

# **MARPLE BRANCH II REVIEW REPORT**

## **Burnout Operation**

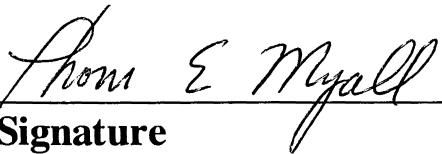
**Pacific Southwest Region  
Angeles National Forest**

**California Department of Forestry  
and Fire Protection  
Sierra South Region**

**Los Angeles County Fire Department**

**September 2, 1996**

**Thom E. Myall**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Chief of Party**  
**LPF**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature**

### **MEMBERS**

**Robert Green - CDF  
John Harris - LAC  
Frank August - LAC**

# MARPLE BRANCH II INCIDENT REVIEW

## I. REVIEW

The team members were ordered by the Marple Incident Command Team. The assignment was to review the burnout incident and to find out what occurred.

- \* was the firing operation a direct contributor to the incident
- \* was the main fire the direct contributor to the incident
- \* what were, if any violations of the 10 standard orders and 18 situations or other violations of policy

Review Team members were contacted by their respective dispatch procedures and requested to assemble at the Marple ICP by 1630 Thursday, August 29, 1996.

The Review Team Members, consisting of Thomas E. Myall, Robert F. Green, and Frank August, were briefed at 1700 Hrs by CDF Agency Representatives, Gregg Scott, Steve Heil, Bill Trowbridge, and LAC IC Bob Lee. After this briefing the Review Team obtained a copy of all interviews and data collected up to that time. The team then reviewed this information and constructed a list of names using the IAP and statements of persons involved. Team members interviewed these individuals and visited the site as a team with the individual involved. Battalion Chief John Harris joined the team on August 30, 1996.

The Review Team members consisted of:

Bob Green, CDF, Asst Chief, Riverside  
Thom Myall, USFS, Forest Fire Management Officer, Los Padres National Forest  
John Harris, Battalion Chief, Los Angeles County Fire Department  
Frank August, Captain, Los Angeles County Fire Department

## II. NARRATIVE

### SUMMARY

At the Marple Incident on Wednesday, August 28, 1996 at approximately 1430 hours, a situation occurred in Branch II, Division G. The Division G supervisor received second degree burns on his left ear and his vehicle was damaged on the left side. In addition, six hand-crews were forced to abandon their line construction assignment, and make an emergency exit to the Crew Carrier Vehicles (CCV). The upper most five crews were able to reach their CCV in a timely manner. The sixth crew that was committed to the lowest point in the operations was impacted by heat and smoke on their exit and incurred flame impingement to their vehicle upon their exit.

An unauthorized burn-out operation had taken place in Division E. The main fire spread was influenced by the burn-out operation. After the review, it is unclear if the burn-out operation caused Division G's "Close Call."

Therefore, this review board has listed all relevant findings.

### NARRATIVE

Between 1100 - 1200 hours, Division G and H, located along the Old Ridge Route (ORR) combined their resources of six hand-crews that were composed of four California Department of Forestry (CDF) crews and two Los Angeles County Fire Department (LAC) crews. The hand-crews task was to construct a cold-trail line east from Drop Point (DP) 5 as far as possible. Division G Supervisor conferred with his Crew Supervisors and Division H to comprise a plan to perform their assigned task in conjunction with a safety briefing. Items handled were to assign Strike Team Leader (STL) 9379G as a Lookout, and move all vehicles to a safer location.

The hand-crews were performing line construction in a leap frog method to maximize resources. Division G then set out ahead of the crews to scout the line.

At approximately 1430 hours, Lookout STL 9379G notified Division G of a fast approaching fire from the south in Division E. Division G immediately ordered all six hand-crews to return to their parking location. When the first five crews arrived at their CCV's, Division G ordered them to leave the area and not wait for him. The crews exited north on ORR to Highway 138, and then south to Interstate 5 to the firing operation where they staged in case they might be needed. The sixth crew committed the furthest from the parking area was impacted by heat and smoke both in hiking-out and arriving at their CCV. Flame impingement occurred to the CCV upon exiting from DP 5.

Division H and Lookout STL 9379G waited for Division G who was making his way back to his vehicle. Division G attempted to make access to his vehicle but retreated due to a heat wave, smoke and ash, forcing him to lay down. Division G removed his shelter from his pack, but did not open it. During this time, Division G noticed that previous burnt stubs were glowing around him due to these conditions. After a short period of time, conditions improved and Division G made a face to face contact with Division H and STL 9379G, at which time exited together on ORR to Templin Highway.

Division E Supervisor was constructing a line using dozers and hand-crews when he noticed a spot become active with rapid spread to the north and to the west approaching Interstate 5. Division E ordered several strike teams to respond to Interstate 5 north of Templin Highway. Division E met with Operations I and STL 9331C to develop a plan for holding the fire east of Interstate 5, and only fire out if absolutely necessary.

Division E was aware of several crews in Division G above the active fire in Division E.

After Division E tried unsuccessfully to reach Division G on the tac net, he decided to drive back up to ORR to find and notify Division G of the situation.

Operations I conferred with Angeles National Forest (ANF) Battalion Chief (BC) 31 regarding the threat of the active fire jumping Interstate 5. ANF BC 31 expressed concern and informed Operations I that there were very few control points available west of Interstate 5.

Operations I then requested LAC BC 30, via tac net, to meet him at scene for a possible job assignment.

LAC BC 30 arrived and was briefed by Operations I of a possible firing operation. Four single increment CDF Engines had also prepared for a firing operation. Operations I informed LAC BC 30 that he was not comfortable with firing as he was not sure if personnel were located above the proposed burn-out operation. LAC BC 30 assured Operations I that he had unsuccessfully attempted to raise resources on the IAP 204 Communications Summary assigned frequencies, he, LAC BC 30, had assumed no personnel were above the proposed burn-out operation.

LAC BC 30 initiated the burn-out operations by firing a flare pistol, into the brush, and was joined by four CDF single engines and ANF BC 31. Operations I reported that personnel were using various firing methods, pistols, drip torches, and fusee's simultaneously over an area covering as much as 200 yards. Operations I attempted to stop the burn-out operation, however, he was only able to convey his decision verbally, face to face, to a few units.

After numerous interviews and gathering of information and statements, the Review Board was able to determine that all personnel in Division G were hiking out prior to the burn-out operation.

Operations I once again, went to LAC BC 30 and stated he was still not comfortable with the firing operation. LAC BC 30 was adamant that the firing operation must continue.

After a period of time, CDF STL 9331 went to Operations I, LAC BC 30 and ANF BC 31 and requested that the burn-out operation stop until verification could be made that all personnel above the burn-out operation exited the area. LAC BC 30 and ANF BC 31 refused to stop the firing operation.

This burn-out operation went on for approximately 2 hours tying into a shear rock outcropping. The burn-out operation distance was 2 miles. This line was secured under LAC BC 30's direction during the night using dozer and crews to ORR.

Division E had returned to ORR and was able to raise Division G and H and eventually meet them on ORR.

## AFTER-THOUGHTS

The end results of the burn-out were textbook, as far as success.

The burn-out methods were not according to generally accepted firing procedures.

Only ICS 204 without frequency summary at bottom should be used in the IAP. The ICS 205 Communication Plan should be the only document with frequencies listed in the IAP.

### **III. CAUSAL & CONTRIBUTING FACTORS**

#### CAUSAL FACTORS

- A. Division G ordered CCV's moved from IAP location (Drop Point 5) to a safer location south approximately 150 feet.
- B. Division G deployed lookouts and conducted a safety briefing prior to going to work.
- C. Division G assigned crews to cold trail fireline east of Old Ridge Road.
  1. Main fire became active in Division E.
  2. Division G ordered all 6 crews back to the CCV's area.
  3. All resources above burnout operation were not informed.
  4. Battalion 30 began burn-out operation.
  5. Inadequate burn-out plan
    - No anchor point
    - No lighting boss
    - No objectives
    - Burnout not approved by Operations 1
    - Acting Lighting Boss did not have control of resources
    - No communications plan
  6. 6 crews exited in CCV's to the North on the Old Ridge Road.
  7. Division G burned left ear - second degree.
  8. Division G's vehicle damaged as a result of heat and flame.

### CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

1. Incident Action Plan - Problem Areas
  - Communications Plan - ICS 205 Frequencies were different than the Division Assignment List-ICS 204 Radio Frequencies.
  - Incident Map did not have division breaks identified.
2. No Air Support available due to priorities in Divisions C and D.

### FIRE ORDERS - COMPROMISED

1. Fight fire aggressively, but provide for safety first.
2. Ensure instructions are given and understood.
- \*3. Remain in communication with crew members, your supervisor and adjoining forces.
4. Retain control at all times.
5. Stay alert, keep calm, think clearly, act decisively.

\* MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR

### WATCH OUT SITUATIONS - THAT APPLY

1. Fire not scouted and sized up.
2. Uninformed on strategy, tactics and hazards.
3. Instructions and assignments not clear.
- \*4. No communication link with crew members or supervisor.
5. Constructing line without safe anchor point.

\* MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR

#### IV. SUPPORTING DATA

##### WITNESS STATEMENTS

Division G and H  
Branch II

- \* Division G Supervisor - Lyle Drenth, CDF
- \* Division H Supervisor - Jack Murassian, NPS, Hawaii National Park
- \* STL 9383G - Captain Howell, CDF
- \* Norco 2 - Captain Bruce Fosdike, CDF
- \* Norco 3 - Captain John McLain, CDF
- \* STL 9379G - Captain Bob Reed, CDF
- \* Porta La Cruz 1 - Captain Vince O'Neal, CDF
- \* Porta La Cruz 3 - Captain Mike Ng, CDF
- \* LAC Crew Supervisor 27 - FCS Jerry Littlefield, LAC
- \* LAC Crew 19-3 - FCS Mark Killingstad, LAC
- \* LAC Crew 16-4 - FCS David Wagnier, LAC
- \* Branch II Director - Hal Mortier, USFS
- \* Crew Truck ORR observers - FCS Jonathan Miller, LAC  
FCS Tom Miller, LAC  
LAC Crew 25

\* Denotes written statement or interview taken

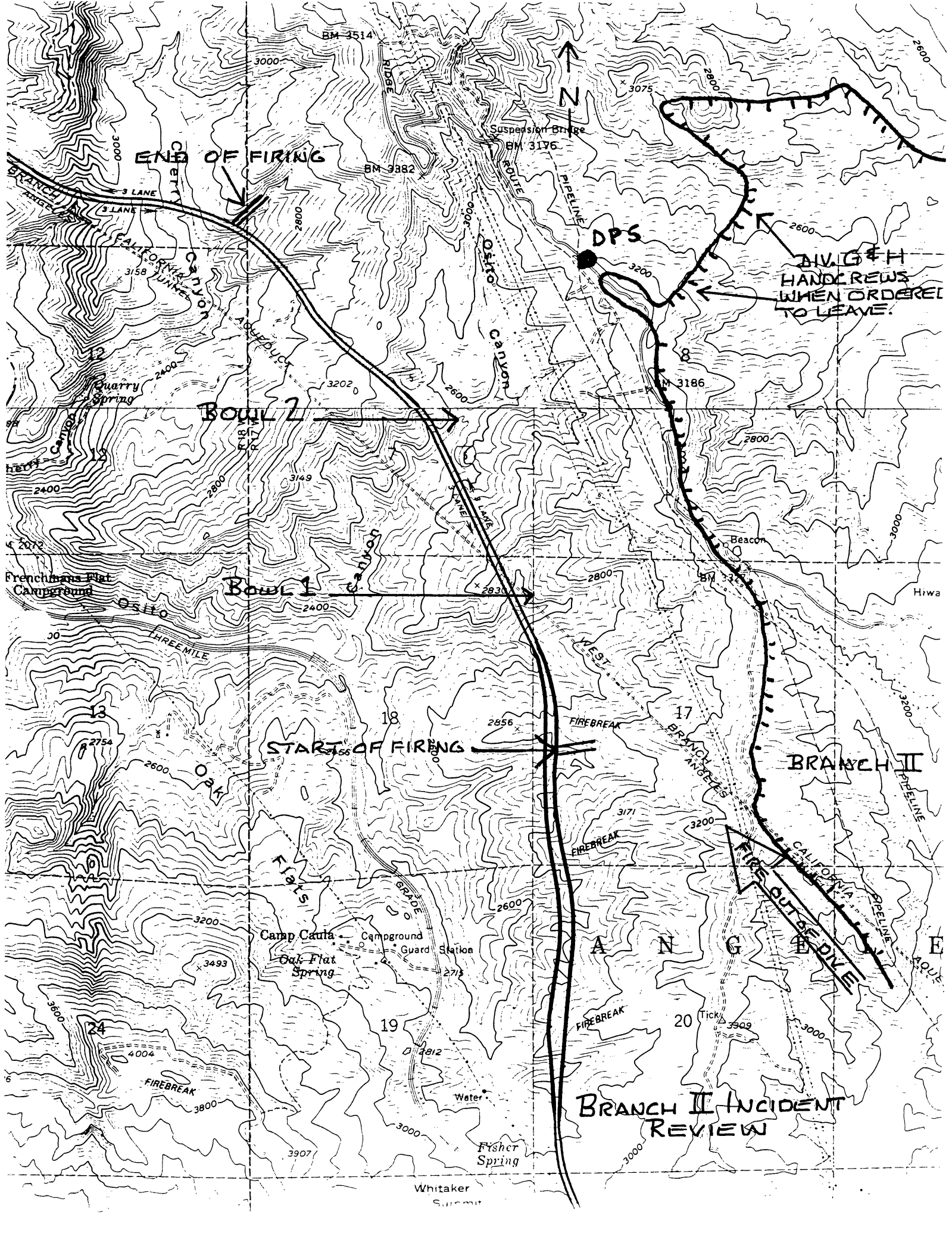
## WITNESS STATEMENTS

Division E  
Branch II

- \* Operations 1 - AC Dave Horn, LAC
- \* Division Supervisor E - Chuck Nicola, ORCO
- \* LAC BC 30 - Bob Grafton, LAC
- \* ANF BC 31 - Terry Molzain, ANF
- \* RXI - Captain Dennis Green, LAC
- \* STL 9331C - BC Kevin O'Leary, CDF
- \* Safety Officer - Captain Don Schwaiger, LAC
- \* MVU E33 - Captain Fae Mary Bryn, CDF

\* Denotes written statements or interview taken





END OF FIRING

Bowl 2

Bowl 1

START OF FIRING

DPS

DIV. G & H  
HANDCREWS  
WHEN ORDERED  
TO LEAVE.

BRANCH II

FIRE OUTSIDE  
PIPELINE

BRANCH II INCIDENT  
REVIEW

Whitaker  
Summit



# Emergency Operations

Volume 10

Wildland Firefighting

Chapter 10

Wildland Incidents

Subject 1

## 10. Burning Out:

- a. Notify Division/Group Supervisor of intent to Burn Out/Fire Out.
- b. Division/Group Supervisor shall notify the OSC or IC.
- c. Burning Out for Immediate Defensive Need:
  - (1) Identify area to burn out(i.e., from point "A" to point "B").
  - (2) Ensure no persons are in the area to be burned out (visualize area).
  - (3) Anticipate direction of spread and spotting potential. (wind vs. slope)
  - (4) Ensure adequate resources are available to handle spot fires.
  - (5) Ensure adjacent resources are aware of spread potential and are prepared for safety and structure protection.
  - (6) Have hoseline in place around defensive need object.
  - (7) Plan and establish an escape route.
  - (8) Ladder the roof, if a structure.
  - (9) When approaching fire is in close proximity and in sight, begin defensive firing operation.
- d. Burning Out for line construction purposes:  
Camp Crew Superintendent/Supervisor may perform burning out operations during line construction, using either 2' Method or Parallel Method (5-50').

## 11. Backfiring Operations:

- a. Request approval from the OSC or IC.
- b. Assign Backfiring Operations Supervisor (must have the experience to carry out safely).
- c. Identify area and establish plan. Identify starting point and stopping point. Estimate expected time of backfiring and notify OSC or IC.

1. BRANCH <b>BRANCH 2</b>	2. DIVISION/GROUP <b>E</b>	<b>DIVISION ASSIGNMENT LIST</b>	<b>ICS 204</b> (1-82)
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3. INCIDENT NAME <b>MARPLE INCIDENT</b>	4. OPERATIONAL PERIOD DATE <b>8-28-96</b> TIME <b>0600-1800</b>
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5. OPERATIONS PERSONNEL	
OPERATIONS CHIEF <b>KUTT / KERKANDAL</b>	DIVISION/GROUP SUPERVISOR <b>NICOLA</b>
BRANCH DIRECTOR <b>BALZANO</b>	AIR ATTACK SUPERVISOR _____

6. RESOURCES ASSIGNED THIS PERIOD					
STRIKE TEAM/TASK FORCE/ RESOURCE DESIGNATOR	LEADER	NUMBER PERSONS	TRANS. NEEDED	DROP OFF PT./TIME	PICK UP PT./TIME
<b>CU 9440 c</b>				<b>E/G BREAK 0700</b>	
<b>NT ELSINORE</b>					
<b>FD 027</b>					
<b>BDU 9488 G</b>					
<b>VIG #11</b>					
<b>VIG #10</b>					

CONTROL OPERATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FINISH LINE CONSTRUCTION</li> <li>• MOP UP 50'</li> </ul>

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS
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9. DIVISION/GROUP COMMUNICATION SUMMARY							
FUNCTION	FREQ.	SYSTEM	CHAN.	FUNCTION	FREQ.	SYSTEM	CHAN.
MMAND	LOCAL	<b>168.100 TX FS</b>	<b>1</b>	SUPPORT	LOCAL		
	REPEAT	<b>170.450 TX LAC</b>	<b>45</b>		REPEAT		
IV TAL	DDP CAL	<b>168.200 FS-3/LAC 40</b>	<b>1</b>	GROUND TO AIR	<b>170.000 FS-7/LAC 30</b>		
PREPARED BY (RESOURCE UNIT LDR.)			APPROVED BY (PLANNING SECT. CH.)			DATE	TIME
<i>[Signature]</i>			<i>[Signature]</i>			<b>8-28-96</b>	

1. RANCH <b>RANCH 2</b>	2. DIVISION/GROUP <b>G</b>	<b>DIVISION ASSIGNMENT LIST</b>	<b>ICS 204</b> (1-82)
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3. INCIDENT NAME <b>TRAPLE INCIDENT</b>	4. OPERATIONAL PERIOD DATE <b>8-28-96</b> TIME <b>0600-1800</b>
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5. OPERATIONS PERSONNEL	
OPERATIONS CHIEF <b>KUTT / KERKANDAL</b>	DIVISION/GROUP SUPERVISOR <b>DRAKE</b>
RANCH DIRECTOR <b>MORTIER</b>	AIR ATTACK SUPERVISOR <b>COSEY</b>

6. RESOURCES ASSIGNED THIS PERIOD					
TEAM/TASK FORCE/ SOURCE DESIGNATOR	LEADER	NUMBER PERSONS	TRANS. NEEDED	DROP OFF PT./TIME	PICK UP PT./TIME
<b>F9383 G</b>				<b>G/H BREAK / 0700</b>	
<b>C 19-3</b>					
<b>C 164</b>					

7. OPERATIONS <b>DIRECT LINE IF PRACTICAL</b>
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8. SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS
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9. DIVISION/GROUP COMMUNICATION SUMMARY							
FUNCTION	FREQ.	SYSTEM	CHAN.	FUNCTION	FREQ.	SYSTEM	CHAN.
HAND REPEAT	LOCAL 168.100TX	FS	1	SUPPORT REPEAT			
	170.450TX	LAC	45				
GROUP PRACTICAL	168.200	FS-3/LAC 40	1	GROUND TO AIR	170.000	FS-7/LAC 30	
APPROVED BY (RESOURCE UNIT LDR.)			APPROVED BY (PLANNING SECT. CH.)			DATE	TIME
						8-28-96	

1. BRANCH <b>BRANCH 2</b>		2. DIVISION/GROUP <b>H</b>		<b>DIVISION ASSIGNMENT LIST</b>			<b>ICS 204</b> (1-82)		
3. INCIDENT NAME <b>TARTLE INCIDENT</b>				4. OPERATIONAL PERIOD DATE <b>8-28-96</b> TIME <b>0600-1800</b>					
5. OPERATIONS PERSONNEL									
OPERATIONS CHIEF <b>KUTT / KERKANDAL</b>				DIVISION/GROUP SUPERVISOR <b>MUNASSIAN</b>					
BRANCH DIRECTOR <b>MORTIER</b>				AIR ATTACK SUPERVISOR <b>COSEY</b>					
6. RESOURCES ASSIGNED THIS PERIOD									
KEY TEAM/TASK FORCE/ SOURCE DESIGNATOR		LEADER	NUMBER PERSONS	TRANS. NEEDED	DROP OFF PT./TIME		PICK UP PT./TIME		
<b>OF 9472 G</b>					<b>CIENEGA C.G. / 0700</b>				
<b>OF 9379 G</b>									
7. DIRECT LINE IF PRACTICAL									
8. SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS									
9. DIVISION/GROUP COMMUNICATION SUMMARY									
FUNCTION		FREQ.	SYSTEM	CHAN.	FUNCTION		FREQ.	SYSTEM	CHAN.
1. MAND	LOCAL	<b>168.100TX</b>	<b>FS</b>	<b>1</b>	SUPPORT	LOCAL			
	REPEAT	<b>170.450TX</b>	<b>LAC</b>	<b>45</b>		REPEAT			
VJ/GROUP ACTUAL		<b>168.200</b>	<b>FS-3/LAC 40</b>	<b>1</b>	GROUND TO AIR		<b>170.000</b>	<b>FS-7/LAC 30</b>	
PA BY (RESOURCE UNIT LDR.) <b>Will [Signature]</b>				APPROVED BY (PLANNING SECT. CH.) <b>Robert [Signature]</b>			DATE <b>8-28-96</b>		TIME

INCIDENT RADIO COMMUNICATIONS PLAN		1. INCIDENT NAME		2. DATE/TIME PREPARED		3. OPERATIONAL PERIOD DATE/TIME	
		MARPLE		8-27-96 2330		8-28-96 DAY	

4. BASIC RADIO CHANNEL UTILIZATION

SYSTEM/CACHE	CHANNEL	FUNCTION	FREQUENCY	ASSIGNMENT	REMARKS
NICC	FS 1	COMMAND	168.100 RX	IC, OPRS, DIV. SUPV.	
	LAC 45		170.450 TX		
NICC	FS 2	TAC 1	168.050 (TX/RX)	DIV A/B	
	LAC 39				
NICC	FS 3	TAC 2	168.200 (TX/RX)	DIV C/D	
	LAC 40				
NICC	FS 4	TAC 3	168.600 (TX/RX)	DIV E/F	
	LAC 41				
LAC	FS 5	TAC 4	154.340 (TX/RX)	DIV G/H	
	LAC 2				
OES	FS 6	TAC 5	154.295 (TX/RX)	DIV I/J	
	LAC 7				

5. PREPARED BY (COMMUNICATIONS UNIT)	
205	J-SIMS COMC
ICS 8-78	

FILE INCIDENT  
28/96 0600-1800

BASE  
STAGING SCALE:  
1:24000

HELIBASE  
P DROP PT.  
DIV. BREAK

BRANCH BREAK

K COMPLETED DOZER LINE  
- COMPLETED HAND LINE  
X OPEN LINE NN. 8/96



2.1 Miles

