



Little Tujunga Hot Shots **ANGELES NATIONAL FOREST**

40 Year Anniversary

Edited and Arranged
By Rod Wrench

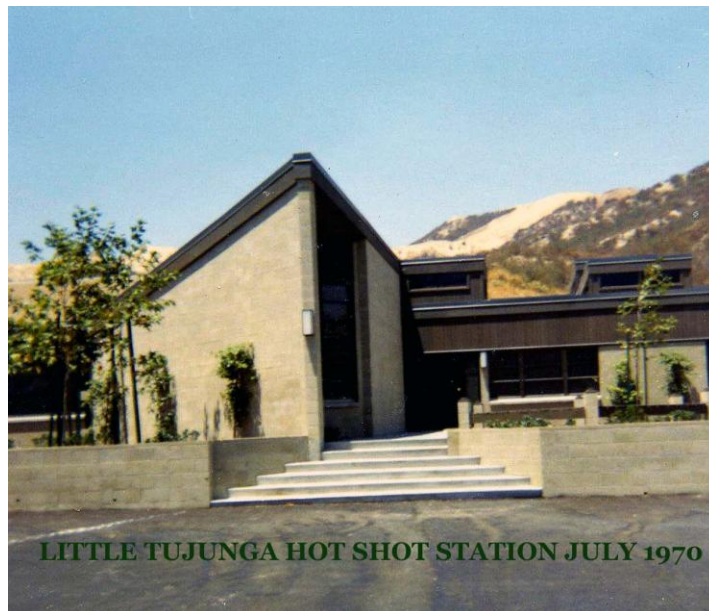
Volume 1, No. 4
Fall 2010

37 Days left to the October 23rd Reunion

THE REUNION

It's been an interesting trip! All of the hard work and story telling found in these newsletters document our history. How many times have you guys gone back to put out the same fires you put out 40 years ago? Did you try on your old vest sporting our colors? Do you hold a tool, sharpen an ax, chain, or shovel the way you were taught? We bet the answer is Yes.

Now we are going to have that chance to see each other once again. We will be at our old Station with memories to share and in some cases, wounds to heal. We gratefully acknowledge and deeply appreciate the Assistance of Robert Garcia, the current Little T Hot Shot superintendent, Fire staff of the L.A. River District and the Angeles National Forest for their full support at Little Tujunga Station.



40 Year Reunion Agenda and RSVP

8:00 A.M.....Early set-up plus coffee and donuts.

10:00 A.M.....10-8 Official start time, meet and greet.

12:00Lunch (Mexican Food)

1:00 P.M.....Official welcome, introductions & open mike

Master of Ceremonies

Robert Garcia - LTHS Superintendent

USFS dignitaries

Mike McIntyre; L.A. River District Ranger

Dave Conklin; Angeles N.F. FMO

LTHS Past Superintendents

Special guests

Mike Rogers; Retired Angeles NF Supervisor

Dick Montague; Retired R5 Director of Fire Management

The 1966 El Cariso Hot Shots

3:00 P.M. ----- Free for All & crew photos

6.00 P.M. ----- 10-7

RSVP

Please respond by Oct. 1st if you are planning to attend the Little Tujunga Hot Shot 40 Year Reunion which will be held at:

Little Tujunga Station

12371 N. Little Tujunga Cyn. Rd.

San Fernando, Ca. 91342

On:

October 23rd 2010 at 10 am

We need 4 things from you:

- 1) Your name**
- 2) Year or years you were on the Crew**
- 3) Your telephone number**
- 4) How many guests you are bringing**

COST is \$7.00 a head

Add it all up and send your response and check to:

**Larry Sall
22924 Rim Way
Tehachapi, CA. 93561**

Email: ldsall@att.net

LTHS reunion ball caps & T-shirts will be available to order, cost unknown at the present but probably between \$15 & \$22.

All “Goons” be there and wear your vest, bring memorabilia, pictures for scanning, anything you may want to donate to Little T H.S. station historical display or Drop and give us Twenty!

Hotels in the Valencia/Santa Clarita Area

Rates are for AAA, Senior, Early Reservation or Best Available

Hampton Inn
25259 The Old Road
Santa Clarita, CA 91381
661-253-2400
\$89 to \$94
17 miles from Little T

Comfort Suites
25380 N. The Old Road
Stevenson Ranch, CA 91381
661-254-7700
\$85 to \$95
17 miles from Little T

La Quinta Inn & Suites
Santa Clarita – Valencia
25201 The Old Road
Stevenson Ranch, CA 91381
661-286-1111
\$90 to \$99
17 miles from Little T

Fairfield Inn
25340 The Old Road
San Clarita, CA 91381
661-290-2828
\$94
17 miles from Little T

Best Western Valencia Inn
27413 Wayne Mills Place
Valencia, CA 91355
661-255-0555
800-944-7446
\$84 to \$89
20 miles from Little T

There are 3 cheap biker flops in
the Sunland/ Tujunga area
Mt. Gleason Lodge – 818-352-7112
Harmony Motel – 818-352-1719
Travel Inn – 818-352-5951
\$45 and some change
Bring your gun

The 8 Year Man

"Hey Walt!"... "Hey What!"

Since Little T's inception not a more familiar face could be found than that of Walt Sniegowski. Crew members from 1970 through 1977 could stop what ever they were doing, drive up to Little T Station, roll down their window and yell "Hey Walt!" and from somewhere in the bowels of the Little T complex echos the gruff reply; "*Hey What!*"

Born and raised in a rural area of Western Massachusetts, Walt Sniegowski attended school in the town of Chicopee in the Connecticut River Valley. His family was always involved with hunting or fishing and owned several fishing camps and cabins for that purpose. If it was fresh water fishing the big rivers of Canada or fishing in the ocean Walt could be found on ocean going vessels, power boats and canoes for that purpose. He's mother said in her diary that Walt was born with a fishing rod in his hand and spent 150 + days per year fishing or hunting right out the back door of the family home. Walt became so accurate with bow and arrow that he competed in regional field archery tournaments in the junior and intermediate categories and helped build tournament courses in Vermont and Massachusetts that still exist today. The career path for Walt was set. He would work for Fish and Game or the Forest Service. The United States Forest Service landed him.

Walt attended and graduated from the Stockbridge School at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Armed with an Associates Degree in Forest and Wildlife Management, Walt accepted a position with the Fremont National Forest in Lakeview, Oregon in 1958 & 1959 and became a "Timber Beast" timber estimating, cruising, and marking timber with a little log scaling thrown in. While learning his craft on the Fremont he became a Red Carded Smoke-chaser and made a few lightning fires and one shift on the only campaign fire in those two years. "I had not yet inhaled enough smoke to get hooked into a fire career".

Encouraged by his District Ranger, Walt attended the University of Idaho in 1960 & 1961 and worked for the USFS experiment station at Intermountain and then in watershed management at San Dimas.

Everything appears to be on track in young Sniegowski's life but who wants to be on track? "I know...I'll join a Hot Shot crew". In 1964 Walt applied for and accepted a position with the Dalton Hot Shots on the Baldy District of the Angeles National Forest. It became his spiritual awakening. "Young" Chuck Hartley was the Superintendent and Walt worked alongside three would be

"Lifers"-- Lorenzo Armas (Interagency Dispatch Center @ Bishop) Paul Gleason (Supt. Of the Zig Zag and Pike Hot Shot crews) and Lou Yazzie (Dalton Hot Shot Foreman and Supt.).

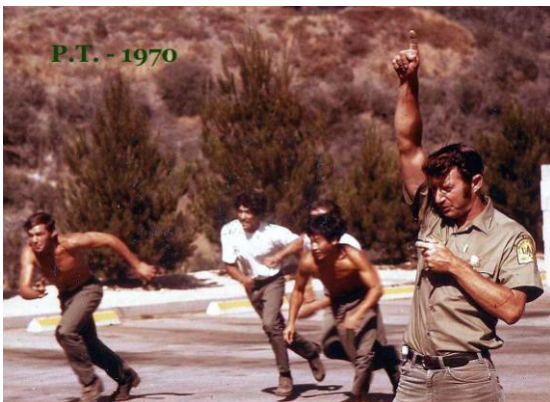
In 1965 Walt accepted a permanent position with the USFS as a Fire Prevention Technician at Dalton first and then Rincon Station. During this time Walt gained a lot of fire experience on sector teams supervising inmates, lemon pickers, and the military. Chosen to organize and train the Y.A.C.C. Crew at Camp Fenner on the Valyermo District, Walt accumulated more fire experience but it wasn't the same as the Hot Shot world. "I was looking for a supervisors position on a Hot Shot crew but few were available. Positions in Arizona and Idaho were offered but they were temporary and I turned them down".



San Gabriel Rangers
Circa 1966

Left to Right:
Chuck Mook; Steve Arvey (Oakgrove Supt.); Woody Kinch; Walt (LTHS Supt.);
Gordon Rowley (Dalton Fmn); Warren Smith; Mike McGeragle (LTHS Fmn)
Walt's dog - Toro (The Bull)

In 1970 Walt was offered a supervisory position working for Charlie Caldwell on the Redding Inter-regional Hot Shot Crew. Then lo and behold the Foreman's position on the Little Tujunga Hot Shots was offered at the same time. "I agonized over the decision for several days, however friends like Woody Hite, Hugh Masterson and others convinced me of the unique opportunity to start from day one with a brand new crew. Not many people get an opportunity like that and I never regretted the decision".



This decision must have been the right one because 8 years later, 4 years as Foreman and 4 years as Superintendent, Walt Sniegowski took into his hands the responsibility to protect, guide, and defend the lives of twenty young men each and every fire season. During his time with the Little Tujunga Hot Shots, not one fire shelter was deployed or one major lost time accident was recorded.



In 1978 health reason's forced a move out of primary fire fighting positions and into the start of the Angeles National Forest Fuels Program. To get things jump started Walt was stationed at Oak Grove, Then, the program eventually moved into the Supervisors Office in 1980 at Arcadia, Ca.

As a cadre member of the Angeles National Forest prescribe burn and fuels management programs, a lot of firsts were accomplished on the "Big A".

- The first broadcast Rx burn under Cal Yarbrough.
- The Helitorch becomes a routine Rx fire tool.
- Prescribed fire policy was written and adopted Region wide.
- Los Angeles and LA County model their prescribe burn, fuel, and smoke management programs from the "Big A"
- The Regional Chaparral Committee was formed to develop training courses in Fuels, Rx Fire, Smoke management and Fire Behavior. Walt served as a Regional and National Instructor for these courses.
- Demonstrations from project areas like the Grindstone and Laguna-Morena show cased Angeles National Forest innovative fuels management practices and established it's reputation as a real leader in this area.
- Fire management and prescribe burn policy becomes part of the Angeles N.F. Land Management Plan.

Walt's work with the Chaparral Committee didn't go unnoticed and he was offered and accepted a new position with the Prescribed Fire Project at Riverside's Fire Laboratory in 1983.

“Our studies at the Fire Laboratory helped refine and improve our prescribed fire prescriptions. We conducted research in a variety of fuel types ---- chaparral in California and Arizona, the Ponderosa Pine type near Flagstaff, AZ., the Giant Sequoia's of King's Canyon and Yosemite National Parks and finally the grasslands of the Aravaida Wilderness in Arizona”.

The most extensive study of chaparral fuel characteristics and fuel moisture studies were completed during the life of this project.



Walt retiring at the Riverside Fire Lab

In 1990, after 31 years, 6 months, and 16 days Walt Sniegowski retired from the United States Forest Service. But wait!....the telephone never stopped ringing. “Hey Walt!....*Hey What!*...It's the Bureau of Indian Affairs, The Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the Department of Justice requesting you put your Whites back on. What do I tell them?...Tell 'em I'll be there”!

For those that don't know, Walt celebrates and shares his life with his wife Sarita, 4 children and 10 grand children. They live a very active life in Palm Springs, Ca. and never miss the opportunity to be active members of that community.



Walt's “Bucket List” includes a cycling trip across the country, or over Logan Pass on the Going-To-The-Sun highway in Montana. Catch an Artic Char and one Piute Trout if the season ever reopens, a couple of unfinished hikes in the Grand Canyon and the howl of a Wolf somewhere on a path less traveled.



Cycling Hwy 395 Reno to Little Lake

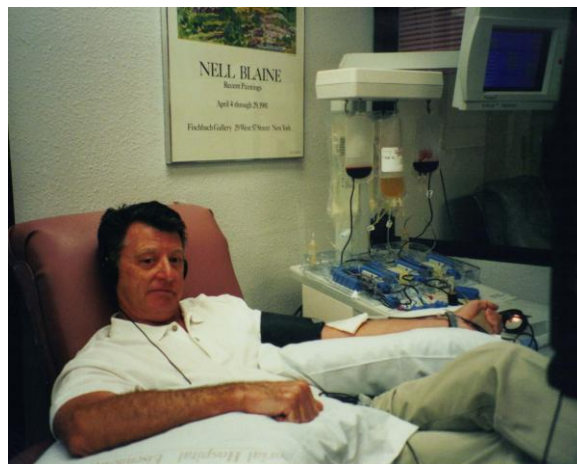
Working with Rod, Larry and Dave, I have very much enjoyed the efforts that have gone into the LTHS newsletter, web-site and reunion. I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the reunion in October”.



Life is good in Palm Springs

From 1970 to 1980 Walt Sniegowski figures at least 30 Little Tujunga Hot Shots have gone on to have a career with the USFS. That is just amazing for such a short time period. The USFS and the Tujunga District Staff on the Angeles National Forest must have been doing something right. This statistic might even rival the Baldy District for producing Hot Shot Superintendents and Fire Control Officers.

Just remember one thing. If you don't handle your tool correctly and you slice yourself wide open...you can always count on Walt to be there!



268 Platelet Donations and Counting
Walt and Sarita 80 gallons!!!

Skinner Ridge—A Tale of Two Forks By: Walt & Rod

It was July 5th, 1970—nearly quitting time—1800 hours. Answering the phone at Bear Divide Station, forest dispatcher Noy Hobson was on the other end.

“Is your crew ready?” was his question to me. There is a major fire burning on the Los Padres National Forest and the Hot Shot crews are being requested.

The reason behind Noy’s question? We were a brand new crew, had two fires (class A and C) under our belt, and had been organized for a total of five days. Calculating potential overtime in my head, the next two days were our days off, I handed the phone to Rod.

“Of course the goons are ready, I’ll get the travel instructions and you get the fire packs loaded.” Enough time was allotted for twenty-three quick phone calls to let the mom’s, girlfriends, wives and the bartender at the Sandtrap know that we would not be coming home tonight. The fire dragon was loose and we were the last hope to slay the beast. It’s a tough, dirty job—but hey, someone has to do it! And we were ready.

The fire, named Skinner Ridge, was burning in the little sub drainage of the Little Sur on the Monterey Ranger District. The fire was burning in mixed fuels, chaparral on the South and West aspects and redwood, oak and madrone on the others. We would travel in convoy with the Texas Canyon Hot Shots. We would meet them at the Castaic Junction and then head north. We had a twelve hour ETA. Since both crews missed dinner, the superintendents decided to feed the crew first—it would be a long night. Rod chose a combination truck stop and all-you-can-eat buffet—a fine dining experience for most Hot Shot crewmen. In fact, for some, it was the first restaurant they had frequented that didn’t require them to order from a clown named Jack or Ronald. The only memorable event from this dining experience was when crewmember Wayne Crow (1970) pointed out to the waitress that she had inadvertently given him two forks. What followed was instruction in the proper use of salad and dinner forks. Wayne also commented that they were not plastic either—but after eating he tossed them in the trash anyway.

As we drove through the night, something badly needing attention became very apparent—that is, the shortage of qualified drivers. By midnight, Gary and I were fighting to stay awake while driving the stake side and Rod was doing the same with the pick-up. We made several rest and coffee stops throughout the drive, changing drivers often. We arrived at fire camp just as it was getting light enough to see. The crew spent a fitful night trying to find a comfortable way to sleep in back of the open stake side. Their best solution was wrapped in blankets and piled-up on the stake side floor. Several long-term relationships were formed that night. It was a long cold ride up the coast.



Doug McCoy & Ken Muneoka On the way to the Skinner Ridge Fire – Aren’t they cute!!!

The fire camp was located in the Butchers Gap campground, in a grove of magnificent coast redwoods. Checking into plans, we believed we would probably be fed and rested prior to and line assignment. Boy, were we ever wrong. Fire boss Jerry Berry got us breakfast, a sack lunch (our first containing mystery meat) and our fire assignment sheet. We had now been awake for over 24 hours with only an occasional catnap.

We were not the most effective crew out there that day. As I recall, the chainsaw guys—maybe Ogan, Olson or Valdez—crashed after just a very short period. Everyone was simply over-tired. Rod was not pleased with the amount of line being constructed, in fact he said “we’re moving too f_ _ _ _ slow”, he was having visions of the Kashmere Fire. Oh no! But at least the goons were maintaining a cutting and scraping order and staying in line. Having seen enough Rod ordered the sawyers to throw brush while he and I took the saws and completed cutting the fire line. Upon completion of line construction and improvement, we began a Hot Shot crewman’s favorite activity—mop-up. Lying across the fire line in a canyon bottom was a 15’ diameter redwood log, fully involved. Taking the liners out of our hardhats, we began a bucket brigade and proceeded to knock the heat out of this log. A falling team was brought into handle the rest of the job because our 16” Homelite XL’s were found to be a bit wanting.

Following the traditional fire camp steak dinner, the crew proceeded to set up camp in the aforementioned redwood grove. My last recollection was placing my paper sleeping bag atop centuries of accumulated organic material. Setting the select comfort levels of our paper mattresses to 75, we enjoyed the first of many nights, out-under-the-stars, that first year.

Our return trip home was uneventful except for a detour to a local beach. After our Pacific swim and a good lunch, we arrived back at base with a much better understanding of what this Hot Shot job was really about. The first two fires had merely been teasers. Fires like Waterman, Fork and Bear were still on the horizon.

I believe that to a man, we knew we had to do better—much better. What followed was acceleration in our physical training program, more attention was paid to each individual’s fire tool and personal gear, more crewmen were qualified in chainsaw operations, and finally a realignment of the cutting order was made. Crew members began to actively compete for the fire line positions. And finally, an intensive driver qualification program was initiated to handle that particular problem. Gary Glotfelty took the lead in getting this done.

Skinner Ridge would be the crews’ baptism of fire. We got a bit of hot line, cold trailing and mop-up. We still needed some fine tuning and a bit of polishing here and there—but we were starting to reach that point that supervisors wait to achieve. That point?—When twenty individuals merge and at least take on the appearance of a team. A crew.

How does one know when this actually does occur? Easy, I think—you see when before the fire we had only our given names—but on returning, we had guys called Meat, Goober, Stick, Speedy and The Little Feller. Where in heck does a nickname Wally Gator, the polish alligator, come from? This has been a fascinating phenomenon to observe—the transition from individuals to a Hot Shot crew. I’m glad I didn’t miss it.

P.S.: All good stories have a post-script and this one is no exception. Shortly after returning home and now finally back at Little T for the first time—all crew overhead were summoned to the residence of District Fire Control Officer Hugh Masterson. Sitting in the middle of his dining room table was a cake that wife Mary had baked for us. On the cake was a single candle to celebrate a number of very special firsts. First Hot Shot Crew in the district, first fire, first off forest assignment. After releasing Rod back to his superintendent duties, Hugh and Mary offered Gary and I a second piece of cake, but this time chased with a few fingers of “old something or other”. Hugh then handed us each a stick up gum, winked, and sent us on our way. You know—they just don’t make FCO’s like that anymore!

I'm running this updated article on "An Identity Crisis" due to a few reporting inaccuracies in the summer edition and I also threw in some photos to help explain the story.

An Identity Crisis

On July 1st, 1970, the Little Tujunga Hot Shot crew members were issued some less than flattering "jell-o mold" style hard hats. Unhappy with our appearance wearing these jell-o mold hard hats and a plain orange fire shirt the crew first purchased Filson vests and an oval patch was designed and sewn on. We really didn't like the oval patch but it was all we could get done at the time. No one could embroider the letters directly onto the vest locally. We would later make another change to the vest.



Early 1970



Larry Sall

The above mentioned change was a start in the identity process, but we were as yet far from satisfied. After a considerable amount of horse-trading by Rod, we were able to obtain a sufficient number of metal, Bullard hard hats—the fashion statement of the day. We then proceeded to paint them in the light metallic blue color of the Tujunga District. The problem was, we looked just like any other district employee, including the recreation crew, and this would just not do. Seeking our own identity, we came up with our own crew color, "International Orange". We made this choice, first because no other Angeles crew was using it, and secondly, there just happened to be a case of "international orange" spray paint left in the storage locker and Rod liked it because it matched our fire shirts. To the hard hat was added the Angeles NF Shield and some gold with black lettering crescents, spelling out Little Tujunga Hot Shots.

Rod Wrench



Early 1970

Greg Holler, Dale Dorman, Larry Beringer

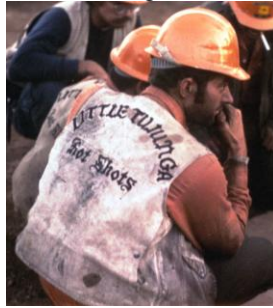


Oct. 1970

(Note: Carefully observe the spelling of the words. Hot Shots is printed out as two separate words—just as first written way back in the 1930-40's. We are one of only a small handful of the 65+ Hot Shot crews existing today that have remained historically accurate on this point.) Rod Wrench is responsible for this. Also look at the crew patches and vest embroidery—they too are historically accurate.

The next change involved embroidering Little Tujunga Hot Shots directly onto the Filson vests. The lettering was in a nicer Old English script and done in San Bernardino where the Del Rosa H.S. had their vests done.

Walt Sniegowski



Early 1971

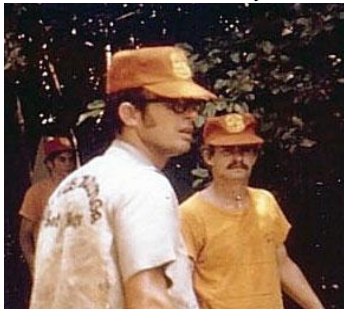
The next step in the identity seeking process was to design a patch that could be worn on khaki work shirts and ball caps. Rod's design was a conservative modification of the Forest Service pine tree badge with an orange background, but with the LTHS, Crew 5 and the Forest embroidered on it.



Late 1971 to 73

What followed close behind was an orange ball cap with the pine tree patch sewn on and later with the letter "T" ironed-on in Old English script as well. These "ideas" lasted a couple of seasons. Yellow Nomex fire shirts became available in October of 1971 during the Romero Fire. However, due to an over abundance of orange shirts the crew continued to wear orange thru the 72 season.

Rod & Dave Bailey



1972-73

Dave McCandliss



1974-75

The next version in late 73 involved the use of military insignias. We purchased pins at military surplus stores and applied them to our ball caps. That only lasted until seasons end. The motivation for this was "General" Dick Gaspari at the fire warehouse. We had been "detailed" there for a considerable time period, reconditioning fire tools, testing and rolling fire hose and performing other duties as assigned.

The crew was pretty top heavy in "brass"; we had lots of sergeants, lieutenants, captains, etc. We even had our own chaplain who led us in daily meditation. Walt held the highest crew rank—Bird Colonel. Only three crewmen were N.C.O.'s. We had a lot more Chiefs than Indians!

It is now 1974 and we are still unhappy with our identity. A crew decision was made to hold a contest and crew members were asked to submit their designs or ideas. The crew would then attempt to reach a consensus on the final design. The winner would become superintendent for a day, receive a case of beer, and would go down in LTHS history for his efforts.

Crew members looked everywhere for ideas: other crews, comic strips, tattoo parlors, head shops, etc. Entries submitted included cartoon characters, psychedelic renderings, Greek and Roman gods of fire, burning bushes, etc. The Zig Zag man was an early favorite (submitted by one of the stoners).

The final choice, however, was unanimous. Greg Vanstone submitted a full color oil painting by his artist mother. The painting was a rendering of the mythical bird—the 'Phoenix'.



1974 to 1980

From that point forward, the “bird” was worn on the ball cap and a black colored Phoenix was silk screened onto orange t-shirts. This became the crews’ semi-official work uniform.

Danny Hinojosa, a very talented artist and crewman, painted two wooden plaques with full color phoenix designs. One was attached to the rear of the crew bus; the second plaque was completed and hung on what would be known as the “Wall of Honor” in our day room. Danny then proceeded to paint, in full color, emblems of all the R-5 Hot Shot crews existing at the time. I am told the “Wall” remained until the crew was disbanded.

Mark Owens and Danny Hinojosa



1974 to 1980

In hindsight, the choice of the Phoenix for the fire crew emblem was most appropriate, considering the following facts revealed in a recent computer search. The phoenix has Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Egyptian and Native American counterparts. The “bird” is known as Feng Hung, Ho-oo, Firebid, Benu and Yel, respectively. The phoenix is a mythical creature with an longing for immortality, reported in some citations as having a lifespan of 500, 540, 1,000 and even 12,994 years. The shortest reported period was from 1974 to 1980.

If injured, the Phoenix can heal itself—its song can make the Sun stop and listen, and it is strongly connected to peace, healing and resurrection. Only one Phoenix can exist at one time. At the end of its life, the Phoenix builds a pyre nest of aromatic branches and spices. Cinnamon and myrrh (as in gold, frankincense and myrrh) are mentioned, but I'm sure sage and chamise were used as well. After the pyre nest is ignited, the phoenix arises three days later—from a single red egg. (Note: In photos, observed by this author, the color appears closer to international orange than it does to red.)

Considered the king of birds, the Phoenix always flies far ahead and to the front of all others. The Phoenix lives on dew (pour out your water, boys!), kills nothing and crushes nothing it touches. The Phoenix represents great beauty, vision, power, grace, virtue, prosperity and deathless inspiration. Recently the Phoenix was elevated to new heights by author J.K. Rowling in the saga of Harry Potter. The Phoenix is a symbol of the Japanese royal family. It appears on the coinage of the late Roman Empire, as a symbol of the eternal city. In 1782 the Phoenix was first depicted on the great seal of the United States of America. (Note: This was changed to the Bald Eagle in 1902.)

If the Phoenix symbol is used to decorate a house, it is believed that loyalty and honesty will be found in the people who live there. Therefore the same must hold true for those many firefighters who have adopted the Phoenix as their own crew symbol.



The Present Little Tujunga Hot Shot Emblem

Little Tujunga Hot Shots and the 1975 Pacoima Fire - By David Herrand, August 2010

Part 1: *The Assignment*

What follows is Part 1 of my recollection of one of the notable events that occurred in the early history of the Little Tujunga Hot Shots. I confess to an extremely flawed memory so beg corrections and invite debate from any, and all, who participated in this action.

In 1975 I was the assistant foreman (GS-4) on the USFS *Little Tujunga Hot Shots* based on the *Tujunga Ranger District* of the *Angeles National Forest*. The crew Superintendent, Walt Sniegowski and the crew foreman, Mike McGergle comprised the brains and supervision of the outfit. The brawn, if you will, was comprised of 18, highly motivated young men; keen for some rare adventure and loads of overtime pay.

On 8 August we were assigned to the *Lake Hemet Fire*. This was an “off forest” fire assignment to a 4,460 acre fire on the *San Jacinto Ranger District* of the *San Bernardino National Forest*. While working 4 day shifts on that fire we heard news of a new start, and apparently major fire, in the upper *Pacoima Canyon* on our own Ranger District. Pacoima Canyon is one of the major drainages in the *San Gabriel Mountains*, one of the steepest mountain ranges in the world. Most of Pacoima Canyon lies on an east-west axis and its easternmost reaches comprise the west slopes of *Mt. Gleason* at 6500’+ elevation.

On 12 August we were released from the *Lake Hemet Fire* and reassigned directly to the *Pacoima Fire*. Making haste we arrived about noon on the 12th and checked in at the fire camp which was established east of the fire at the recently “abandoned” *Mt. Gleason Nike-Hercules Surface to Air Missile (Russian Bomber Defense) Base*. Even at 6000’ elevation it was quite warm.

Two important points here are: 1. we checked-in to a fully, or nearly fully, staffed fire organization that had been managing this fire for at least one if not more burning periods. 2. To our surprise the management organization wasn’t the old, familiar, *Large Fire Organization*. The 1975 *Pacoima Fire* will forever have the unique distinction of the first, large wildfire “incident” managed under the emerging *Incident Command System (ICS)* one of the major outcomes of the landmark *FIRESCOPE* program.

Under the circumstances we sensed a night shift was in our immediate future. I remember seeing Keith Ellenger and asking him what the fire was doing- behavior wise. He pointed to the American flag, wrapped as it was around its flagpole, and said, “This thing is squirrely all day long but after midnight it goes crazy. Watch-out!” I wasn’t sure if Keith was joshing me or if he was really trying to tell me something.

During mid-August 1975 Southern California was experiencing what I would tag a classic “heat wave”. Under a dry and stagnant air mass, it was stiflingly hot, triple digits in the valleys and the nights stayed quite warm. At mid-slopes relative humidity was below 30% with little recovery at night.

This wasn’t our first rodeo. While waiting for an assignment, we performed maintenance and checks on our headlamps and tools- particularly our cutting and firing tools and equipment. On a fire such as this we expected to be involved in indirect attack tactics in heavy, Type 14 fuel (mature chaparral). Burnout and sometimes even backfiring are inevitable components of indirect attack. In short order the night shift plan was published and we were on it. ☺ Yeah! After devouring a typical fire camp evening meal we loaded up onto our FS green *Little Tujunga Hot Shots* 25 passenger bus (I loved that bus, it was our *magical mystery machine that took us to places we could only dream*). Heading west on the *Santa Clara Divide Road* we took the left fork at *Lightning Point* and continued west on the *Mendenhall Truck Trail*. Driving into the smoke obscured, late afternoon sun was surreal. Everything seemed so different and confusing. There was some guy on the command radio frequency called *S & R* (Suppression and Rescue Chief*) who we took to be something like the *Line Boss*. There were these other guys going by *Division Supervisors* who we guessed to be *Sector Bosses*. Then there were these guys calling themselves *Branch Directors*. All over the place there were groups of five engines who seemed to be part of *Strike Teams*- whatever those were. I think we were even assigned to a *Crew Strike Team* but don’t ask me the details. It was all new and somewhat confusing to say the least!

Arriving at our assignment, we, and our comrades for the impending night, tied in with the tired, grimy and somewhat defeated looking day shift folks. There were a number of Hotshot crews present. I’m ashamed to write the only three I remember were *Fulton HS* (Sequoia NF) and *Palomar HS* (Cleveland NF) with us on night shift. *Laguna HS* (Cleveland NF) was the one crew I remember coming off day shift. I think there were engines, water tenders and two dozers as well. In the big scheme this assignment was but a small corner of the complete, fire-wide, suppression effort.

Our *overheads* coalesced into the all-important, shift change pow-wow. As an assistant foreman I, rightfully, wasn’t a direct part of this information exchange and decision making process- my correct place was with the crew attending to last minute personnel and equipment details, taking weather observations, figuring out the vehicle maneuvering, and the parking fiasco that is a reality on all narrow, mountain, truck trails at shift change. In between these activities I would talk with some of the individuals coming off shift and get their take on the situation.

Mendenhall Truck Trail is a “ridge-top road”. However, except for passing through the occasional saddle, it’s not actually on top Mendenhall Ridge. In this area it’s hung on the north side of the ridge; some places hundreds of feet below the peaks. Day shift had put in a lengthy dozer line dropping steeply off of *Mendenhall Truck Trail* on top of a substantial spur ridge that separated the *South Fork* from the main fork of *Pacoima Canyon*. This dozer line followed this spur ridge in an arc around to the northwest and west with the fire on its east and north side and the green on its west and south side. Despite the efforts of day shift many spots had gotten established in the huge bowl that this dozer line curved partially around. This bowl is the upper reaches of the *South Fork* and comprises a North-West exposure.

The assignment was to cut the spot infested bowl off with hand line and burn it out. Like many assignments- simpler said than done! The dozers had constructed an adequately sized safety area about 2000 linear feet down this line but on the south shoulder of the spur ridge overlooking the bowl. It was decided we and Fulton would anchor off the south, downhill edge of this safety area and construct indirect handline steeply down into the *South Fork*. Simultaneously Palomar (and maybe one other crew) would do likewise off of the truck trail and the two handlines would tie-in at the dry creek, in the bottom. All together we’re talking, maybe, 60 chains of line- tops. I vaguely remember the crews bringing handline off the truck trail would have a hose lay progressing with them. We and *Fulton HS* would be punching in handline, off the aforementioned safety area and, for reasons I don’t remember, would not have a hose lay progressing with us, at least not immediately.

The issue, of course, was this was a combination of indirect and downhill line construction in close proximity to the fire- the most dangerous tactic in wildland fire suppression. Everyone was keenly aware of this. Therefore, the crew Superintendents and other supervisors spent considerable time (and agony?) in weighing options, and deciding if the risk could be managed sufficiently to carry out the assignment.

Per procedure common to such an assignment, the crews would carefully burnout the bowl side of these lines as each progressed. In heavy chaparral this can be maddening slow and tricky but is necessary to create a wider avenue of escape for the firefighters should the fire buttonhook under the crews or spot over the line. Additionally, the two groups of crews would have a grandstand view of each other across the *South Fork*, each serving as lookouts for the other. Not to mention the over watch from the truck trail was good. This was nightshift so there would be no contribution from air assets. To be continued...

*The position *Suppression and Rescue Chief* would eventually be re-named *Operations Section Chief*.

“Hot Shots” Who are those guys or what are they??

By Walt Sniegowski

During major fire incidents, reporters are often hanging around fire camps looking for fresh angles to embellish their main wild fire stories. Many will meet with the public in formation folks and some will interview an engine crew along the road or even a crewmember or two in camp. It would be a very rare occasion to see a Hot Shot crew being interviewed. This is because they are busy doing their job far out on the fire line in the most remote areas of the fire or they are resting in a remote area of the fire camp getting ready to go out and do it all over again.

More than 200 men have been Little Tujunga Hot Shot crewmembers during the period from 1970 to 1980. What follows is my personal view of who these Hot Shots really were:

They are young men of all nationalities, generally between the ages of 18 and 25 and mostly men of the West. Mountains, rivers, beaches, deserts, wilderness and generally the enjoyment of open space are all important to their lifestyles. Couch potatoes and every day city slicker they are not.

Most are resent high school graduates, some are already in college. These men are looking for excitement, challenges, comradeship, laughs, and a few bucks to put down on their next ride or into that college fund.

I have discovered that there are some common denominators to this Hot Shot individual. As a man of the West, Hot Shots like to fish, hunt, backpack, skydive, surf, rock climb, hike, cycle. They ride motorcycles and enjoy four wheeling across the south west desert landscape. As a Hot Shot he would never be caught dead on a tennis court or a golf course. Unless, of course, a good bottle of beer or a female companion, preferably both are involved.

Hot Shots are good athletes and most are into team sports. This undoubtedly accounts for their easy fit into the Hot Shot organization and lifestyle. Physical fitness is conducted both on and off the station and is taken very seriously. Calisthenics, weight training and running are preformed regularly. Jazzercise, yoga, zumba, etc. --- never.

Days off will find these guys at the beach having some fun in the surf, catching some rays, checking out the babes, drinking beer and kicking sand in the face of 200 pound bullies. Music is very important as well; however it must be played loud ---very loud.

When the descriptor “Hot Shot” is added to the crew name a magical transformation takes place. To the overhead on a large complex, Hot Shots are the “Marines”, the few, the proud and the capable. We arrive fully equipped, have our own supervision, transportation, tools, protective gear, etc. Being fully self contained, we are fully prepared to perform during the first burning period with a minimum of outside assistance.

We are fully capable of handling any of the fireline tasks needing attention. Hot Shots are generally assigned to the most critical and difficult areas of the fire. We were born for hot line, backfiring and burnouts. Holding and mop up assignments are not our strong suits; however we gladly accept them on our days off.

Are Hot Shots really all that special? Or is that just some hype that we ourselves have created? I submit to you, watch the eyes of the other firefighters in camp or on the fireline when that 20 man Hot Shot crew comes by. We are and have something very special. This is that unwritten and unspoken show of respect and admiration that Hot shot crews have earned over 60+ years. This also accounts for the long waiting list of names of those wishing to join our ranks.

We rarely allowed crewmembers to spend more than two seasons on the Little T crew. By this time, he has acquired a considerable amount of general fire experience and is ready to go into a position with more and varying responsibility and to broaden his knowledge concerning the use of other resources in the organization necessary to suppress wildfire. Many other Hot Shot crews do not adhere to this philosophy and keep crewmembers on crews for many years. Look at the list of names at the end of this article and see our success for yourself.

In any given season only 20 men can be selected to fill the ranks. Previous fire experience is always a plus. A few crew members will return to college mid season and a replacement will be added here and there. The attributes mentioned earlier play a large part in the selection process. However, Hot Shots crewmembers are made not born.

We have followed Rod's original recipe. Starting with a green recruit (goon), we stir in some P.T., discipline, safety, fire behavior knowledge, proper use of all fire fighting tools, and first aid skills. We then add good food and simmer while building initiative and confidence. We will critique all fires regardless of size and complexity, soon a team capable of handling the toughest assignments begins to emerge.

Hot Shot crewmembers are unique in many ways. They are essentially a self-governing and self-regulating bunch. Slackers or misfits are either "rehabilitated" or forced out, a situation that occurs rarely. Our screening process and the use of crewmember referrals has served us well.. It is rarely necessary to ever fire a Hot Shot crewman. Peer pressure forces out the slackers.

A few select crewmembers earn special recognition from their peers. They will acquire a nickname that will remain with them for life, at least in our company. A tip-o-the-orange-hat to: "Meat", "Goober", "Stick", "Speedy", "Underdog", "Doc", "Skip", "Rocky", "Lizard", "Columbo", "Hitler", among others.

Members of the "early" LTHS have only been males. This fact has led at times to a fair amount of controversy and criticism of me. Trying to balance my position as Forest equal opportunity counselor and a crew supervisor was at times difficult, but so is firefighting. We (supervisors) have always taken the job with utmost seriousness. We attempted to always assemble the most highly skill and professional team possible. Tokenism and social agendas have no place on the fireline. I believe our outstanding safety record and physical accomplishments speak for themselves.

Early in this article, I mentioned that a number of Hot Shot crewmembers were re-assigned to positions of additional responsibility. Thus far we have been able to locate only about 80 of the more than 200 members of the early crews. Consider below what a few of them have managed to accomplish:

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Forest/Agency</u>
1.	Jim Biddle	Fire Prevention Tech	Angeles
2.	Mitch Bulthuis	Range Program Manger	Wallowa-Whitman
3.	Randy Doman	Asst Forest FMO	Nez Perce
4.	Bob Dorman	Asst District FMO	Angeles
5.	Dale Dorman	Helitack Unit leader	Stanislaus
6.	Kenny Duval	Air Officer	Angeles
7.	Larry Hayes	District FMO	Shasta-Trinity
8.	Frank Howell	Silviculturist	Lassen
9.	Chuck Koller	Border Prevention Officer	Cleveland
10.	Scott Lowden	Fuels Specialist	Angeles
11.	Jeff Luff	District FMO	Payette
12.	Dave McCandless	District FMO	Sierra
13.	Chet Ogan	Wildlife Technician	P.SW-Arcata
14.	Bob Olson	Asst Forest FMO	Lassen
15.	Mike Ryan	District FMO	Sequoia
16.	Pete Saldana	Fire Prevention Tech	Sequoia
17.	Monte Satern	District Roads Manager	Six Rivers
18.	Jack Sepsey	Helitack Squad Leader	Inyo
19.	Norm Walker	District FMO	San Bernardino
20.	Dave Bailey	Lieutenant	USAF-Plant 42
21.	Jeff Giampaolo	Engineer	Glendale FD
22.	Ralph Martini	Paramedic	San Luis Obispo FD
23.	Tim McLaughlin	Captain	CA Dept of Corrections
24.	Doug Nakama	Deputy Chief	San Diego FD
25.	Jim Nye	Engineer	Orange Co. FD
26.	Rich Onsgard	Engineer	L.A. City FD
27.	Steve Reed	Engineer	Kern Co. FD
28.	Paul Silveri	Captain	L.A. City FD
29.	Mike Vradenburg	Captain	China Lake FD

Stay tuned ----- More to come!!!