

### Mount Umunhum Fire

# What It Took To Lick It— Why Did It Cost \$40,000?

By Wally Trabling

See that dark, ugly 8670-acre scar up behind Santa Cruz which covers Mount Umunhum and Loma Prieta like a black cloak of mourning.

That cost you close to \$400,000.

It will never regain its former beauty in your lifetime.

Why did it happen? Why so expensive? How was it conquered?

The fire raged from July 18 to the 27th and required more than 3000 persons to lick it.

Charles Coomber, assistant ranger in charge of the Alma fire

station in Santa Clara county, explained the cause.

It was about 5 p.m., toward dusk of a hot, airless day. Low humidity had sucked thousands of gallons of water from the pores of grasses, brushes and trees.

At the foot of Mount Umunhum, below the air force radar station, someone kicked on the power at a water pumping station which forced water up to the air force installation. At the top of the deadend power pole, in one of the ceramic insulators, was a tiny crack.

"Something drew an arc of

fire across the crack, blowing the insulator to "smithierines." This exposed some interior insulator metal and drew more arcs of fire which turned the metal into tiny beads of molten liquid. It dropped in the grass under the pole, setting the grass afire.

And from these tiny grass flames a game of fire-tag developed until brush and trees joined in a deathly chain reaction.

Almost immediately the fire lookout on Loma Prieta saw it. So did Chief Ranger George Britton who, dog tired, was returning by plane from the Mount Hamilton fire which had kept him awake 36 hours.

By 5:45 p.m. Coomber was racing down a mountainous road to size up the blaze. By 6 p.m. Britton had diverted several air tankers from the Hamilton fire. They dumped oxygen-killing borate on the growing flame fronts until it became too dark to fly.

By 7 p.m., two conservation crews (prisoners) arrived from the Hamilton fire, stinking from smoke, stubble-bearded, and weary. From summit road I watched them walking a mile into the fire front, their flashlights bobbing and twinkling like eerie fireflies.

From atop Umunhum another attack began. Six caterpillars, running almost in tandem, tabbed their huge steel blades into the ground and began a tortuous descent down the west side of the fire. Twenty-four hours later they would reach the bottom at Los Gatos creek (near Summit road) to form an 80-foot fire break that you can easily see from Highway 17.

While this was underway Britton's radio men at Morgan Hill were crackling out appeals for fire fighters, privately-owned bulldozers and drivers, and water tankers. A call went to Sacramento for top fire bosses. Britton, battle weary from other fires, knew the lack of sleep would weaken his efficiency soon.

Men, mostly prisoner-fire fighters from other areas in the state, began to respond. They were tired men with six or seven days of ax swinging behind them.

"But," said Coomber, "by 6 p.m. on the 19th we had the fire contained, to 150 acres and things looked good." Not for long.

Around midnight a northwesterly wind tore over the area at 35 miles an hour. The fire which was heading west toward that big cat line, suddenly reversed itself and by 2 a.m. on the 20th all hell broke loose.

That day the fire, cheered on by winds up to 40 miles per hour, raced more than six miles to Loma Prieta.

"You can carry in an arm load of fire wood for your fireplace and it will warm your living room all evening," explained Dick Le-



No birds sing here anymore in this pine forest. No animals

seek its coolness for the only shade is from the dead skeleton-like fingers which were life giv-

ing trunks. The carpeted pine floor is now ugly black ash. Mother nature will be slow to

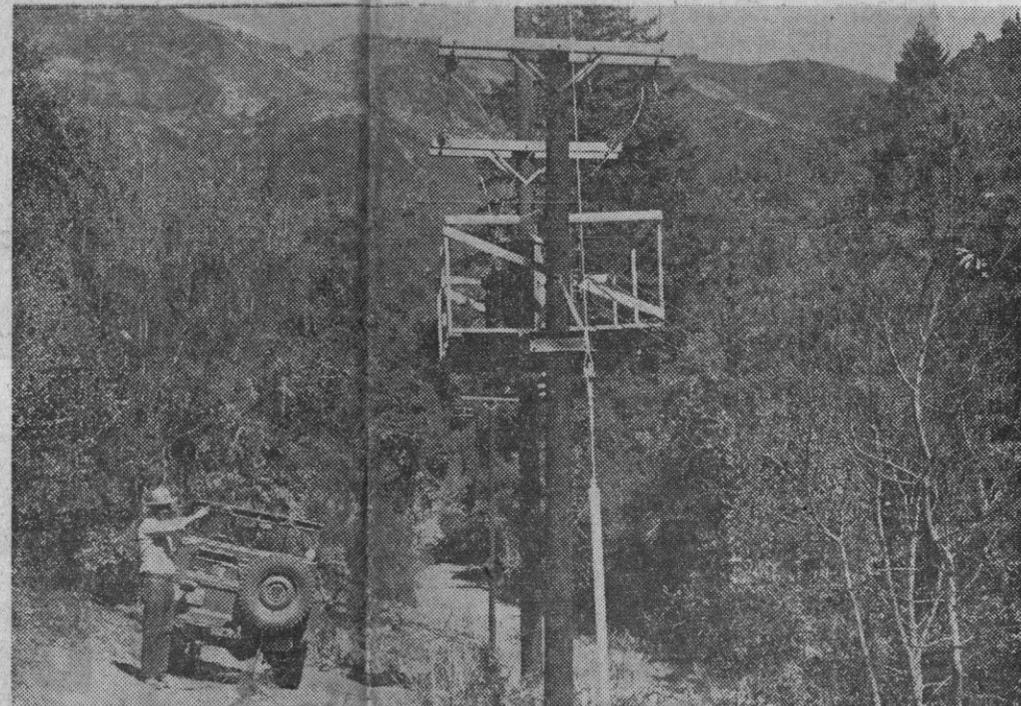
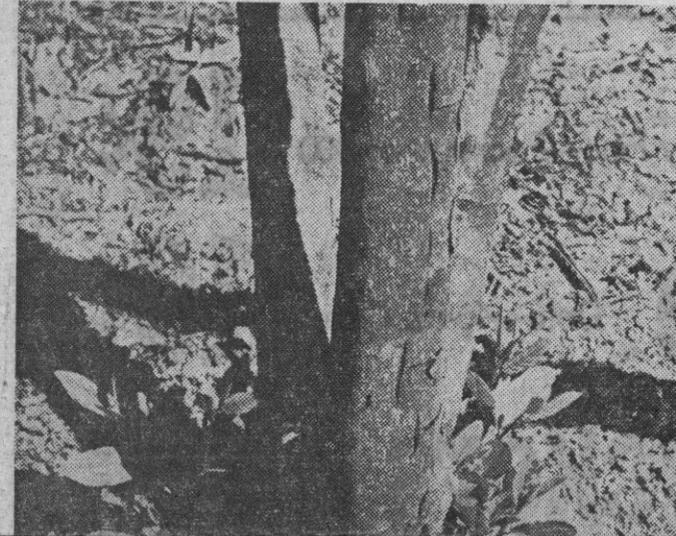
rise again here. Her scar will show for a generation. This photo was taken along the

ridge between Loma Prieta and Mount Umunhum.



Ken Rogers, division of forestry fire ranger for the Alma station in Santa Clara county, holds parts of insulators which were involved in the starting of

the 8000-acre Loma Prieta-Mount Umunhum fire. A defective ceramic insulator which blew up is said to have caused the blaze.



### Annual Folk Dance Festival Slated

The 14th annual folk and square dance festival, which is co-sponsored by Santa Cruz Breakers folk dance club and Santa Cruz Parks and Recreation department, is set for Saturday and Sunday, October 14 and 15.

Breakers president, Joel Schaefer, said the festival is being organized under auspices of the Monterey Bay Area Regional Council of Dance clubs. It is expected to draw members of dance clubs from throughout northern California.

General chairman of the colorful event, which usually draws over 500 dancers and more than 1000 spectators, is Mrs. Marion Hiskey. It is planned for Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon at the civic auditorium. There is no charge for spectators to watch the folk and square dancing exhibitions, and to participate in some of the dances.

There is no judging at the event, which is held "just for fun," Mrs. Hiskey said.

Call Burdick's for **Appliance** SERVICE REPAIRS

ALL BRANDS OF WASHERS DRYERS RANGES REFRIGERATORS

CALL GA 6-1010

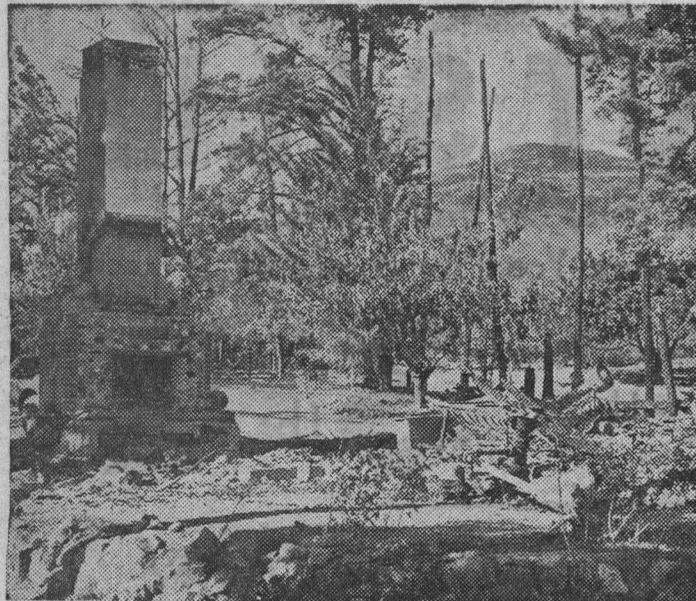
**Burdick's** TELEVISION APPLIANCES

902 SOQUEL AVE.



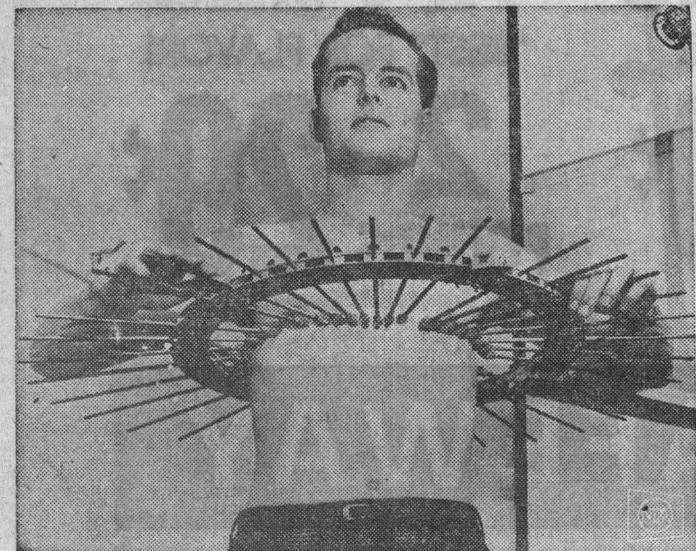
Mother Nature died in a 30-mile radius above Santa Cruz in the big July fire, but hardly two weeks later a resurrection began. Tiny green leaves pushed through the black ashes and into the sunlight. They ringed

the blackened skeletons of oaks, bay, manzanita, buck brush and other species of brush. The new cycle of life has begun, but the area will never regain its pre-fire lushness in your lifetime.



This unidentified home was destroyed in the Mount Umnum fire which began July 18. Division of Forestry officials never did learn its owner. It was located on a lonely ridge

between the air force radar station and Loma Prieta and was one of five structures burned in the raging brush and forest fire.



**ALL RIGHT, P.L.L. TALK**—Resembling a medieval torture apparatus, this device is fitted on a student at Vanderbilt Univ. Medical School, Nashville, Tenn. Called a scolimeter, it charts breathing difficulties due to spinal curvature.

bel, assistant ranger. "But when you consider 150-ton of wood per acre, the heat generated is so high that entire groves of trees explode and burn in minutes."

Now the fire became a campaign.

Fire crews, some 3000, came by bus, and by plane from one end of the stage to the other. They were rotated after a number of days on the line, but at one time there were 1075 men trying to beat the monster.

Accumulating men and equipment and organizing them for effective use is a general size job.

Lebel said there were 150 assorted vehicles called into action; 22 air tankers, even a cement mixing truck to mix the borate chemicals; and four helicopters.

Sixty-five bulldozers, 57 of them privately owned, were vital weapons against the fire. The finally surrounded the fire near Loma Prieta.

Twenty-five Greyhound buses were rented to bring men into the area.

A DC-3 and smaller planes helped fly men from the southern part of the state. There were fuel trucks and lubrication trucks to keep the caterpillars moving.

Large refrigerator trucks kept food cold at the field camps on Umnum and at the Loma Prieta school on Summit road. There was a mobile first aid wagon, a communications truck and a complete mobile weather station which moved in to keep rangers instantly informed.

What about the cost so far?

Dozer men averaged \$16 to \$20 per hour. The total bill about \$100,000. The men who drove their planes over flaming trees and brush, through narrow canyons and dangerous updrafts, earned around \$350 an hour. That bill will be between \$100,000 and \$200,000.

"You couldn't pay me enough to do this work," said Coombers. Two pilots have died this year in California fires.

Some of the pilots flew from six to eight hours a day for seven days.

Reconnaissance pilots got \$25 an hour.

Fire fighters received from \$2 to \$3.75 per hour.

Other big bills were \$7000 for National Guard personnel who came to fight. Chemicals for the planes cost \$40,000. Still to be added are the cost for the buses and transport planes.

Food for the men added up to \$30,000. A whole egg truck was routed to the fire furnishing about 259,000 eggs for the field kitchens.

Division of Forestry supply experts purchased two tons of ham, three tons of beef, which included some mouth-watering steak cuts; 1500 one-third quarts of milk per day; an ocean full of coffee; and enough fruit juice, fruit, bread and sandwich meat and cheese to make thousands of sandwiches for the men on the line.

Britton figured about 5000 disposable sleeping bags were used. These are thick paper with a fibrous filler and make

Here is where the fire started. It's the terminal power unit for a water pumping station which supplies the air force radar base on top of Mount Umnum. According to Char-

les Coomber, assistant forest ranger, a defective ceramic insulator exploded and molten metal dropped into the grass beneath the poles, caught fire

and raced up the mountain. Note that there is still considerable growth between the two poles. From this tiny blaze, more than 8000 acres of brush and timber were destroyed.



Ken Rogers' jeep stands forlornly in a dead forest near the air force radar station on Mount

Umnum. An area as thick with brush as this becomes preheated and sometimes explodes

ahead of the fire an acre at a time. Below the brush and trees is a sea of ashes.

warm quarters for men sleeping in the woods.

Britton said no major injuries were incurred but four were hospitalized from broken ribs, smoke inhalation, and poison oak. He said more than 200 were given first aid, mostly from poison oak.

There was some criticism about idle civil defense water tankers and some cats at Loma Prieta school during the fire.

"What people do not understand that the civil defense trucks were not designed for forest fire fighting. They were brought in to protect the homes along Summit drive.

"Sometimes it probably looked like the dozers were not being used, but we have to do a tremendous amount of planning before sending caterpillars into the fire area. They can't just go in on their own," he said.

San Jose Water Works owned 3000 acres of the land burned and the rest owned by about 70 other private citizens, Britton said.

On the 25th of this month an emergency seeding project will spread 31,800 pounds of

rye grass seed over 5300 acres of the burn. This grass is quick growing and has a strong root system. It will serve to help check erosion during the winter rains.

The fire has been off the front page for more than a month, but forestry crews still patrol the 30 mile radius where Mother Nature died, quenching little fires that refuse to die.

Had the fire gone unchecked, Ranger Britton visualized that it would have burned into Santa Clara valley, and taken Soquel, Aptos and maybe Corralitos.

Investigation is still under way concerning the cause. Coomber was reluctant to lay the blame on anyone.

#### MEN FACING DEATH LOSE PLEA FOR WRITS

San Francisco (AP). — Two men convicted with Mrs. Elizabeth Ann Duncan for the murder of her daughter-in-law were denied their petition for writs of habeas corpus Friday in the last judicial act of Chief Federal Judge Louis E. Goodman.

BUY U. S. SAVINGS BONDS

#### PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE TO CREDITORS  
No. 17,418

In the Superior Court of the State of California, in and for the County of Santa Cruz.

In the Matter of the Estate of GERVASO RODONI, also known as GARVASO RODONI, Deceased.

Notice is Hereby Given by the Undersigned, GINA RODONI, Executrix of the last will and testament and of the estate of Gervaso Rodoni, also known as Garvaso Rodoni, deceased, to the creditors of, and all persons having claims against the said deceased, or said estate, to file them, with the necessary vouchers, in the office of the Clerk of the above named Court (which said office is situate in the Court House in the City of Santa Cruz in said County and State), within six months after the first publication of this notice made on the 27th day of August, 1961, or present and exhibit them, with the necessary vouchers, within said period, to the said Executrix at the office of Attorney Emmet L. Rittenhouse, Room 4, Rittenhouse Building, in the City of Santa Cruz, County of Santa Cruz, State of California, which said last named office, the undersigned selects as the place of business in all matters connected with said estate.

GINA RODONI,  
Executrix of the last will and testament and of the Estate of said deceased.

Dated: August 25, 1961.  
EMMET L. RITTENHOUSE,  
Attorney for said Executrix.  
Aug. 27, Sept. 3, 10, 17 (5274)