

BOYD FIRE

Taylor County, Florida

May 17, 1985

This is in reference to the Boyd Fire which started around 3:30 p.m. Friday, May 17, 1985. Arson was the cause and it was set north of Perry on the east side of Highway 221 approximately four miles from the city limits. Winds were from the north-north-west averaging 12 miles per hour and humidity was in the high 20's.

Ranger Rufus McMullen arrived on the fire when it was less than the size of an average home and called for help immediately. In approximately 15 minutes the fire had built to 100+ acres and was spotting extremely bad. Additional crews from the Division and forest industry continued to arrive and all efforts for containment failed. In an hour and a half the fire was estimated to be approaching 1,000 acres and fire fighting personnel continued attack on the flanks. The fire was raining spots in all directions and the flanks were spotting also.

Forest Rangers Billy Wright and Jimmy Kramer were working together on the right flank when the severe spotting began. They were putting in multiple lines on the downwind side of a woods road in the southeast quarter of Section 23, Township 3 South, Range 7 East. The area contained planted slash pine approximately 20 years old, around 50 feet tall and a dense understory of pine needles, brush and vegetation. The winds began shifting more to the north and put the rangers in direct path of the fire. Forest Investigator Beaty radioed several times for all firefighters to retreat, but with our communications system the two rangers were unable to receive the warning. As the wind continued to shift, the spotting caused the rangers to be completely surrounded by a wall of flames with no avenues of escape. They retreated to the woods road, approximately 30 feet wide, and butted their tractors up to each other on the downwind side of the road.

Both rangers removed their fire shelters from the tractors and got on the ground on the downwind side of the fire using the tractors for protection. Ranger Wright did not have time to remove his tent from the plastic cover and shared Ranger Kramer's shelter. As the fire rolled over them they changed sides of the tractors and continued to use them for protection. A combination of fire shirts and fire shelters, coupled with experience and good judgment, enabled the two rangers to make it through the crisis. Within 30 minutes, both were at Doctors Memorial Hospital where they were treated for smoke and heat inhalation.