

## Fire Sweeps S.A. Canyon and Hills; North Edge Y.L. Singed

### ***Yorba Linda Star November 12, 1943***

With the aid of several hundred soldiers from near-by camps and fields and half a dozen State Forestry Service rangers from northern counties the worst brush and grass fire this part of Orange County has seen in 40 years was brought under control about dusk Tuesday night after sweeping the Puente hills from Riverside County line to a point just short of the town of Olinda, a distance of 12-15 miles.

County headquarters of the State Forestry Service at Orange estimated the area burned over at five to six thousand acres, but there were many who believed this estimate too conservative.

No human lives were lost and only one structure was known at midweek to have been destroyed.

Science suffered a serious loss, however, in the burning over of from one-fourth to one-third of the area of the nationally famous Rancho Santa Ana Botanical Gardens.

The fire started Monday forenoon just across the Riverside county line where according to trustworthy accounts, a rancher was burning brush under a Forestry Service permit, in spite of the fact that a considerable breeze was blowing down the canyon and relative humidity was almost at zero.

Sparks from this fire were said to have leaped to dry grass or brush down the wind, and soon a first class blaze was going. There was enough wind and the air was dry enough to cause crown fires in the trees in the river bottoms and in a grove of eucalyptus trees which stood in the path of the flames which climbed up the south slope of the Puente hills and soon were menacing the well known botanical gardens.

In spite of all efforts to keep the flames away from the plantings, a considerable acreage north of the ranch house and offices was seared although a whole hillside of pines and other conifers which had been collected from all parts of the state over a period of 15 years and induced to grow in their new environment escaped damage.

The portion of the gardens covered by the fire was considered the least valuable, but Dr. Carl Wolfe, the director, mourned the loss of some desert junipers he had just induced to grow thriftily after 12 years of effort.

None of the ranch buildings were damaged in any way and all of the splendid orange groves belonging to the rancho also were undamaged.

### Fire Fighters Effective

The fire on the Puente hills was one of 27 the State Forestry Service men were called upon to combat in Orange County from the last Saturday noon onward to this midweek, and the men who directed the fight against the blaze which began in the Santa Ana canyon had already passed two full days and nights in their clothes and without sleep. Nevertheless there is evidence along the southern edge of the burn of their effective work. First they saved the most valuable end of the botanical gardens and the great ranch house. They kept the blaze on the uphill side of the Santa Fe tracks and Esperanza avenue. They and a group of high school boys stopped the flames a hundred yards or so short of the Adolph Friend ranch house which was next in its path. They stopped it after it had approached almost as close to the Kraemer boys ranch buildings in the dry farming area east of Yorba Linda, and they kept it at a distance

from the Tony Reyes ranch buildings, about the only other group of buildings in the path of the flames until they came abreast of Yorba Linda.

### **Flames Outflank Fighters**

Because of the wind and low humidity County Ranger Joe Sherman general in charge of the battle and his aids, did not consider it safe to make a frontal assault on the fire, and the backfires they started invariably got away from them. Their efforts thus were confined to working on the flanks of the fire and all day Monday and all night Monday night and through most of Tuesday the advancing front of the flames outflanked them, edging northward and sometimes moving even against the east wind. Dozen s of times during the night the men saw the flames move eastward, reach the head of a canyon, and then race westward down it. Firemen told of seeing flames leap one to two hundred feet going down these heavily grassed canyons.

They asserted, however, that the fire seemed to burn with equal fury in brush, green trees, long grass or short grass. "Even the flammable," said several of the men. Among these was Foreman Paul Fellman of the Yorba Linda station of the Forestry Service who says from now on he will be living on borrowed time. Monday night he was directing a group of 40 soldiers when suddenly, according to Mr. Fellman, flames seemed to be coming at them from all directions. They saved themselves by running to the sidelines, part way through flames.

None suffered serious injury. Up to midweek in fact no serious injury to any human had been reported, though the army ambulances which accompanied each detachment of soldiers sent here from March Field, Santa Ana air base and Ontario dressed many a minor burn, scratch, bruise, and, most numerous of all, eyes suffering from long exposure to smoke.

### **Old Gray House Burned**

The one structure destroyed by the fire was the dwelling known as the "Old Gray Place" far up the drainage basin of Telegraph canyon. It was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Bruc Friend who escaped with 20 goats, two kittens, the clothes they wore and little else.

The story was current that several cattle had perished in the flames. At Forestry Service headquarters here it was said that 16 or 17 head of cattle had been seen surrounded by flames at head of Telegraph canyon but it was not known if they were able to escape.

Up to midweek *The Star* was unable to find ay first hand evidence that any cattle were lost, but thousands of acres of their pasture was gone.

Other creatures than cattle and goats were routed from their habitats. One group of soldiers told of seeing two fawns run away from the fires just north of Yorba Linda, and another insisted he had seen a bobcat.

### **The Yorba Linda Sector**

While the fire singed only the northeastern edge of the Yorba Linda tract, the community did not escape without damage. Hardest hit was Herbert E. Anderson who lost 16 big avocado trees along the north line of his grove. Fifteen other big trees along the north line were scorched. Mort Schneidewind suffered

painful burns on his face while fighting to keep the flames away from the barn on the George Howe place where he lives.

First Yorba Linda property to be threatened was the big lemon ranch of Mr. and Mrs. S. M. Rosedale at the extreme southeastern corner of the tract. They had a fire brake disced to deflect the flames to the north of their property line, and for a time it seemed to have done the business. Finally though, the fire front came to the end of this fire brake and, moving around inside, it began working back eastward. A crew of neighbors and friends then went to work with shovels, hose and wet sacks to keep the flames from the Rosedale property. The story was repeated all along the north line of the tract until it reached the road cut by the Shell Oil company to its new wildcat well northeast of the Anderson grove. This road served as an excellent firebreak except at one point where fire broke over to burn along the north line of the Anderson property.

The crew working at the Shell well was ordered out. Instead the men sprayed the grass and brush to the eastward of them with mud from their pump and kept on working while the fire marched on to the north of them. Westward of the Anderson place the Shell Oil company and the Yorba Linda Water company had disced and bulldozed wider firebreaks and the left flank of the fire front was driven towards the top of the first range of hills to the north. With soldiers and other firefighters working along its flank it was confined to a narrowing strip towards the top of the hills. Finally about the middle of the afternoon the east wind died entirely and a slight drift of air from the west—not enough to tip the trees but sufficient to change the smoke drift—and then the defense closed in on the flames. A few hours later the fire was contained within lines, but it was not officially declared “out” until late Wednesday.

### **Two and a Half Mile Front**

According to the Orange office of the Forestry Service the fire front at its widest was two and a half miles in extent. It was said by the men who had been all the way up Telegraph canyon that the fire at no place crossed the road in the bottom of the canyon. As far as this reporter went up Tuesday afternoon it was almost wholly on top. Only in the little side canyons did the fire come any distance down the north slope of the ridge.

The Forestry Service said that none of the planes circling over the fire made reconnaissance reports to it as many believed.

A report widely circulated but unconfirmed up to Tuesday night was that Adolph Friend had lost several head of horses. Mr. Friend at that time said he knew of no stock he had lost.

### **Red Cross, Scouts Help**

Mobile kitchens were sent out to help feed the firemen during part of their long, weary battle by the Fullerton chapter of the American Red Cross and both boy and Girl Scouts helped bring food to the men.

Most out of town papers printed that there were 1500 men engaged in fighting the fire but according to official sources the most that was on the line at any one time was about 350. These worked in shifts, however, and replacements may have run the total to near a thousand.

After men of the Forestry Service in the county had fought continuously for 36 hours they were relieved by the arrival of six rangers from northern counties. Among Amador, Toulumne and Tehama counties.

Sleepy Hollow and Olinda residents were aroused at 2 a.m. Tuesday and told to prepare to evacuate but as it turned out they were never in the dire danger the daily papers indicated.