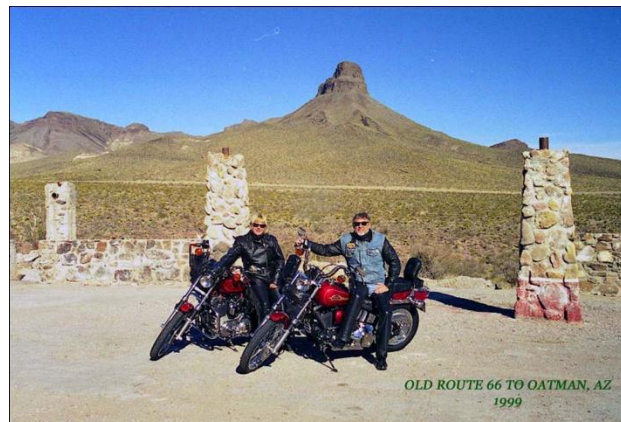
In 1980, Rod returned to the San Bernardino N.F. as the District Fire Management Officer on the San Jacinto Ranger District headquartered in Idyllwild, CA. Rod's Hot Shot connection continued as the Vista Grande Hot Shot crew was located on his District. Rod also served as an Operations Chief on Regional Class One Fire Team and was very active with the District's prescribed burning program.

Following his USFS retirement in 1989, Rod began working for the City of Hemet, Ca. in an assortment of capacities. Responsibilities ranged from building and municipal code enforcement, wildland fire assessment and mapping, vehicle abatement to weed abatement. Rod was running the Code Enforcement department when he retired again in 1997 at the age of 55.

In 1998 his wife Mary saw the light and did the same from her long time job with the Automobile Club of Southern California. Retirement checks in hand, Rod and Mary moved to Kingman, Arizona and built their "dream" home on a half acre where, "you don't have to change your clocks twice a year". Mary returned to work a year later for the Arizona Game & Fish where she is now the Kingman office manager. She will be looking at full retirement in four years.

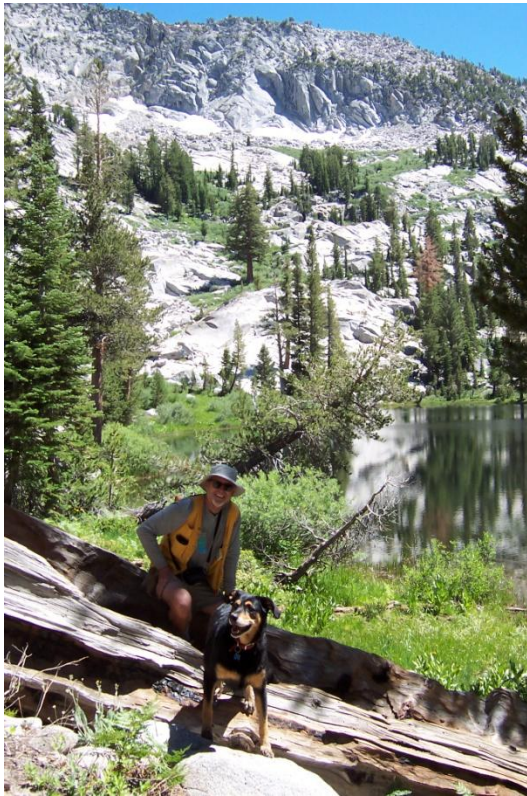
To this union were born two children, Beverly (born during the 1971 Romero Fire) a dental hygienist and a son Michael who works construction in Idyllwild. There is currently one grandson and another grandchild on the way due in April.

Some sacrifices had to be made so Rod and Mary sold their "Hogs" (short for Harley Davidson motorcycles) to cruise old Route 66 in their 1996 Corvette. It's the 4th Corvette they've owned.





On the “catch me if you can” side during retirement, Rod tested Harley's at the Ford Proving Ground Track at Yucca, AZ., managed a fixed base operation where they fueled aircraft, helicopters and air tankers at the Kingman Airport, he now polishes his Corvette, hits the table's and slots in Laughlin or Vegas, stays busy in his wood shop, visits the Grand Canyon and Arizona high country or is back packing and fishing for the elusive “Golden Trout” in the Eastern Sierra. Of course he helps put this newsletter together and contributes to the California Hot Shot website for both Little T and Del Rosa Hot Shots providing early facts and photos.



Rod would like to hear from as many of the crew as possible. His # is 928-692-5141 or email him at rmwrench@citlink.net

A VERY USED TRUCK FOR SALE BUT IN GOOD CONDITION

Acquiring a crew carrying vehicle is hardly the heavy hitting subject matter one would hope to find in a Hot Shot newsletter. That might ordinarily be true, but when you have a new crew arriving soon and no vehicle in which to transport them to fires.....well then it can be a matter of some concern.

About 30 days ahead of the crew's arrival Gary and Walt met with the new Superintendent. After the obligatory sniffing and checking each other out, Rod presented his foreman with their job descriptions and performance expectations and they all got busy finalizing the hiring of the crew, getting equipment and supplies readied for the start of the Little Tujunga Hot Shots first fire season. They anxiously waited for their half million dollar station to be completed and the delivery of their new 26 passenger International crew carrier (bus). Time was running short on having everything in order and ready to go. All the crew's tools, equipment and supplies were boxed up in storage at the tanker station and as yet there was no place to put it.

Rod then presented Walt and Gary with a "bombshell". "I got a call from our District Fire Control Officer Hugh Masterson, The Boss." And it went like this:

Hugh: "Rod, I have some bad news, some good news and some more bad news."

Rod: "OK Hugh, give me the good news."

Hugh: "I got you a truck."

Rod: "I've got a truck!"

Hugh: "This truck is to transport the crew."

Rod: "What? Where's the bus?"

Hugh: "What bus? Ha, Ha. This is an old stakeside truck that's stored down at Arcadia."

Rod: "S___, OK, What's the bad news?"

Hugh: "No bus for a couple months."

Rod: "S___, OK, what's the other bad news?"

Hugh: "The new station won't be ready for the crew by July first, too many little things to correct."

Rod: "Oh great, where do we go?"

Hugh: "Bear Divide."

Rod: "Oh s___."

Hugh: "You guys get down to the Arcadia shop and get that truck ready to transport your crew."

Rod: "10-4 Hugh."

With that order in hand the three wise men went into action, they only had a few weeks to get'er done.

A Forest Service vehicle ends up in the South Zone bone yard at Arcadia shop in one of four ways: 1. the vehicle mileage exceeds its set limit, 2. The vehicle exceeds its recommended years of service, 3. the repair costs exceed the original cost of the vehicle new, or 4. the vehicle is wrecked, totaled and/or has been burned up.

They located a cobweb infested Ford cab-over stakeside truck. It was the old Oak Grove Hot Shot crew vehicle. At least the truck had good breedinga history.....and a legacy. To get this baby back into service a terrific amount of cooperation would have to occur with a lot of different folks in a short period of time.

Ralph Patterson and his S.Z. shop mechanics proceed to complete a virtual overhaul of this vehicle. They essentially performed an "annual service and inspection." The vehicle got tires, brakes, a safety check, tune up, lube and oil change, etc. They also provided the expensive FS green paint to be used where needed and the black non-slip paint and tape for the deck and drop down steps. Rod remembered before he left Del Rosa they had just what was needed for the bed of the truck stored there, a set of old metal tool bins that also served as crew seating and a drop down step.

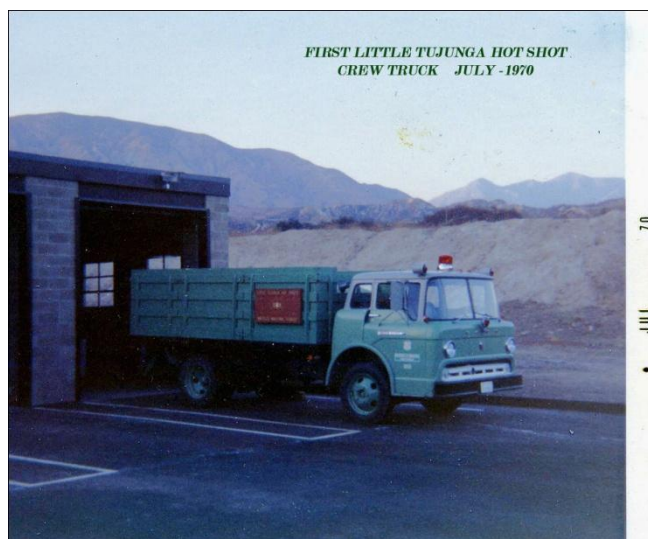
The Cajon District was contacted about borrowing the tool boxes and step, and they said “sure, come on over and get them.” In exchange for the step and boxes, a promise was made that the Tujunga would keep Rod on the district for at least five years. Gary and Rod took the truck to Del Rosa and got everything they needed and headed back to Arcadia with another Hot Shot crew hand me down.

Back at Arcadia the boys proceeded to cannibalize the old stored F.S. fire trucks for metal canteen racks and extra tool holders. After the plywood sides were painted and installed on the stakesides the newly painted boxes and step were installed and securely bolted down. Next stop was the radio shop where Don Galbraith and Vaughn Hayes installed the forest radio, antenna, red lights and siren. Larry (aka “the wood butcher”) Morrison routed out a nice pair of redwood signs with the Forest Service shield, Forest and crew name. These were attached to the sides of the truck. Wow, this is looking good!!! The last stop was at the Arcadia fire warehouse where Dick Gaspari, Ralph Boyd and Gunner provided them with a lot of items still needed and required like more canteens, head lamps, first aid kits, web gear, blankets, etc. These Hot Shot guys were always begging, borrowing and stealing stuff from the warehouse.

Most of the above mentioned individuals at Arcadia are no longer with us, but were a group that performed what work was necessary to get the job done for these newbie’s in a jam without a single written job request or purchase order. They did it without complaining and for a simple thank you. You have to often wonder if that could still happen today.

Back at Little T and the last step was to outfit the cab, that refuge of the crew’s foremen. The location where big decisions and astute observations were made, like did you see that blonde in the red convertible? The Cab was outfitted with a box of Dutch Master Cigars, an air freshener, a tasteful Playboy centerfold and an AM/FM Radio.

The Little Tujunga Hot Shot crew was now the proud owners of a lean, mean, green, firefighting machine. When did you say the crew would arrive?



Thanks to Rod, Walt and Gary for providing the contents of this story.

My First Day As A Little Tujunga Hot Shot

By Larry Sall

I had no idea what I was in for. All I knew was I needed a job and flipping hamburgers at McDonald's was not an option. My Lottery number for the Vietnam War was 242 and since I was registered in the largest pool of draft eligible 18 year olds in Southern California, I thought I'd take my chances classified as 1A and keep my fingers crossed.

On July 1st 1970, dressed in green Levi pants, eight inch lace up work boots, a bandana, leather gloves and khaki shirt, I drove North on Hwy 14 out of San Fernando Valley with my first peanut butter and jelly sack lunch. I was instructed to exit at Placerita Canyon and proceed to Sand Canyon, take a right, and follow the narrow two lane black top road up to Bear Divide Ranger Station on the Angeles National Forest. I arrived 10 minutes early, parked the car and walked over to meet and become part of the original Little Tujunga Hot Shots.

I was feeling nervous, like you are when you attend high school for the first time. The only face I recognized was Rod Wrench our Superintendent and he was surrounded by what he affectionately called the "Goons" a group of twenty young men mostly in their late teens or early twenties reporting for duty. From what I could gather, it looked like Rod hired half of the Sylmar High School football team. One kid looked like a local thug who was picking on a smaller skinny kid, chasing him around the station pretending to dry hump him. The thug was Dale Dorman and the small skinny kid was Jimmy Smith.. It turns out these two were great friends and there was nothing to worry about. Another fellow didn't seem to give a damn about all the excitement or bravado and he sat quietly in the training room wanting to proceed with his career. His name was Bob Olson, just back from Vietnam and one of the hardest working men you will find on a Hot Shot crew. About this time Walt Sniegowski, our Foreman, and Gary Glotfelty, our Assistant Foreman, got our attention by ordering us to the parking lot for Physical Training (PT). This physical training consisted of the usual stretching exercises, jumping jacks, push-ups, squat thrusts and sit-ups. A quick run around the station and it was back to the training room for orientation. The training room was located in the front part of Bear Divide's barracks complex and it was here that we started our fire training. It was around 10:00 am. as I recall. For about an hour we were told about a contiguous carpet of chaparral that clung to the hills and canyons of the Angeles National Forest and how valuable it all was to the LA River Basin Watershed. Once this valuable chaparral was set on fire, it could generate enough heat to create its own weather and rip the air right out of your lungs... I felt we were off to a pretty good start and was looking forward to lunch.

At some point in the training room I can remember taking a bite out of my peanut butter and jelly sandwich, listening to Walt or Rod describe fire by drawing a diagram of the Fire Triangle on the black board....when all Hell broke loose! Three beeps sounded over the Bear Divide station radio system and the voice on the other end declared a brush fire was on the loose and then Rod Wrench yelled out "Load-Up!!" I thought to myself, load-up? What does that mean? This is just a drill...right?

Somewhere in all the excitement, I was issued a fire shirt and a hardhat with a chin strap which I promptly put on in the back of a cab-over Ford stake-side crew truck as it roared out of the driveway. Twenty guys somehow squeezed themselves into the back of this truck using metal tool boxes for seats. Frank Helper, the push cutter, yelled out to everyone that he would pass out tools to us when we got to the fire. So off we went, with a red light rotating on top of the cab and one hell of a screaming siren. The wooden signs on either side of the stake-side declared that we were "Little Tujunga Hot Shots"!...Watch out everybody, here we come!

We whistled down Sand Canyon and followed the old Soledad highway that paralleled Hwy.14 North to a small grass fire, with scattered brush, burning on a hillside next to the town of Acton. The name of this fire was the Kashmere Fire and it was our first one. I believe it was around 1:00 pm. in the afternoon. Gary Glotfelty was driving and he jumped the curb and pulled up to some County fire engines who were already laying hose to the fire. When the crew truck came to a stop, some of the guys bailed out over the sides as Helper was trying to release the tail gate steps for the rest of the crew to "Un-Load". When the steps were finally deployed the rest of the crew joined the others at the back of the crew truck and Helper began handing out the tools. I was handed a tool called a McLeod. This tool was a combination hoe and rake and I was wondering how I was going to throw dirt with it when Bob Olson sprinted by with a Pulaski in his hand and started attacking a bush that was on fire. I joined in and started hacking away on the same bush using the McLeod as if it were an ax. Both of us spent considerable energy beating this bush to death and when we figured it had had enough, we went to the next one. All this time I think we were aware that someone was screaming and yelling up in front of us but we were too busy "fighting fire" to pay much attention. It was Rod Wrench that got our attention and said, "Hey you guys!...God dammit!" We stopped what we were doing and ran over to where Rod was. It was at this point that I realized the crew had scattered pretty much all over the place, one or two guys here and there, some in the burned area were scraping the ground. Rod was very "pissed-off". His face was all red and he was yelling "God dammit, Just follow the Black Line!!.... The Black Line God dammit!!" What in the world was Rod talking about? What black line? In all the smoke and dust I frantically looked around for a black line, you know, maybe some black caution tape that had been strung out or maybe spray paint designating a black line... I was feeling kind of dizzy and thought about throwing up.

The Black Line is defined as the point where burned fuel meets unburned fuel. Burned fuel is "Black, unburned fuel is "Green". Our job as Hotshots was to separate the two down to mineral soil. Any brush we cut that didn't have black on it, we threw into the "Green". Any brush we cut that had black on it, we threw into the "Black". This line is called the Fire Line and its width, down to mineral soil, was determined to be one half the height of the fuel type we were in. If the brush was eight feet tall a good four foot Fire Line was needed.

Today...nobody knew what a Fire Line was or how to use the tools properly to build one. About an hour or so into this all-out assault on the fire and co-mingling with a L.A. County inmate crew, we were ordered to back away from the fire and gather around Rod for "further instructions". I looked over at Walt Sniegowski and wondered if he was about to laugh or cry. All he was doing was looking at Rod and shaking his head back and forth. It was about this time a County helicopter dropped a load of water directly over us. It was a sign that we were "all wet" no doubt!

After Rod gave us the old "you f__king Goons" this and "you f__king Goons" that, he pointed to the crew truck and said we were going to practice loading and un-loading until we got it right. Five or six "Load-Ups" and "Un-Load's" later, we found ourselves on the road back to Bear Divide Station. It must have been around 3:30 in the afternoon.

Everybody was pretty hot and sweaty and didn't say much on the way back but we knew we'd soon be back to the station and get some cold water to drink. Fat Chance!...we drove right on by the station and down the road into Little Tujunga Canyon and came to a stop in a turn out below a brush covered ridge. Now what? It's getting close to quittin' time isn't it? Then came the order, "Un-Load"! We did what we were told except this time we waited for the steps to be lowered and one by one we hit every step on the way out of the crew truck onto the ground. Without stopping, each crew member followed themselves around the front of the crew truck returning to the back of the truck where each of us was handed a tool and we "Lined-Out". This is where we became aware of the tools we would be using as Hot Shot's. The first five guys in line received a Brush Hook, the next five received a Pulaski, the next five received a Shovel and the last five received a McLeod for a total of twenty guys with a tool in their hand.

The one's with Brush Hook's and Pulaski's were known as the "Cutters" and the one's with Shovel's and McLeod's were known as the "Scrapers".

Rod declared! "the fire is on that ridge in front of you, let's go". We crossed the road and headed into the brush. It was our first practice line and we were starting to sweat again. It must have been 4:30 or 5:00!

I had no idea if we would become elite firefighters or that the Little Tujunga Hot Shots would acquire a reputation as one of the best Hot Shot crews in Southern California. All I knew was I had to decide if this job was worth it! Could I "cut the mustard"? Those were the questions I had to answer driving home that night.

Doug McCoy remembers his first day like this:

"I don't remember much about the first day but I recall my first fire (Kashmere). Upon arrival I didn't really expect to see so many firefighters on a fire that was pretty much out. Anyway, guys were going over the side of the stake-side crew truck instead of waiting for someone to lower the steps. Once they did everybody was handed a tool except one guy his name was **Larry Beringer** later to be known as "Underdog". You see, when we were roaring down Sand Canyon on the way to this fire, "Underdog" forgot to secure his chin strap when he stood up to see where we were going and the hardhat he was wearing blew off his head and proceeded to bounce down the highway behind us. **Ken Muneoka** confirms that when we un-loaded he looked back into the truck to see Larry Beringer just sitting there, where Rod had told him to stay, with the saddest looking hound-dog face you'd ever want to see. Maybe that's why we called him "Underdog" like the cartoon character.

Anyway, the guys with hardhats and a tool were off to the fire!...anything with a flame on it was attacked. An inmate crew of about the same size as our crew was wandering through the "burn". Someone was yelling, I think it was Rod, something about "Follow the Black Line!". I looked around but sure didn't see a black line! Not too long after that we were all called together. Everyone with a tool was instructed on Fire line Construction. One foot in the "green" and one foot in the "black" then you could follow the "black line" and separate the green from the black with your tool. Upon being given a work break, I recognized one of the guys on an inmate crew, went over and sat down, had a smoke and found out this was their first fire too! The guy I recognized was doing time for burglary and he was one of three brothers I knew from my school days in Sylmar, CA.

Once the fire was completely out we were instructed on how to Un-Load, Tool-up, Line-out, Un-tool, Load-up etc. We did this about half a dozen times! When we were done with that exercise we headed back to Bear Divide Station or so I thought. Everyone was looking over the side of the crew truck as we went right on passed the station. Hey!...what now? was on the faces of a lot of us. We drove down the road a ways and pulled into a dirt turnout. We were instructed to Un-Load, Tool-up and Line-out. Rod Wrench pointed to a ridge top and said the fire was on our right and he wanted a 3' line. So up the side of the hill we went, brush and dirt flying to the side. That was how it was done".

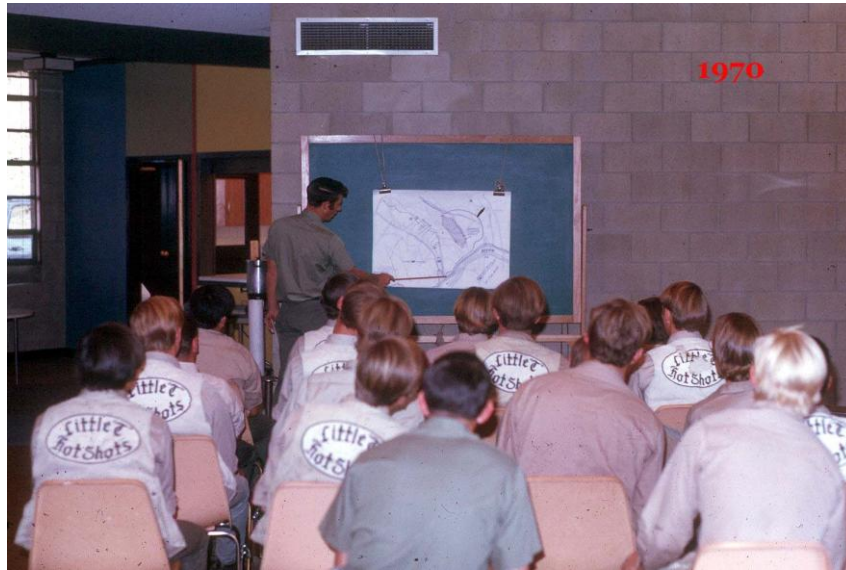
Rod Wrench remembers the first day fire like this:

It was a nightmare!! It was Keystone Cops!! The poor little goons didn't know their ass from a hole in the ground; of course not, it was their first day. They bailed off the truck, sort of lined out, but soon went in every direction, beating the hell out of every little burning bush on that fire all the time we were trying to keep them in a lined out cutting and scraping order. Wow! What did I get myself into? I'd never seen anything like this before. But it was the best thing that could have happened to all of us because of what was learned real quickly and the memory of it all. They became a hell of a crew soon afterward!!

My First Fire...with the “Goons”

by
Walt Sniegowski

The Kashmere Fire as I remember it. I recall the 3 “Beeps” (dispatcher's alert of a reported fire). We were in the training room at Bear Divide Station. It was the Crews' first day on the job. The reported fire was in our response area. We could hear the sirens of the Bear Divide Engine and Patrol...they were rolling! We had not yet completed the mandatory 40 hours of Basic Firefighter Training – at best we had 2 or 3 hours.



I asked Rod, “should we go”? “why not” was his response, “it will do the 'goons' some good you know OJT, on the job training”!

I rode to the fire with Rod in his half ton pickup, Gary Glotfelty drove the Crew in the stake-side. I recall Rod's words to Fire Boss Ken Reveley as we were 10-97 (10-97 is part of the old 10 code meaning we had arrived on scene and ready for assignment). Rod said; “the Crew is inexperienced—No Hotline!!”

They unloaded in no special order, in their spanking brand new orange fire shirts and their shinny blue hard hats, tooled-up in a modified order, (no saws, only a few cutting tools but mostly scraping tools). They started out in single file, alert, confident, smelling of Brut and Aqua-Velva, in our once or twice practiced order.

This wasn't much of a fire, most of the flames had been knocked down and we would cold-trail and mop-up this basically nothing fire but through the Crews' eyes this was their first fire, serious business, a conflagration, holocaust, a phantasmagoria!!!

Suddenly a small bush flared-up a short distance ahead of us. In an instant, all 20 crewmen ran past me, looking like a covey of Quail, and attacked this raging inferno with shovels and McLeod's. They literally beat it and each other to death. At this point Rod lost it (his mild manner disposition) and ordered me to, “Get them Goons back here”, we badly needed some OJT!!

About this time an L.A County Inmate crew showed up and began cold-trailing where we had left off. Rod instructed Glotfelty and the Crew to observe the inmates and see how a real crew got the job done. Rod taught them the 5-points to consider while working with fire tools; Distance, Footing, Sharpness, Control, and Overhang.

We suffered the most utter humiliation that can befall a Southern California Hot Shot Crew. We learned how to Cold-trail and Mop-up from a group of inmates who were probably incarcerated for such major crimes as, non-support, DUI, shoplifting, check forgery and littering.

There probably isn't another Hot Shot crew that got their start in quite the same fashion. But they were a quick study, fast learners...they sucked it up and after the fire was out, they were heard singing.



We're Little Tujunga Hot Shots rappers of the night
We're dirty Sons-a-Bitches and we'd rather F___ than fight
So hiedy, hiedy Christ all Mighty how the hell are we
Bleep, Bleep, Bleep, Bleep, Hot Shots of Little T

Copywriter
The Reverend Greg Holler & Stan Lamb



A STALWART LITTLE TUJUNGA HOT SHOT

By Larry Sall

I don't know quite where to start when talking about Robert Olson. All I know is he was a soldier for his Country at the Tet Offensive in Vietnam in 1967 with the 101st Airborne and there was a bounty on his head. He could hit the ground running and always remained stalwart in the defense of his comrades.

From 1967 to 1968 Bob was a 5th Echelon Counter Mortar Radar Repairman overseeing 25 Field Units through out central and South Viet Nam. As a Sgt. E5 26C30 supervisor, Bob supported combat unit Counter Motar Radar Units, at Fire Bases, Special Forces Training Units, Air Bases, and Major Command Units... No wonder the Viet Cong were pissed! In November of 1968 Bob continued his military service at Fort Huachuca, AZ. / White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico as an adviser to Civilian and U.S. Army Staff Officers for the radar equipment they would be using at the Missile Range. Later that year Bob would be drawn to the near by Coronado National Forest by a convection column and the smell of smoke. This would mean the start of his career as a USFS firefighter.

Late in 1969 Tujunga District Ranger Jess Barton saw promise in the young soldier and hired Bob on to the Big Tujunga engine with foreman Henry Smith. After all, Bob grew up just down the street in the San Fernando Valley so it just made sense. Cal Yarbrough would be instrumental in offering Bob a job on the first ever Little Tujunga Hot Shots in 1970. Cal saw a need for experience and leadership by example for this “green” crew and Rod Wrench would need all the help he could get as the new superintendent.



From 1970 to 1971 Bob operated and shared the Little T Hot Shot lead saw and hook positions with Lorenzo Valdez a tough Mexican firefighter in his own right. In later years Lorenzo said he was always secure in knowing Bob Olson had his back. Bob worked hard and he played hard. One night at the “Sand Trap”, a favorite bar frequented by L.A. cops and detectives, we found ourselves surrounded. Bob saw his chance and he went for the big detective in the corner. In the ensuing melee of screams, flying glass, ash trays and bar stools, I happened to look over to see this great big detective trying to shake Bob off his back. The guy was in a losing battle as Bob's choke hold had him locked in solid. With a beat red face, eyes bulging and his arms flailing around in the air trying to grab something... the big fat tub of guts hit the floor. In those days after a fight there weren't any charges or lawsuits brought but there were friendships made and so it was at the Sand Trap that night.



During the time spent as a Little Tujunga Hot Shot, Bob met and married a cute little gal who lived at the mouth of Little Tujunga Canyon. Her name is Arlene. To this union were born three children. Tamara (34) 2 grandchildren, Shannon (30) 1 grandchild and Kyle (21) Sgt. USMC counter intelligence team.

In 1972 Bob received a permanent appointment with the USFS at Mill Creek Station and in 1975 was recommended by Don Biedeback for the ADFMO and fuels management position on the Tahoe National Forest at Downieville, CA. which he accepted.

From 1977 to 1980 Bob was the DFMO on the Salmon National Forest and eventually was promoted to and accepted the GS-11 District Fuels Management Officer position on the Lassen National Forest in 1980. During his career on the Lassen National Forest Bob was the DFMO, Deputy Forest Fire Chief, and Fuels Management Officer responsible for defining and implementing defensible fuel profile zones that are in use today.

Bob's achievements and awards include:

- Establishing Defensible Fuel Profile Zones (DFPZ's) – concept development, planning, and international implementation.
- Congressional hearings expert witness for Wood Waste Utilization, DFPZ's, and Fire Control.
- Leader of the California Suppression Strategy Team (State fire history).
- Forest Service Liaison for the Wood Energy Program to establish numerous wood fired power plants in northeastern California.
- 1988 – 1989 Region 5 Civil Rights Employee of the year
- National Recreational strategist and National Award recipient 1989
- Established a Camp Ronald McDonald on the Eagle Lake District of the Lassen National Forest.
- California Spotted Owl Advisory Team (leader for fire and fuels)
- Instructor at Clemson University for National Recreation Strategy and developed a Fire History curriculum in conjunction with Penn State University.

Bob's career has spanned 30 years and includes 5 National Forests and 3 Regions. From Hot Shot to Smokejumper to Incident Commander, Fire Historian, and now Author, Bob has just about covered it all. I guess you could say he's "completed the mission". Whether they know it or not, Foresters now and in the future will benefit from his hard work and insight and so will the lands he managed and loves to this day. Although retired now, he continues to research fire behavior and is writing a book "Circle of Fire" about Native American use of fire in our Nation's history... Good job Robert, we wish you well.



USS Enterprise Some Where In The San Fernando Valley
Star Date August 1970

By Walt Sniegowski

The letter arrived and the return address read "U.S. Forest Service, San Fernando Ranger Station." The opening words on the enclosed missive read, "Congratulations, you have been selected for a position on the Little Tujunga Hot Shot fire crew. Attached find a physical examination form that is required prior to employment. Bring completed form to "Chief" clerk Marilyn Wrenne at the enclosed address."

Upon completion of all paperwork, the "Chief" provided the new applicant with a list of required clothing. From top to bottom required items included:

1. White cotton t-shirts.
2. Long sleeve cotton khaki work shirt (Dickies or equivalent).
3. Pair of green Levi's.
4. One inch leather belt.
5. Large bandanna.
6. Leather gloves
7. Warm jacket (not nylon).
8. 8 inch lace type leather boots with lug soles.

All other equipment will be provided.

The "Chief" suggested sources for the clothing, Sears & Roebucks, Montgomery Wards, and Penny's. (today Roebucks and Montgomery Wards are lost to history). The "Chief" indicated that finding an adequate pair of boots may be difficult; brands suggested were Redwings, Wolverine and Chippewa. Los Angeles not being a logging industry hub limited their choices. The "Chief" further suggested not to purchase cowboy boots at Nudies on Lankershim Blvd., as they were more appropriate for two stepping and shit kicking at the Corral or the Palomino Club. Something the "Chief" knew quite a bit about.

The crewmen did not spend a lot of kesh on boots a very obvious reason usually buying an inexpensive pair at Penny's. This first expenditure came nearly a month before the first pay check would arrive. We were paid bi-weekly, but the first check was always paid in the next pay period after starting work. Digressing a bit, the first payday was quite a memorable event, because the checks would arrive on a workday. The Crew would not be able to cash them until their days off. Gary and I instructed the crew to bring their pay checks to work. During our routine area familiarization and fire planning, we just happened to pass by the Security Pacific Bank in Sunland, just about the time they opened. Lining the crew out, not in cutting order, but in decreasing size of the checks, we proceeded to get them cashed. The crew leaving the bank wit fistfuls of 50's and 100's was a joyous occasion. That first check had lots of overtime and hazard pay.

Our next stop was the liquor store, but not for the reasons you might think, rather to purchase an assortment of Dutch Masters, Cheroots, Tiparillos and Swisher Sweets. To this we also supplemented cans of Copenhagen and Skoal. The wimps bought Skoal in pouches.

We then proceeded to an area where to this day all Hot Shots are sworn to secrecy, a place the superintendent would never find. (note: when I became superintendent the location was changed again.) At the secret location we proceeded to light up, but not before we cleared the area to mineral soil and placed a fire extinguisher within reach. We had arrived, we had made the leap from hotshot to bigshot. Smoking and spitting we discussed how and on whom we would spend this “manna from heaven”. This leads me back to the main story.

Now that we had achieved status and money, we thought it best that we would try to improve our images. We would purchase buck knives, big belt buckles, and new “kicks”. (Tattoos were not yet a must have and in thing yet.) Some of us would order the “gold standard” in boots;

The White #375 Vibram “Smokejumper” model!!



This boot is hand made by the Otto White shoe shop in Spokane, Washington. Otto’s shop is located at the corner of First and Main and is an official wildland firefighter pilgrimage site.

Returning to the station, Gary proceeded to take the necessary foot measurements. Clad in heavy work socks individuals stood on blank sheets of paper while Gary traced out their foot images. The tracing along with a deposit was then sent to Otto’s shoe shop.

Very shortly after the much anticipated delivery the boots arrived by UPS and a boot initiation ceremony was then held. Everyone received their package except for one lonely crewmember. He received a letter, reproduced verbatim below:

*Dear Mrs. Muneoka,
Thank you for your sons’ interest in our product. We are returning your recent check. The White boot shop only makes adult sized boots for outdoor activities such as ranching, firefighting and construction. Also we do not carry lasts (the foundation on which the boots are made) in a size 7 narrow. May we suggest an alternative choice? Buster Brown makes an excellent product. You may find them at locations such as Penny’s, Kids R Us, or similar stores.*

Sincerely, Otto White

P.S. Mrs. Muneoka, when little Ken finally does grow up, please do not hesitate to contact us.

This story would not be complete without an explanation as to how this fine boot would receive the “smokejumper” designation. You can all thank your lucky stars that you are receiving a copy of this news letter, because it is only here will you find this important and long-lost truthful bit of information.

The #375 Vibram model is a heavy and rugged boot, weighing over four pounds per pair. They contain a steel shank arch as well as good ankle support to name just a few features. Smokejumpers, notoriously full of hot air upon deplaning, would simply drift off or upwards and would never hit their drop zone target. Some rarely do anyway. However, with this additional weight, plus the law of gravity working in conjunction, they might at least end up in a treetop somewhere near the drop zone. And now you know the facts!

It is only on these pages do we **“Dare to go where no man has gone before”**.



1970.....year in review and you were there.

It is the Chinese year of the Dog....Nixon is President....

World population is 3,692,000,000....U.S. population is 205,000,000...

The Beatles record their last album "Let It Be" and break-up....

Ohio National Guard shoots and kills 4 students at Kent State....100,000 Viet Nam war protesters march on Washington DC....

The Supremes perform their last live concert at the Frontier Hotel in Las Vegas....

World Trade Center starts construction and will be the World's tallest....

A postage stamp is 6 cents....Gas is 36 cents a gallon....Milk is \$1.15 a gallon....

"Patton" takes the Oscar for Best Picture as does George C. Scott for Best Actor....

Voting age is reduced from 21 to 18...The Ford Pinto is introduced....

Monday Night Football begins....Nicklaus wins both the U.S and British Opens....

The Concorde makes its first supersonic flight....The Dow Jones is 631

**DEAD: Jimi Hendrix & Janis Joplin (drugs) both were 27 years old....
Stripper Gypsy Rose Lee....Green Bay Packer Coach Vince Lombardi....**

**BORN: Wednesday, July 1st, at 9:30am, the Little Tujunga Hot Shots
Aka...Little T...Crew 5...Hollywood Hot Shots...
Little Tarantula's...Singing Hot Shots...Little Fellars...
The Goons!**

Coming Soon:

Here is some stuff that might be fun and informative!

- *The Bear Fire... The Pacoima Fire... The Walsh Ditch Fire**
- *The 1971 Sylmar Earthquake and the Little T Hot Shots**
- *The 2009 Little T Hot Shots and the Station Fire**
- *More stories, observations and bio's from the past**

We need your stories and pictures to keep this news letter going