PATTEE FATALITY INVESTIGATION REPORT SHIP ISLAND FIRE

CHIEF INVESTIGATOR

# PATTEE FATALITY INVESTIGATION REPORT

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## I. PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

On Thursday, July 26, 1979 at approximately 1500, **Approximately** fire management officer on the Ashton Ranger District, Targhee National Forest, was killed on the Ship Island Fire, Salmon National Forest.

District, Payette National Forest, had taken positions on a helispot preselected by them as both a vantage point for observing the fire and a safety escape area. The helispot was a rock promontory near the bottom of the upper reaches of Tumble Creek drainage canyon.

At about 1400 Pattee and Camp, from their vantage point on the helispot, observed a spot fire across the creek. Pattee advised both the Targhee and Lolo crews which were conducting holding actions at the bottom of Tumble Creek to move to the spot fire. Within 10 minutes, as the fire rapidly increased in size and intensity, Pattee directed the 2 crews to move to designated safe areas.

Targhee and Lolo crews, plus some other support gear consisting of cargo nets, pumps, saw boxes and food, and placed it in the center of the helispot (H-10) forming a pile approximately 17 feet in diameter and 3 feet high.

At about 1415 the fire had traveled about 300 yards and overran the helispot. As the fire approached them, **approximately took** refuge in their fire shelters on the upslope slide of the helispot, above the personal gear.

As the fire burned quickly around the helispot, it ignited the personal gear, creating an intense fire within 12 to 15 feet of Pattee and Camp.

before succumbing to smoke and hot air inhalation.

helispot 3 times over a 2-hour period.

The Regional Office was notified of the fatality and in turn notified the Washington Office. The Regional Office investigation team was formed consisting of: Forest Supervisor, Targhee National Forest - chief investigator Forest staff officer, Payette National Forest Constitution, Forest staff officer, Payette National Forest Regional Safety manager Forest Statement, team recorder

They arrived at the Supervisor's Office in Salmon, Idaho about 1530 on Friday, July 27 and began the investigation. A brief was prepared and transmitted to all Regions and the Washington Office on July 31, 1979.

## **II. EVENTS PRIOR TO THE ACCIDENT**

## A. Location and Topography

The Ship Island Fire began from a lightning strike about 1745 on July 17, 1979, in the Middle Fork of the Salmon River Canyon near the mouth of Ship Island Creek on the Cobalt Ranger District, Salmon National Forest.

The fire originated in an area of steep, rugged terrain. Normal initial attack efforts were determined unfeasible by both the helitack foreman and smokejumpers who made aerial observations of the fire scene within 40 minutes after the fire was reported.

Slopes of 70% to 80% are common here, making this one of the rockiest, steepest, most inaccessible locations within the Idaho Primitive Area.

# B. Fuels

Fuels over the northern exposure of the Tumble Creek fire area consist of moderately dense Douglas-fir with nine bark and pinegrass as shrubs and ground cover. The area is interrupted by numerous talus rock outcroppings and slide areas.

Fuels over the southern exposure of this area are scattered mountain mahogany with bunchgrass and cheatgrass as ground cover interrupted by slide and talus rock outcroppings. The fuels surrounding the helispot where **scattered** made their stand were scattered mountain mahogany and bunchgrass.

## C. Weather and Fire Danger

On Thursday, July 26, the 0630 weather forecast predicted a hot, dry day with the risk of afternoon dry thunderstorm activity (which did not materialize in the fire area on July 26). Maximum daytime temperatures were forecast at 92°F (for 4,000 ft. elevation), relative humidity at 10%, and winds from the southwest of 12-18 mph in the afternoon.



All indications on the day of the fatality were for critical fire weather conditions, not unusual for this area in late July.

At 1400 hours, when the fire ran up the southern exposure of Tumble Creek, wind speeds of 14-18 mph with gusts of 24 mph were recorded and reported to the fire behavior officer, as shown by the weather observation records.

### III. CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

## A. Fire Discovery and Initial Fire Strategy

The Ship Island Fire was started by lightning about 1745 on Tuesday, July 17, 1979. It was located just north of the Ship Island Creek drainage approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile above the Middle Fork of the Salmon River in T21N, R14E, Section 1.

Long Tom Lookout turned in the first smoke report at 1808 to the Salmon National Forest fire dispatcher. The fire dispatcher notified the Cobalt Ranger District who requested that the Indianola helitack unit take initial attack action. The helicopter and Alouette Lama arrived at the fire at approximately 1900 that evening.

The fire at that time was reported to be 15 acres and burning intensely. The position of the slope and the fire intensity and its position on the slope and the steep topography that the fire should not be manned at that time because it presented a safety hazard to the crew. The helicopter, returned to Indianola.

At this time, there were 3 potential project fires burning on the Cobalt Ranger District. The fire dispatcher had ordered 16 jumpers from the Missoula jumper base anticipating that they would be used as reinforcements on one of these 3 fires. The jumper aircraft arrived at the Ship Island Fire at 2014. They circled the fire and dropped streamers but reported that they could not jump and recommended not manning the fire.

Early Wednesday morning, July 18, 1979, Forest Supervisor District District Ranger (Management), and (Management) fire from the air. By 0830 of that morning an escaped fire situation analysis had been completed listing the following alternatives:



- 1. Implement control action necessary to hold the fire to its present size. This was estimated to be about 50 acres.
- Select a favorable control perimeter utilizing defensible terrain features. Attack the fire with full control action necessary to hold the fire at this point. Estimated fire size under this alternative would have been, at control time, approximately 400 acres.
- 3. Monitor the fire closely to determine the point that control action will be necessary. Fire may or may not reach this point. Control action may vary from full to partial in order to protect special or unique features such as Ship Island Lake. Estimated size at control time under this alternative would have been approximately 1,000 acres.
- 4. Allow the fire to play its natural ecological role. Continuously monitor the fire to predict the seasonal extent of the burned area. Monitoring should include the analysis of current energy release components as indicators of the possible occurrence of unacceptible resource damage. These should be compared to predicted energy release components to evaluate the feasibility of continuing with this alternative. Estimated size under this alternative would have been approximately 4,500 acres.

Special note: <u>all</u> alternatives include keeping the fire on the east side of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River.

Alternative 4 was selected for the following reasons:

- a. Low suppression costs.
- b. High wildlife benefits.
- c. High wilderness values.
- d. Greater fire crew safety.
- e. The naturalness of fire was more in keeping with wilderness management objectives.

The importance of establishing a fire monitoring and public safety program was emphasized. Plans were developed subsequent to the completion of the escaped fire analysis.

The monitoring plan included stationing an observer on the old Stoddard Creek Lookout, located on the west side of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. An observer, **Manual Forest**, manned the lookout on Thursday, July 19, at 1700. The Stoddard Lookout reported that 1/10 of an inch of rain had fallen on the fire area during the night of Saturday, July 21. This triggered another review of the escape fire situation analysis by the fire behavior since July 17, potential movement of the fire and resource loss, suppression costs and smoke which was affecting detection of new starts. The analysis concluded with the decision to take a flanking action on the northern and southern borders of the fire.

## B. Fire Suppression and Reinforcement

A division boss, and 5 well qualified fire fighters were placed by helicopter on the southern border of the fire along Ship Island Creek. Twenty-four smokejumpers from McCall and Boise were ordered for the northern boundary of the fire. All crews were to be spiked on the fire for a period of at least three days beginning July 21, 1979.

A small overhead team was ordered from the Regional Office. This team was to direct the activities of the 30 people on the fire. Their objective was to keep the fire out of Ship Island Creek and flanking the fire on the northern boundary, force it into the higher elevations, or control it if possible.

The mini-overhead team gathered in Salmon on Sunday, July 22, 1979 at approximately 2000. The team met with Forest Supervisor Fire Staff Officer and the forest Supervisor and District Ranger and tactics. The group decided to continue with the strategy and tactics. The group decided to continue with the strategy to force the fire into the higher elevations. The mini-overhead team consisted of the fire as fire boss, the strategy as the fire behavior officer, and the performing a dual function of service and plans chief.

By 0840 on Monday, July 23, the team had reconned the fire and set up a base camp at the old Stoddard Lookout. Bob Olsen, sector boss, and his crew had been successful in keeping the fire out of Ship Island Creek on the southern flank of the fire. However, the jumpers on the north flank had not been successful in fire lining the north ridge of Parrot Creek and burning out during the night.

After conferring with **Control of Second Sec** 

Additional reinforcements were requested at this time to consist of 3 Interregional (IR) fire crews, 2 Class I division bosses, and an additional helicopter. The fire order stressed that these crews and personnel be well qualified in line construction and burning out in steep, rough topography.

On the morning of Tuesday, July 24, a smokejumper reconn team reported to the overhead team that it would be feasible to hold the fire in the bottom of Tumble Creek with pumps. The rest of the jumpers then moved down into Tumble Creek.

A helispot was located near the mouth of one fork of Tumble Creek approximately 150 yards upslope from Tumble Creek. This helispot was designated H-10. By 1030 fire crews from the Lolo and the Sawtooth National Forests were flown into Helispot 2 on the ridge north of Tumble Creek. Division Bosses, Helispot 2 on the ridge north of Tumble Creek. Division Lookout base camp where they were briefed on the fire by the flown to Helispot 2 to supervise the line construction along the ridge north of Tumble Creek.

At this point a request was made to release the jumpers and replace them with another IR crew. Since no additional IR or hotshot crews were available, the fire team agreed to utilize the Targhee Regulars. They made this decision because of the proven performance of the crew and the experience of their crew boss and the provent and fire behavior.

The Targhee crew arrived at Cove Creek which was being utilized as a heliport on Wednesday, July 25, at approximately 0700. The plus ten crew members were then ferried into H=10 at the bottom of Tumble Creek. The remaining Targhee crew members were sent to the southern flank of the fire to reinforce the plus and his crew.

The Targhee crew's task was to begin a holding action in the bottom of Tumble Creek utilizing pumps as the fire backed down the northern facing slope of Tumble Creek. At approximately 1300, and and the fire backed flew to H-10 to brief Kyle on fire behavior, strategy, and tactics. They also wanted to make an on-site inspection of the safety zones available to the crew working there. All other smokejumper personnel had been ferried to the Cove Creek heliport for release to their home units. On the afternoon of July 25, fire activity increased when the temperature inversion lifted. The same afternoon, Safety Officer Control and Line Scouts (Control and Control)

to the southern flank of the fire while Jim Camp was assigned to the southern flank of the fire while Jim Camp was directed to scout the bottom of the Tumble Creek drainage. About 1600, the fire spotted across to the west side of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River opposite the mouth of Tumble Creek. Retardant, helicopter and waterbucket, and 8 smokejumpers were utilized to contain this spot fire. This fire reached approximately 1½ acres in size.

The bolding action in Tumble Creek continued and the overhead team decided to reinforce the Targhee crew with 15 members of the Lolo crew and Crew Boss **Contactors** the next day.

Smoke was again a problem on Thursday morning, July 26, as another inversion had formed the previous night. The Targhee crew had been up most of the night working on the fire as it backed down the south of Tumble Creek Ridge. They gathered on H-10 sometime around 0400 to get a few hours of sleep.

At approximately 0630, a spot fire was reported across Tumble Creek. **(1997)** and the Targhee crew worked about 2 hours before that spot was contained and mopped up.

directing the crews in Tumble Creek. The Lolo crew's A.M. departure from H-2 to H-10 was delayed by late arrival of hot meals. At about 1000 they left for Tumble Creek to reinforce the Targhee crew. Interference and 15 Lolo crew members proceeded across the south facing slope above Tumble Creek to H-10.. The 5 other members of the Lolo crew joined interference at the mouth of Tumble Creek to prevent the fire from hooking around the ridge and making a run up Tumble Creek.

The Lolo crew arrived at H-10 at about noon. **Constitution** assigned them a position below H-10 starting from immediately below where the spot had burned earlier that morning. **Constitution** and **Constit** 

Shortly atter those pumps arrived, at approximately 1400, a spot fire was reported across Tumble Creek in the vicinity of the earlier spot fire. The immediately directed both crews to proceed to that spot. Within minutes, he indicated to the fire overhead team that the spot fire could not be contained. He then had directed the crews to their safety zones. Within 15 minutes the fire had overrun H-10. 7

The Lolo and the Targhee crews had proceeded to escape zones formed by talus rockslides. The Targhee crew was located in a rockslide in the old burn on the south side of Tumble Creek across from H-10. The Lolo crew had gone to a rockslide below and to the west of H-10. Within 2 hours the fire had almost completely consumed the Tumble Creek drainage.

Prior to this time, Forest Supervisor had. requested that a Class I team be assigned to the Salmon as a fire strategy group to look at future options and to be prepared to assume the fire if it escaped from the Tumble Creek drainage. This group assembled in Salmon on July 24 to be briefed by Supervisor **and a make an aerial reconnaissance** of the fire, and begin future planning. This group consisted 📄, Line Boss 👹 of Fire Boss 📷 Plans Chief , Finance Chief Service Chief and Safety Chief When the fire blew up in Tumble Creek and proceeded into the Roaring Creek drainage, the decision was made to assign this full overhead team to the fire. All other personnel were then evacuated from the fire, with the exception of 11 people that were left either on the fire or at Stoddard Lookout when the helicopters ran out of flying time.

- IV. FIRE BEHAVIOR
  - A. History

Since the fire's origin on July 17, 1979, it's behavior had been influenced by extreme topography and extremely dry fuels. On July 21, 1979, .1 of an inch of rain was recorded in the fire area. At that time, direct initial attact was attempted with helitack and 24 smokejumpers.

The weather forecasts prior to July 26 were quite similar and predicted continual drying, warmer temperatures, mostly sunny days, strong afternoon winds, humidities on all parts of the fire at less than 20%.

Fuels on the slopes above Tumble Creek were as follows:

1. North Facing Slope

Douglas-fir - light to medium density stocking Nine bark - scattered brush Pinegrass - ground fuel scattered over area. 2. South Facing Slope Including Helispot Fatality Site

Mountain mahogany - scattered Bunchgrass - constituted most of the ground cover Cheatgrass - constituted some of the ground cover

All fuel sizes were reportedly very dry including the larger ground fuels on the north slope.

Topography as shown on the oblique photos is extremely adverse, rugged and steep. Cliffs and bluffs are common.

B. July 26, 1979

On Thursday, July 26, the 0700 weather forecast (see Appendix - Exhibit A) indicated another hot, dry day with the risk of afternoon dry thunderstorm activity (this did not materialize in the fire area on this day). Maximum daytime temperatures were forecast at 92° F. The relative humidity at 10%. The winds predicted from the SW at 12-18 mph in the afternoon.

Weather readings were taken by the fatality victim, and the second secon

#### LOCATION

& OBSERVER	TIME	DRY BULB	WET BULB	DEW POINT	REL. HUMIDI
TUMBLE CR. (Pattee)	1000	70	52	37	30
11	1100	78	52	27	15
ŧ#	1200	81	54	30	16
tt	1300	84	56	34	16

Winds were not measured carefully by They were estimated as "gusts to 5" or "steady with a slight inversion". Evidently the winds up until 1300 were blowing slightly upcanyon but not with great velocity (see Appendix - Exhibit A). At 1400, on the ridgetop north of Tumble Creek, windspeeds of 14-18 mph with gusts of 24 mph were recorded and reported to the fire behavior officer.

## C. Fire Behavior Forecasting

to the fire on Monday, July 23, 1979.

Each day, morning and afternoon, special spot forecasts were received specifically for the Ship Island Fire. From each morning forecast, a written daily fire behavior forecast was prepared. These were carefully, numbered and documented in an accepted FBO forecast format (see Appendix - Exhibit B). Some forecasts were very descriptive, professional, and complete. He was unable to hand individual copies to line overhead since they were not in direct physical contact most of the time. He did, however, contact line overhead by radio each morning and provide them with the essentials of the fire weather and fire behavior forecast for the day.

Each afternoon, at about 1500 hours, he provided line overhead with an update of any additional, pertinent information. The fire boss and plans chief were each thoroughly briefed as information became available. In addition, that had people (including **perform**) on the line at several locations with belt weather kits reporting observations. On July 26, regular hourly observations were being taken at Stoddard Lookout, H-2, and in Tumble Creek (by Pattee). A recording weather station and a time-lapse camera were in operation at Stoddard.

Fire Boss and Fire Behavior Officer visited was done to brief where and assure his understanding of the fire behavior conditions and the need to agree on designated safe areas for he and his crew.

Appendix - Exhibit B) emphasized continuing dry, critical weather conditions including the high probability of upslope afternoon winds in Tumble Creek. He predicted afternoon fire runs in Tumble Creek and probable spotting across the creek. He also predicted that the spot fires would probably make rapid runs up the south aspect which included the location of H-10, the fatality site.

The occurrence of the first spot fire under the inversion at 0630 hours and following the active fire behavior during the night, should have signaled extreme caution to the overhead and crews. However, the Lolo crew and the safety officer traversed the south facing slope of Tumble Creek at midday with apparent full knowledge of **Contraction** forecast and predicted fire behavior. His forecast turned out to be quite accurate. It provided a very definite early warning to the situation that developed at 1400 hours. V. SUPPRESSION EFFORT AND ACCIDENT SEQUENCE ON JULY 26, 1979

## A. Events - Early Morning Until 1200 Hours

Kyle main and 10 men of the Targhee regular crew had been in the Tumble Creek Canyon since Tuesday, July 24, 1979. On July 25, Jim Camp, line scout, joined the fire objective was to hold the Ship Island Fire from crossing Tumble Creek. The tactic was to put the fire out as it backed down the north facing slope toward the creek using hoses, pumps, and water application equipment.

During the night of July 25 and the early morning of July 26, the crew had worked hard and diligently to keep the fire from crossing Tumble Creek. Burning conditions were quite favorable during the night hours.

The crew slept and rested from about 0400 until 0600. At 0630, a spot fire started on the north side of the creek. This was quickly extinguished, but gave a prelude of events to come. The holding action resumed with the favorable conditions of the temperature inversion and slightly rising humidity.

During the evening of July 25, the fire overhead in consultation with Supervisor and his Class I advisory team agreed to increase the forces in Tumble Creek with 2 organized crews and attempt to hold the fire at Tumble Creek. Concurrently with this decision was the decision to continue with the line building in preparation for possible burning out on the next ridge to the north above Tumble Creek. This was a backup strategy in case the direct attack in Tumble Creek failed.

The Lolo crew, under the leadership of Crew Boss **Control**, was directed to join **Control** in Tumble Creek. Their 2-hour hike from H-2 to H-10 in Tumble Creek was delayed by the late arrival of hot meals. The Lolo crew left H-2 at about 1000 hours and arrived at H-10 at approximately 1200 hours. (It is important to note that the route chosen by this crew to H-10 took them right across the very exposed, south facing slope. This is a direct violation of Standard Fire Fighting Orders No. 3 and No. 4 - walking downhill into a canyon with fire below you). Their personal gear and additional water handling equipment was ferried to H-10 during the morning.

On July 25, Fire Boss and Fire Behavior Officer and the had met with the state of the review the plan strategy, the predicted fire behavior, and designated safe areas. At this time, the was told he was in charge of the Tumble Creek holding action. It is unclear about the relationship between and Division Boss and the Fire Boss and the fire Boss and the fire due to the inaccessibility of various parts of the organization. All instructions were being verbally made over the radio or in face to face contact.)

During the morning of July 26, Fire Behavior Officer **Constant** relayed the details of the spot weather forecast and his fire behavior forecast to the overhead on the fire. We assume that **Constant** received this forecast. It was typical of other forecasts which predicted probable spotting as the inversion lifted and the fuels were heated in late afternoon. Insufficient attention may have been given to this forecast by the overhead.

# Events - 1200 Hours Through Evacuation of Personnel

Upon arrival at H-10, **Control** was briefed by **Control** on the tactics and strategy for holding the fire at Tumble Creek. (Five Lolo crew members and Division **Control** had continued to the middle fork of the river to keep the fire from hooking around at river level. Only **Control** and 15 men hiked down into the Tumble Creek Canyon.) **Control** uickly perceived the problems of the extreme fire behavior predicted and the difficulty of crew movement in the heavy brush along the creek. **Control** and **Control** and **Control** by the Targhee crew and the Lolo crew. Their conference resulted in the ordering of more pumps for placement in the creek.

The Targhee's holding action to date had utilized the random location of pumps in the creek and hoses radiating out from those pumps. The Targhee crew had had little time to cut trails to improve the access to potential spots on the south facing slope of Tumble Creek.

The Lolo crew moved to their lower section of creek which was about 400 yards below H-10. Instructed his crew in trail building for access and pinpointed pump locations.

At about 1400 hours, and and from their vantage point at the helispot noticed a spot fire across the creek from the Targhee crew. This spot fire was near the canyon bottom, upcanyon from the Lolo crew, and about 300 yards below H-10.







<u>10</u>

The Targhee crew under the leadership of Squad Boss which attempted to move quickly to the spot fire. They had difficulty in moving their hose lines across the creek to the fire. At the same time, which asked the Lolo crew to assist. The additional pumps had arrived at H-10 and were still being packed to the Lolo portion of the creek. The Lolo crew had no water to apply at the spot. Which gathered up his crew as they moved to the spot with their hand tools. Before either the Targhee crew or the Lolo crew could make a direct attack on the fire, which realized the fire was gaining rapidly in size and intensity. Within 10 minutes following discovery, which instructed both crews to move to designated safe areas.

The Targhee crew gathered quickly in a large rockslide on the north facing slope and across from the spot fire and downcanyon from helispot H-10. The Lolo crew gathered in a rockslide about 400 yards below H-10 and on the south facing slope. (There were numerous talus rockslides on both sides of the creek which were designated as safe areas.)

At this same time, Fire Boss and Fire Behavior Officer Middle Fork from Tumble Creek Canyon. As the was insuring the safety and accountability of each of the crew members on each of the 2 crews, Fire Boss and was asking the about his and Camp's location and safety. At this time, the realized that the and the were not in a designated safe area (rockslide) they had agreed to the day before but were at H-10.

fire suppression equipment at H-10 into a stack. The and Camp estimated they had 15 to 20 minutes before the fire reached them. Early behavior of the spot fire was directly upslope and it delayed its movement toward H-10.

As the fire approached them, **Constant** and **Constant** took refuge in their fire shelters on the upslope side of the helispot and above the stack of personal gear. Both felt quite sure that the helispot was as safe as the designated safe areas and that the shelters would provide them adequate protection. (The investigation team has agreed that the helispot was a minimum safe area. However, the stacking of the personal gear was done in the very place **Constant** should have placed their shelters!) Soon after getting into their shelters, **Constant** and **Constant** talked frequently to reassure one another that they were all right. Radio transmissions between **Control** and Fire Boss **Control** show that **Description** felt very confident about his location and told Fire Boss **Cont** he was "snug as a bug in a rug". **Control** picked a location 12 feet from the stack of personal gear. **Control** first location was 17 feet from the personal gear and about 5 feet above **Location**. (See Diagram, page 16)

As the fire moved quickly around the rock helispot, it ignited the personal gear. This then caused an intense source of heat 12 feet from the and about 17 feet from the Some additional heat was the result of a minor amount of brush at the bottom of the rock promontory holding the helispot.

puickly perceived that the gear was on fire and that his shelter was getting extremely hot. He moved to another location (see diagram). At about this same time, and approximately 20 minutes after crawling into the shelters, mathematic elements and said, "The fire is getting very hot, has the main fire burned past?" The fire has past and is up the draws".

One of **Control** last radio transmissions was to **Control** in which he said, "The ground is on fire in my shelter". Camp asked if he could beat it out with his hands. **Control** replied that he couldn't. **Control** told him to move and that is when he said, "I can't, I can't". Obviously he couldn't beat the fire out because he didn't have his gloves on.

Jim the moved his shelter 2 more times in the course of the lig to 2 hours he was in it. He was able to move his shelter because he was wearing gloves and could handle the very hot shelter edge. The changed his location once, he moved about the length of his body leaving his hard hat and radios behind. We believe this occurred near the time of his death. The believes his death occurred approximately 45 minutes after they began use of the shelters.

found it very difficult to control his shelter in the erratic and strong winds that surrounded him. He also found it very difficult to keep his bearings as he attempted to peek out from under the shelter and find another safe spot. The winds would raise the shelter from him and make it very difficult to control it, then hot air would sweep in underneath the shelter. He tried to hold it down with his feet, knees, elbows, and hands. At other times, the winds would be pressing the shelter down around him and he would struggle to get the hot shelter off his back. Second degree burns were received by **Second** those places where his hands, elbows, and other parts of his body came in contact with the shelter. Both men were wearing the required Nomex clothing. Both men had received and actually taught shelter use. **Description** inability to move his shelter was probably due to his not wearing gloves. **Second Second** stated he would have been unable to move his shelter if he had not been wearing his gloves.

It is also apparent that the cause of **states** death was due to the hot air sweeping in underneath his shelter when the wind would try to raise it off of him. **States** commented that it was difficult to breathe and not draw in the hot air when this would happen, which would have seared his mouth and lungs.

The gear pile was completely consumed. A saw box and pump box also caught fire and burned completely.

At the time the spot fire occurred, Safety Officer **Constitution** was traversing down the south facing slope into Tumble Creek. His purpose was to check on the safety of the crew and the operation of the heliport at H-10. **Constitution** witnessed the spot and the movement of the fire from his vantage point. Soon he had to scramble to the top of the ridge to prevent the fire from overrunning him. **Constitution** upon hearing of the fatality, quickly returned to the H-10 and began the accident investigation.

The Targhee and Lolo crews were not at locations that provided them a good view of H-10. Members of the Lolo crew were first to arrive at H-10 and determine that the had survived. They administered the initial aid. A Targhee crew member with EMT training provided assistance. The was evacuated by helicopter to the Stoddard Lookout and then to the road end where he was met by ambulance and removed to the Salmon hospital.

the Jones - Casey Funeral Home in Salmon. The coroner advised against an autopsy and determined the cause of death as heat and smoke inhalation. The body was not burned.

VI. ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

The fire organization was as follows:



H-10 Helicopter Pad



first shelter position above the helispot.



irst shelter position above the helispot.



he left them. Saw box position shown by flagging.







position.

position. Flagging shows gear box and saw box.

position. Flagging shows gear pile. A. Fire Overhead Team



## B. Fire Qualifications and Experience

A summary showing overhead and fire fighter training experience and fire assignment is shown as Exhibit C in the Appendix.

## C. Crew Organization

The Lolo Interregional Crew consisted of **Constants** as crew boss, and 19 crew members. The crew leaders experience and qualifications are listed in the Appendix.

The Targhee Regular Crew consisted of **Constitution**, crew boss and **Constitution** as crew boss trainee plus 18 crew members. Crew boss experience and qualifications are listed in the Appendix.

# D. Logistical Support

Transportation to and from the site was entirely by helicopter. A heliport was established at Cove Creek on the main Salmon River and crews were ferried from that point to the fire. Three helicopters were operating:

- 1. Helicopter 60, which is an Alouette Lama, stationed at Indianola on the Salmon National Forest.
- 2. Helicopter 51, which is an Alouette III, stationed on the Payette National Forest.
- 3. Helicopter 11G, which is a Jet Ranger 206B, stationed on the Bitterroot National Forest.





Mobility on the Ship Island Fire was extremely complicated and time consuming because of the isolated, rugged nature of the Middle Fork of the Salmon River. Once on the fire line, overhead and crews had to maneuver entirely by foot or were moved from one helispot to another by helicopter.

Logistical support was further complicated by difficulties in communication. Because of the isolated nature of the fire, there was a delay in setting up both the administrative and the Interagency Fire Center radio network. At the time of the accident, this network was only partially in place and activated. This meant that the fire overhead team was operating with essentially 5 separate communication systems. They were:

- 1. Salmon National Forest net.
- 2. Salmon Forest cache crew radios.
- 3. Individual crew radios accompanying the Interregional crews.
- 4. Part of the Boise Interagency Fire Center radio net.
- 5. The Challis National Forest net for communications to the river.

Communication between the fire overhead teams and the crews working in Tumble Creek were not directly affected by these difficulties. Fire Boss the was able to talk directly to the and the second se

### Compliance with the Ten Standard Fire Fighting Orders

The following Standard Fire Fighting Orders were not rigidly adhered to:

1. FIRE ORDER #3 - BASE ALL ACTIONS ON THE CURRENT AND EXPECTED BEHAVIOR OF THE FIRE.

The predicted fire behavior had proven accurate over several days. Yet several actions did not adequately consider it:

- designated escape area.
- The movement of the Lolo crew and Safety Officer Webster across the south facing slope at midday above the fire.
- **The second spot fire to pile the personal gear rather than moving to a safe area.**

2. FIRE ORDER #4 - PLAN ESCAPE ROUTES FOR EVERYONE AND MAKE THEM KNOWN.

The escape routes were known to **second second** and **second** and **second** and **to** the Lolo and Targhee crews. However, there was obviously not a clear understanding of what constitutes an escape route. In this case a fire shelter became a planned primary escape route when in fact, it should have only been used as a last resort.

3. FIRE ORDER #8 - GIVE CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS AND BE SURE THEY ARE UNDERSTOOD.

Communications on this fire were extremely difficult. Many of the instructions and information had to be given to the line by radio. **However** e and **However** did not have written instructions as to what their role was in Tumble Creek.

- were discussed. In view of these actions, it's difficult to realize there may have been a misunderstanding as to where they should have been positioned to direct the Tumble Creek operation.
- F. Exposure To The Fire Situations That Shout "Watch Out"
  - 1. FIRE SITUATION #6 YOU ARE AWAY FROM THE BURNED AREA WHERE TERRAIN AND/OR COVER MAKES THE TRAVEL DIFFICULT AND SLOW.

The travel in the bottom of Tumble Creek was very difficult due to brush, rock, and steep terrain.

2. <u>FIRE SITUATION #10</u> - YOU ARE GETTING FREQUENT SPOT FIRES OVER YOUR LINE.

The fire had spotted across the line during the night and in the early morning. In addition, the fire behavior forecast was for probable spotting across Tumble Creek with resulting spot fires that would probably not be controllable.

3. FIRE SITUATION #12 - YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN AN ASSIGNMENT OR INSTRUCTIONS ARE NOT CLEAR TO YOU.

In this incident, the assignment and instructions may have been clear to the some misunderstanding in what the fire boss and overhead team visualized as the tactics in Tumble Creek and the perception that the situation of those same tactics. Perhaps written instructions along with a briefing, could have clarified the situation.

## VII. FINDINGS

The investigation team reviewed all the information which had been provided them by the various Forest Service offices and by individual witnesses during interviews and in written statements.

Nine findings have been documented. Five of the findings are direct causes of the fatality and are so labeled. Each of the findings relates directly to the information contained in this report. The findings are grouped by the general category of human factors, mechanical factors, physical factors and management factors.

The findings are as follows:

- A. <u>Human Factors</u>
  - CAUSE 1. designated safe areas as agreed to with Fire Boss and Fire Behavior Officer designated on July 25, 1979.
  - CAUSE 2. CAUSE and crew gear on the helispot in lieu of leaving for a designated safe area.
  - <u>CAUSE</u> 3. Undue reliance was placed on the shelter from the advancing fire by **Cause** and **Cause** They considered it as an actual escape device rather than to be used as a very last resort.
- B. Mechanical Factors
  - CAUSE 4. Gloves were not worn by the second prevented him from moving his shelter away from the burning personal gear as the was able to do.
  - <u>CAUSE</u> 5. The concentration of the crew personal gear became an intense source of heat and flame.
    - 6. Fire shelters do work in cases of extreme fire emergency and it is responsible for the survival of **Contract**. The shelter is designed to reflect heat only. The **Contract** shelter undoubtedly withstood temperatures in excess of design specifications and was in contact with actual flame.
- C. Physical Factors
  - 7. Fire and weather behavior was accurately predicted and was usual for that terrain and that time of year.

# D. Management Factors

- 8. Careful attention to the predicted fire behavior and a thorough review of the strategy employed was made by the fire overhead team, the Forest Supervisor, and the investigation team. Given the conditions, the holding tactic in the Tumble Creek Canyon was acceptable strategy, considering the small crew force and the location of designated safe areas.
- 9. Lack of written instructions may have contributed to:
  - a. Unreliable communications of extreme fire behavior from overhead to crew leaders.
  - b. Precise understanding of impending fire behavior.
  - c. Inadequate use of intelligence.
  - d. Less attention to safe practices.

3	Highest Red Card	Qualification	Line Boss Intelligence Office	Training Officer							.26								 	
	Red	Carded	Yes																	
	Passed Step	Test	Yes																	
QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE	caining and Year Received	S-190 Other	230, 260, 270, 320, 330, 331,           71         110, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215,	20	Squad Boss - 9+ fires	Crew Boss - 42+ fires	Firefighter - 10+ fires	Tractor Boss - 1 fire	Training Officer - 4 fires	Sector Boss - 10 fires	Fire Boss III - 41 fires	Crew Liaison - 9 fires	Tanker Boss - 4 fires	Division Boss - 1 fire	Fire Boss II - 1 fire	Line Boss II - 1 fire	Felling Boss - 1 fire	TOTAL: 134+ fires		
NUQ	Fire Tı	S-19	1701																 	 
		s-130	1791																	
	Fire	Assignment	NF) Training Officer Targhee Reg. Crew																	
		Name	(Targhee NF																	

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			QUALIF	QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE			-4-
					Passed		Highest
	Fire	F	Fire Training	ning and Year Received	Step	Red	Red Card
Name	Assignment	S-130	S-190	Other	Test	Carded	Qualification
(Payette)				211, 212, 214, 215,			Division Boss
	Division Boss	1964	1964	270, 320,	Хев	Yes	Fire Boss III
				, 451			ASM - Heli I
				Division Boss - 3			
				Fire Boss III - 9+			
				Sector Boss - 2			
				3			
				Helicopter Boss - 9+			-
				ł			
				Felling Boss - 2			
				1			
				Tool Manager - 4			
				Truck Manager - 2			
				Air Serv.MgrHeliport I-6			
				Heliport II			
				Radio Operator - 9+			
				TOTAL - 102+			•
(Sawtooth)	Safety Chief	1960	1960	110, 211, 212, 230, 260, 270, 120 330 341 380 370 390	Vaq	Vaa	Safety Chief Mans-Becords Office
				580			
				Line Boss II - I			
				Plans Chief II - 1			-
				Division Boss - 2			
				- 11			
				- 5			
				Crew Boss - 3			
				tticer -			
		-					
				Licer -			
				Radio Operator - 1			
				TOTAL - 27			

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	Highest Red Card	Qualification	FBO Line Boss I																		
	Red	Carded	Yes																		
	Passed Step	Test	Yes																		
QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE	Training and Year Received		110, 341, 520, 343, 590, 354, 211, 355, 212, 356, 214, 370,	390, 230, 420, 260, 450, 330, 451, 330,	Fire Boss II - 2 Line Boss II 10+	Plans Chief II - 9+ Air Attack Boss 9+		Sector Boss - 94 Crew Boss 94	Squad Boss - 9+	Firefighter - 114	1	 ŧ	R	LOCATOY -	1	Maps-Records Officer - 4 Intelligence Officer - 9+	General Scout - 94 I.R. Interpreter 104	LITE DEMANDI ULLIGET - L	TOTAL - 197+		
<b>UALIF</b>	Fire Trai		1967 1966	<b> </b>																	
	Fire	ant	Fire Boss									-									
		Name	(r.o.)																		

48-dill 14

795h1p-49		. 🛥	<u>,                                    </u>	POT	VEAT	HER	FORE	CAST ISSUED	0700, 7/20	5/79	EXHIBIT A
WS FORM ( (2-71) Pres. By WS	•••	• . 1	FIRE WE	ATHE	R <sub>.</sub> SP	ECI	AL FO	DRECAST RE	QUEST	I.S. DEPA	NOAA
				See re	¥658	lor	instruc	tione)		NATION	IAL WEATHER SERVICE
- REQUEST			FURNISH:			2.0	ONTRO	AGENCY	13.		
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	21/		RI4E		· /	-2 1-1	٢		J Islan	<b>j</b>	C. EXPOSURE INE. E.
I. SIZE OF	PROJECT	(Acres)*	8.	ELEV	ATION	•		9. FUEL TYPE	C#H ·		10. PROJECT ON:
3	500		*** 85	00			400	L.P 8.	~e, D-F, 1	Roch	
1. WEATHER	CONDIT	IONS AT	PROJECT O	R FROM	NEA			is (See example of			
PLACE	ELE- VATION	OS Time#	WIND DIRVEL.	TEM DRY	P. WET	t CLy RH	Blank)	Ales	REM (Indicate rain, th wind condition an	ARKS understorm d 10ths of	e, etc.
Stoddard	7540	0600	5W @6	57	44			scattered ,	comulos -	yesten	day loss elev.
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	·								•	•	
12, SEND F	ORECAST	r <b>TO</b> s	PLACE	sal	101	J		Teleti	ype	ATIN: 0	Name, If applicable)
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It . REQUES	TING AG	ENCY WIL	LCOMPLET	E UPO	NREC	EIPT		RECAST			
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Explanation symbols:	· { · }	Use 24-be For coace of largest	entrations () If concer	as grou cration	te tim ps of s are i	e. E light	aing fire are than	s) specify "Con	quest special fo	1015. 🚅	mber of fires and size

WS FORM D-1 SUPERSEDES WE FORM D-1 (9-70) WHICH MAY BE USED UNTIL EXISTING STOCK IS DEPLETED

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ASHP-23 LAME OF FIRE: SHIP ISLAND	PREDICTION FOR: DAY SHIE
FOREST: SALMON	SHIFT DATE: 7/26/79
PIME AND DATE DRECAST ISSUED: 1000 7/26	SIGNED: FIRE BEHAVIOR OFFICER

WEATHER SUMMARY Little CHANGE FROM YOSTED DAY QXCOPT FOR CHANCE OF APTERNOON AND EVENING thomasterns with strong whose the VICINITY (WILL ICLUP WATCH MOR ADVISE ALL DIV. BOSSES OF PRICE) CIEGRETOP WINDS IZ-ISMIN EMAPTER NOON-WITH GUSTS TO 35 HPH. WINES WILL BE 10-12 UPSLOPE IN TUNBLE CREEK. RH IN BOTTOM 10% AND 18% AT HIGHER E LEVATIONS, INVESTED WILL SCOUP OUT B NOON.

GENERAL: FILL INTERING WILL IN ERRARE AS INVA-SION SCOURS. RUNS WI OCLUR IN TUNDLE ER (SOUTH SIDE) ABOVE FORKS AND AT BETTE LOWEN THE HAIS APTERNOON. THUMBORTHAN WINCE CAN BE FROM MANY DIRECTION. I WILL MAINTAIN A WEATHAN WATCH AND ADVISE EXPECTED DIRECTION AND FIRE BEHAMOR.

SPECIFIC:

NORTH RIDGE (H-11+0H-2) - BUTWOUT WILL NOT BET FOSSIBLE IE THUNDESTOMS DEVELOP. IF FIRE EPOTS TO NORTH SIDE OF TUMBLE CREEK FIRE WILL SPREAD RAPION UPLUSE - FIRE BOSS WILL ADVIE & BURNOUT OF LINE IS TO BE ATTEMPTOD.

TUMBLE CREEK - FIRE WILL SPREAD UPSWPEAT LOCATION NOTED ABOVE WITH SPOTTING to NORTH SIDE PROBABLE

RIVER FACE ABOVE H-12 - FILE WILL BACK DOWN to FRIVER THIS AFTERNOON WITH High PROTABLING OF SPOTTINY DEVILS RIVER WITH NO CONTROL ACTION.

SPOT ON WELT SIDE OF KIDDLE FORK - SMOKES WILL Dewe as wind increments but NO Have prime expected

South SECTOR (1+4+ to H9) - FIRE WILL IN CREASE IN INtering As WINDS INCHARE, FILL IN TALMS SLOPE COVED SPOT INTO SHIP ISLAND CREEK.

- AIR OPERATIONS: SMOKE WILL REDUCE VISIONITY VICINITY OF H-10 AND LATER IN AFTENDEN H-2. DEDITY ALTITUDE AT 4-11 7000', AND H-2 10,000'
- -MAFETT: ROLLING FORKS AND LOGS REMAIN & HARADO, SHONG THUNDANTON WINDS COULD PRODUCE DANGED FILL BEHAVIOR. ALSO WATCH FOR SNAMS BUNNING OFF, PARTICLEY ON SOUTH SELTOR.

<sup>-----</sup>

-9	Passed Ilighest Step Red Red Card	Test Carded Qualification	Fire Boss III		Line Boss II					•													-		
QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE		<b>S-190</b> Other	211, 212, 213, 214,	1955 230, 260, 270, 320, 330,	341, 380, 351, 352, 370, 390, 420, 590	Boss I -	rife Boss 11 - 2	sion Boss -	-	Sector Boss - 1	-	Firefighter - 9+		Boss -	1	Scout -	Dfficer -	General Scout - 5 Fire Behavior Officer - 2	Tanker Manager - 9+	Heliport I	Radio Operator - 9+	Time Recorder -	TOTAL - 158+		•
J. S. L. S. S.	Fire	Name Assignment S-130	(Payette)	Line Scout 1955	JIM CAMP					-															

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Nane Assignment S-130 S-190 (Targhee) Crew Boss 1967 1970	Fire training and rear vecetved           S-190         Other           S-190         Other           110, 211, 212, 214, 215, 230           1970         260, 270, 320, 330, 351, 352           390         370           Fire Boss III -         13           Crew Boss -         7		1000 1000 P
(Targhee)     Crew Boss     1967	110, 211, 212, 214, 215, 260, 270, 320, 330, 351, 390 Fire Boss III - Crew Boss -	Test Carded	Qua
	390 Fire Boss III - Crew Boss -	Yes	
	P		Fire Boss III
		•	
	Squad Boss - 12		
	Firefighter - 21-		
	Tanker Boss 2		
	Line Locator - 1		
	Tool Manager - 1		
	Air Service Manager- 9		• •
	Radio Operator - 2		
	TOTAL - 68+		
•			

	Highest Red Card	Qualification	Squad Boss			Firefighter			Firefighter		Firefighter	-	Squad Boss	Trainee Crew Boss		•	Firefighter	-				
	Ređ	Carded	Yes			Yes			Yês		Yes		Yes			-	Yes.					
	Passed Step	Test.	Yes			Yes			ïêā.		Yes		Yes				Yes		•		-	
QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE	ning and Year Received		110, 211, 212	Firefighter - 20 Squad Boss - 1	TOTAL - 21		Firefighter - 2 Squad Boss - 1	TOTAL - 3	110	Firefighter - 2	110, 212	Firefighter - 16	110	Firefighter - 13	Squad Boss - 8 Crew Boss - 1	Total - 22	110, 212	Firefighter - 4		-		
QUALIF:	Fire Training		1979			1979			1979		1977		1977				1977					
	Ę	S-130	1979			1979			1979	•	1977		1977				1977				•	
	Fire	Assignment	Firefighter			Firefighter			Firefighter		Firefighter	-	Squad Boss				Firefighter					
		Name	(Targhee)			(Targhee)			(Targhee)		(Targhee)		(Targhee)				(Targhee)					

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Name A (Targhee) F			QUALIF	QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE			And in the local data and the second s	
(Targhee)	Fire	<u>E</u>	Fire Trai	ning and Year Received	Passed Step			Highest Red Card
	Assignment	S-130	S-190		Test	it Carded	-+	Qualification
	Firefighter	1970	1970	110, 211, 230, 260, 270	Yea	Yes		Squad Boss
				Fire Boss III - 4				
				Crew Boss - 7				
				Squad Boss - 13				
	•			Firefighter - 7				-
				rotal - 30				
(Targhee)	Firefighter	1978	1978	110, 260	Yes	s Yes	<u>م</u>	Firefighter
		•		Radio Operator - 2				
-				Firefighter - 2				••
	•			4 - TOTAL - 4				-
(Targhee)	Squad Boss	1975	1975	110, 211, 212, 230, 260,	270, Yes	3 Yes	Ś	Crew Boss
	-			390 Firefighter - 14+				
				Radio Operator - 1				
	•			Squad Boss - 1				
			•	Crew Boss - 6				
	-			TOTAL - 22+				
(Targhee)	Firefighter	1978	1978	110	Yes	s Yes		Firefighter
				Firefichter - 3				
(Targhee) Tom Reuter	Firefighter	1979	6791	S/110	Yes	s Yes		Firefighter

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•	Fire	<u>ب</u> نا 	Fire Trai	ning and Year Received	Passed Step	Red	Highest Red Card
Name	Assignment	S-130	S-190	S-190 Other	Test	Carded	Qualification
(Targhee)				110, 230, 270, 260			Crew Boss Trainee
	Crew Boss	1975	1975	-	Yes	Yes	Squad Boss
				- 5			Faller
				Crew Boss - 3			
				Faller - 2			
				Tanker Boss - 1			
				Total - 30			
(Targhee)	Firefighter	1976	1976	110	Yes	Yes	Firefighter
				Firefighter - 6			
				Squad Boss - 7 Faller - 27			
				Total - 40			
(Targhee)	Squad Boss	1978	1978	110	Yes	Yes	Firefighter
				Firefighter - 20 TOTAL - 28			
(Targhee)	Firefighter	1978	1978	. 011	Yes	Yes	Firefighter
			-	Firefighter - 3			•
(Iolo)				110, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215,			Fire Boss III
	Lolo Crew Leader	1972	1973	260, 270, 320, 330,	Yes	Yes	Sector Boss
				- 111		•	•
				1			•
				rirerigneer - 2 TOTAL - 15			

				•	Passed		lighest
Mam <b>a</b>	Fire Accimment	5-130 F	Fire Training	ning and Year Received Other	Test	Carded	Oualification
(Payette)				211, 212, 213,		2	GHQ Service Coord.
	Fire Behavior Officer1956	r1956	1956	260, 270, 320, 330,	168	res	FBO
				343, 351, 352, 354,	•		GHQ Plans Coord.
•				370, 390,			
				Servic			
				Plans Chief I - 1			
				Service Chief I - 16+			
				Service Chief II - 2			-
				Division Boss - 3			
				Fire Boss III - 1			
				Sector Boss - 4			
		•		Squad Boss - 9+			
	•			1		-	
				Line Scout - 4			
				Maps & Records Off 4			• •
				IR Interpreter - 2			
				Officer -			
				Air Serv.MgrAirport - 1			
				" " " -Heliport II-4			-
				Radio Operator - 94			
				Time Officer - 9+			
				Time Recorder - 9+			
				TOTAL - 100+		-	, , , , ,
	-						
							•
					-		
	-	•		•			

	Highest Red Card	Qualification	Firefighter		Firefighter		Fire Boss III Fire Boss II. (OH)	Boss I	ASM - Nell I		• -		•			-						
QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE	Red	Carded	Yes		Yes		Yes															
	Passed Step	Test.	Yes		Yes		Yes															
	ning and Year Received	Other	110	Firefighter - 1		Firefighter - 9	213, 320,	370, 390, 420, 451	FIFE BOSS II - 2	Division Boss - 1	Fire Boss III - 8	Sector Boss - 3	Crew Boss - 9+	Squad Boss - 9+	Firefighter - 9+	Line Locator - 4	Line Scout - 4	Air Service Manager- Heliport 2	Time Officer - 9+	Time Recorder - 9+	TOTAL: 71+	
	Fire Train	S-190	1979		1978		1965															
	F	s-130	1979		1978		1964														•	
	rire	Assignment	Firefighter	35	Firefighter		Plans Chief														•	
		Name	(Targhee)		(Targhee)		(Salmon)															

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