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4. Publish the news that is public property without fear or favor of friends or foes.
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"The fire broke out on private lands"

"They still thought they had a way out"

## ROMERO FIRE REVIEW

# Conversation With Forest Supervisor

At what spot, precisely, did the Romero Fire start? Were the retardant bombings carried out effectively? Is the C-130 practical for such purposes, or was it just an impressive display? Did a motion picture crew record on film the firestorm that was fatal to four men? How do you evaluate the flood dangers to Carpinteria?

Robert G. Lancaster (pictured above), supervisor of the 2-million-acre Los Padres National Forest, is a man who can answer such questions authoritatively. News-Press and KTMS radio newsmen put them, and others, to Lancaster in a tape-recorded interview, most of it printed below.

Questioning Lancaster were Paul Veblen, John Ball, Keith Dalton and Steve Sullivan of the News-Press and Malcolm Morehouse and Gary Clark of KTMS.

**Q.** — What is the scope of your responsibilities as Forest Supervisor?

**A.** — We are somewhat different from a normal federal agency in that we are unique in our system of decentralization of authority in the field. This runs down to our district ranger who is totally responsible for all activities in a given unit of ground.

In this case the Los Padres Forest has seven ranger districts and seven district rangers and each one is totally responsible, but does not have final authority. Some of that authority I hold on my level, some is held at the regional forester's level, but essentially the decentralization is quite direct and quite complete.

It is based on the theory on which the service is organized, to put the decision making as close to the ground as you possibly can. That is, essentially, from the secretary of agriculture to the chief forester to the regional forester to the forest supervisor to the district ranger. Each one of those line officers has complete responsibility for an ever smaller geographical portion of the national forest system.

**Q.** — When a fire such as the Romero Fire breaks out, who does what?

**A.** — The jurisdictions are absolute in some aspects. The fire protection district, under state law, has a fire protection boundary.

With the passing of the Clark-McNary Act of 1924 it became federal policy to co-operate with the states in the protection of wild lands and in the suppression of wild fire. And, in turn, a subsidy is paid to the various states and is administered through the secretary of agriculture. The funds are used to encourage the organization and training of personnel and extension of fire protection to wild lands.

This is different from what is done in a fire protection district where structures are involved. Here people are actually taxed for individual protection based on their property. Rural fire protection is deemed a national interest by Congress through enactment of the Clark-McNary Law. The state of California gets a relatively small federal sum in comparison to their total fire control budget. Their rural fire responsibilities are handled through the California Division of Forestry. There is close co-operation between the Forest Service and the California Division of Forestry because federal law requires inspection of the federal interests. So we have a contractual arrangement here.

**Q.** — Can you take us through the Romero Fire from Wednesday to control? Who was responsible for making the big decisions? For example, we had the Saturday night situation where there was a Carpinteria fire department command post set up and it sounded like the Carpinteria fire department was calling the shots because the fire was coming down into Carpinteria. How does the decision-making change in such jurisdictional situations?

**A.** — We both remain totally responsible for our individual jurisdictions. The Carpinteria fire chief always was responsible for structure protection. He never did come under our command. Nor did we ever come under his command for brush land. The same is true of the State Division of Forestry. They were working primarily to help the Forest Service under our mutual aid agreement, on wild land fire fighting. The forest supervisor himself is still totally responsible for the national forest.

We also have a responsibility to the California Disaster Office for the CDO tankers which Civilian Defense has scattered throughout the state. The requests for those tankers go through the state forester to the California Disaster Office. No one ever abrogated their authority. It was exercised in concert and this was the particular function I played during the fire. I never did become involved in actual tactics, other than if I didn't like what I saw, I let the fire boss know in a big hurry. There never was a disagreement on strategy on the Romero Fire and there never really was a disagreement on tactics — there just can't be.

It gets back to the business of all of the variables coming at you in the face of the fire.

If you try to second guess you're going to have people out there in much more trouble than if you have a trained man on the ground making his own decisions. And this is essentially the philosophy behind our firefighting. It's the only way you can do it. This is one reason why structural fire departments traditionally fall flat on their face when trying to handle brush fires. Because they are built on a strong command structure where you don't move unless your superior — your chief — tells you to. This works fine in structures where you have a confined fire — and need for close knit co-operation, where you have to be in constant communications and it is possible to do it. But you take a large firefront in brush, and you can't use the same command structure.

**Q.** — Who was on hand in the district at the moment the Romero Fire was reported?

**A.** — The forest fire control officer, Ben Lyon, and the assistant fire control officer arrived on the scene simultaneously, five or six minutes after the fire was called in.

The district ranger and the deputy forest supervisor were up inspecting a proposed road project needed essentially for fuel break management. It took them an hour to get to the scene of the fire. But they were in radio communication.

**Q.** — Your men who have responsibility whenever a fire is called. Do you require that these people be in constant radio communication?

**A.** — Yes, our fire danger had been running up, you bet. So this is why we had people on hand at my office who could handle the fire and was why the deputy supervisor could be out on a job and why I could be down in Long Beach.

**Q.** — At the moment a fire like this occurs, does the first man who gets there make the decisions as to what's going to be ordered?

**A.** — The first senior forest officer there was Ben Lyon, and he promptly decided, "It's a big one."

**Q.** — Could he order bombers?

**A.** — Yes, not only could he do so, but the dispatcher would automatically order them. Our forest dispatchers are in my office and that's one of their jobs. And they would promptly start ordering.

**Q.** — As soon as you know it's going to be an overnight fire situation and you have to take care of men, or bring men in, can you give us a rough outline of the system you employ to obtain all of your supplies?

**A.** — It is essential that qualified firemen be on the spot as soon as possible. Either the district ranger, his fire control officer, or, in this case, men from the supervisor's office, which is close to the fire. Some one of us would be there to assume command of the fire. In this case it was the Forest fire control officer who promptly took charge.

**Q.** — What happened at the start of the fire from the standpoint of organization?

**A.** — Our fire organization is set up similarly to the military and for the same reasons — we have a fast changing situation, data on which to base a decision is constantly scanty. So your fire boss and each man in a line position under him is essentially his own fire boss for his particular area of the fire. The fire man at the fire is the overall fire boss.

Let's say you are a brand new crewman and you happen to be in a pickup and the fire starts alongside the road and you are the first one there. You are the fire boss and you take the action you are trained to take. Our whole system says you are the fire boss and you get on the radio and you ask for what you think you need and until you are relieved, you hold that responsibility. If the fire grows and the next man who comes up has a superior capability then the new man assumes the responsibility. In most cases the district ranger can assume the responsibility of fire boss, but it is possible that a district ranger's qualification might not include the capability of handling a large fire. However, someone in his district

See Page C-7, Col. 2

# Forest Supervisor Discusses Fire Duties

Continued from Page C-6

organization would have that qualification and would promptly head for the fire.

**Q. — As yet you have no command post. Where would this man go? With whom would he communicate?**

**A. —** Our command post essentially works through the supervisor's dispatcher office until the fire boss sets up a plans section and makes a camp.

**Q. — Is this your point of communications?**

**A. —** That's your hub. That's your communications. That's your ordering. That's your co-ordinating. That's when you start asking other forests for aid through the zone dispatcher in Southern California — down in Arcadia. He co-ordinates all the aircraft and ordering from other agencies.

Let's take aircraft, for instance. We have two at Goleta — that's our contract. Paso Robles has two, under contract to the California Division of Forestry which are available to us through our zone dispatcher. There are two at Hollister under CDF. There's one at Burbank, under Forest Service contract, one at Fresno, under CDF contract. At Porterville, here's one under Forest Service contract and one under CDF. Hemet has one under Forest Service contract and two under CDF. At Ramona one is under Forest Service, two are under CDF. Those areas share retardant mixing. A major reason they are not all under one agency is budgetary.

**Q. — When you order aircraft from Hemet, do they come loaded ready to drop?**

**A. —** Yes, they would come fully loaded. After their first drop they would be sorted out. There's a logistics problem — you can only handle so many aircraft at Goleta. Then you start working out of Burbank or another nearby base.

**Q. — What is the time lag between the time a plane is ordered and the time it makes the first drop?**

**A. —** In this case — from Goleta — a matter of minutes.

**Q. — Does the dispatcher's first call involve lead planes? They can't make a drop without a lead plane, can they?**

**A. —** Yes, they can. Some of the contractors are qualified air attack pilots and are checked out by our people so that if a lead plane is not immediately available, the pilot can come in and establish ground communication with the line boss.

Even if there is not a line boss there, they've been trained to make a drop because they are trained in air tactics. They will fly their target to start on and then, when the line boss has established communications, they will take over and put an air attack boss in charge, either on the ground or in the air. In a big fire where there's lots of smoke and many aircraft, we ordinarily put up a qualified fire officer into the air as air attack boss.

**Q. — We heard accusations from some people that some of the pilots used the fire as an excuse to make as much money as they could, staying up in the air as long as they were able. What can you tell us about the possibility of this happening?**

**A. —** This is one reason why in the California region, we hire ten highly qualified Forest Service pilots. One of their jobs is to check and make sure that this does not happen on a fire.

Forest Service pilots have no connection at all with any profit on the fire. They are paid overtime to do this very thing. They're fliers, they're qualified retardant droppers and they're qualified to check out those pilots who are hired by contract — and they time them.

**Q. — Do you feel the bombing of the Romero Fire was done efficiently?**

**A. —** First, you have to define your objective. What is your goal? Can air attack put out a fire by itself? No, it can't. If you're expecting air attack to put out a large fire, it never would. Air power can do quite a few things, but it can't put out forest fires without ground troops any more than it can win a war without ground troops.

What the air tankers allow us to do is to confine the fire in a drainage or within a series of drainages where we at least have one point under control. We don't have it when

problems are no different than what we encountered with Forest Service fire retardant aircraft when we first started out. It is new, its capabilities are untested. Yes, you have some problems. The C-130 was there to get a little operational time and to iron out some of the bugs.

**Q. — What would it carry in comparison to the Flying Fortresses you are using now?**

**A. —** Right now it will carry only 1,000 extra gallons. The C-130 has a 3,000-gallon capacity, the B-17s have a 2,000 gallon capacity. This is one reason why some comment came that the C-130 wasn't able to get into the fire area. That flying monster has a tremendous turn radius and it's like one of those California condors, you've got to give it room.

**Q. — Wasn't it also limited in communications?**

**A. —** Yes, we didn't have the complete communications setup in it when it came. In fact, this is why it didn't get into action right at the start. We had to install the proper radios so they could talk to the air attack boss. Once it got into the air, it interfered with all the other aircraft because they were faster and more maneuverable. It had to be held up until the air attack boss had a hole to put it in. The idea was to put the fire out, not give practice time to the C-130.

**Q. — The afternoon of the fire we only had so many hours of daylight and then you would run into the problem of fighting the fire in the night. At that point what did you plan to do in the evening as opposed to daytime attack plans?**

**A. —** Obviously the fire escaped the initial attack capabilities so then you start organizing for a large fire.

**Q. — Why did that happen?**

**A. —** The rate of spread and the wind. The fire was running up the slope and you had a southerly or onshore wind condition, which is a unique problem in this area. The wind in this narrow plain, with its proximity to the ocean, is highly variable. During the early evening hours, a downslope or northerly wind condition occurs. Some of our worst problems exist where houses are in the middle of tree cover in the most unstable air portions of the entire watershed. A tremendous turbulence occurred near the point of origin after the fire had been burning about four hours. The fire went in several directions at that time but primarily it went down the slope and that's when the homes were lost.

**Q. — Was it burning in heavy brush initially or was it burning in an area that had burned over during the Coyote Fire of 1964?**

**A. —** The initial start was in grass under a tree canopy. It promptly spread into mature brush which had not been burned during the Coyote Fire. Again, the rate of spread of fire in grass is very fast. We have the same problem in fuelbreaks. We have more starts in grass than we have in the brush because the ignition point is quite a bit lower. But in grass you have a very small fuel mass.

**Q. — Is there a difference between fire in a burned over area and fire in an area where the fuel is heavy, like in back of Carpinteria?**

**A. —** This gets back to the point that if you light-burn the hills and convert the brush cover to a grass cover you would be home free. There are some obvious fallacies in this, on steep ground. When I was district ranger on the Cajon District of the San Bernardino Forest we burned four times in as many years on one area and the last three times we were burning almost entirely grass. She goes like a son-of-a-gun and if you've got anything in the way, you're in trouble. So grass in itself gives us a fire problem.

Grass in the right place gives us access and gives us an opportunity to hold the fire line as we did on the top at the El Camino Cielo fuel break.

**Q. — How do you feel about controlled burning? Are there places where it can be applied here?**

**A. —** It's a tool. Yes, there are places where it can be applied. Controlled burning has been very successful in the Santa Maria area. In the Medocino Forest it has been done successfully, where the topography is not severe and the soils are stable. But, you take soils that are beyond the angle of repose and in an active geologically moving area such as the Santa Ynez front — to say that you are going



"We don't put fire protection over human life"



"The stream channels will probably clog"

that's carried downstream after a fire. Under normal flows, these materials don't move. With heavy flood loads — and this can occur in unburned watersheds too — you can have a tremendous deposition of materials to the flood plain below.

**Q. — What responsibility does the Forest Service have in regard to the transportation lines outside of its boundaries — such as the Southern Pacific railway and U.S. 101, when and if bridges are washed out from the flow coming from the burned slopes?**

**A. —** It's an act over which we had no control and had taken every precaution — fire inspection, control and firetanker air attacks, etc. As far as I know there would be no liability on the part of the Federal Government.

Now let me give you an example. If we had been conducting a controlled burn and had had the same results as the Romero Fire, we would be responsible. Or, had we bungled the fighting of the fire through carelessness or other such acts, a citizen through court could legally start adversary proceedings against the Forest Service to determine blame.

**Q. — Have the reports been completed yet on the four fire deaths?**

**A. —** No, in fact the report now is in draft form and is being circulated to team members of the investigating group — two people from the Chief of the Forest Service office in Washington, D.C., a representative of the regional forester and our deputy forest supervisor. The principal responsibility for preparing this report lies with Miles Howlett, director of engineering for the forest service in Washington, D.C. The report should be in final form to present to the chief forester by the end of this month. It should be returned to the regional forester by the middle of November.

**Q. — Was the coroner's report completely accurate about the event of that evening?**

**A. —** No. His responsibility was to determine if there had been a wrongful death and he had to make that determination quite rapidly and once he is satisfied — was there foul play, was there gross negligence, the cause of death, etc., he releases the victims' names and their remains from his custody.

**Q. — Why is the Forest Service conducting its own investigation; that is, why is it investigating itself on this matter of deaths?**

**A. —** The problem of cause of death, blame and foul play was answered by the coroner's report. Our investigation is to seek further into the causes so that they do not happen again. We don't put fire protection over human life. The only time you would risk a life would be when human lives are at stake — such as occurs commonly with city and county firemen. It becomes less clear in fighting brush fires, when you can't completely predict or control the wind conditions and other factors. We don't plan to lose people — we sure don't. But when a brush fire is sweeping along uncontrolled in an area directly above places of human habitation, it requires the best men and the closest type of figuring to try to control it and there are risks inherent in this type of work. There is no such thing as completely safe fire fighting in brush.

Q. — Mr. Lancaster, on the night of the

or four hours before the men lost their lives lessened their margin of safety. The decisions weren't made that way, to lessen it. But each of those series of coincidences kept lessening the safety margin until, finally, all they had left to do was climb under those cats — and that wasn't good enough. Good enough for the upper two men, but not good enough for the four down below.

**Q. — Who was the tractor boss and how well qualified was he?**

**A. —** The tractor boss was highly experienced. His name was Tom Klepperich. He rated way above his fire job at the time. He worked for me in the Cajon District in the early 1960s and was trained by some of the best firefighters in the U. S.

**Q. — Had he been in fires like this and of this size before?**

**A. —** Yes, in fact lot bigger fires. You can play Monday morning quarterback but they never fully realized the fire was going to hit them until the last minute. They still thought they had a way out. It's just one of those things.

**Q. — What about the statement of Jimmy Ames, quoted by his wife, who said, "I gotta get outa here"?**

**A. —** This is always a problem when you import people from other areas and put them in a fire. Ames had the advantage, he lived here, he knows the area, he has worked on fires in the area as a bulldozer operator. Each area is different. We had "a normal" weather phenomena here. As a matter of fact 50 percent humidity had been predicted for that night. We may have had it somewhere down below but not in that fire area. This may have led to a misreading of the rate of fire spread. I don't know.

**Q. — You said earlier that there was a firebug loose. Do you have actual proof that arson was the cause of the Romero Fire?**

**A. —** No, we do not. What we do have is a five year average of incendiary fires on the forest showing that nine of our fires each year are of incendiary origin. In 1971, on the Santa Barbara front country alone we have had 15 incendiary fires. About the Romero Fire, we've narrowed the origin to a 10 foot diameter area. It was in high grass near some sycamore trees. They have not been able to find an actual device. They have also narrowed the human factor down to the fact that there was no one there within 10 minutes of the start of the fire — and it started nearly 60 feet from the road, inside a closed area — closed by mutual agreement with other agencies because of the high fire danger.

The likelihood of somebody seeing you, if the person starting the fire were there for some innocent purpose such as hiking or picnicking, would have been good. You don't normally go 60 feet off the road unless you go for a specific reason. Because it was above the road it could not have been something casually thrown from a car. We've narrowed it down to the most probable cause — deliberate.

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What the air tankers allow us to do is to confine the fire in a drainage or within a series of drainages where we at least have one variable under control. We don't have it whipping back into the Santa Ynez drainage like it did in the Coyote Fire. The planes were instrumental in keeping the fire from jumping the ridge top fuelbreak and crossing over into the Santa Ynez drainage.

Without the fuelbreak up there, on the crest of the Santa Ynez mountains, even the air power would not have been effective. Fuel modification, that is conversion from brush to grass, creates a high rate of fire spread, higher initially than brush, but develops a low rate of resistance to control. In other words, one load of slurry (dumped from an aircraft) fireproofs it. Whereas one load of slurry on 20-foot brush doesn't do anything except retard the fire a little bit as long as it's not a fire front hitting it. With an uphill fire front, the retardant is no good at all.

**Q. — Have you seen any photos of the ridge on which the crucial firebreak had been cut by bulldozers?**

A. — Yes, and I have flown the ridge several times, during the fire and after. On the Santa Ynez fuelbreak, where it sloped over (into the Santa Ynez drainage) planes were able to cool it enough so that we could work hand crews down into the brush to pick it (the fire) up.

**Q. — When the fire started were the planes in Goleta loaded and ready to go?**

A. — At that time, and with that fire danger, yes.

**Q. — Is the C-130 practical? Or was it just an impressive display, but not very effective in putting out the fire?**

A. — The C-130 does have a place. Any aircraft has a place in fire control. The C-130

was to put the fire out, not give practice time to the C-130.

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A. — It's a tool. Yes, there are places where it can be applied. Controlled burning has been very successful in the Santa Maria area. In the Medocino Forest it has been done successfully, where the topography is not severe and the soils are stable. But, you take soils that are beyond the angle of repose and in an active geologically moving area such as the Santa Ynez front — to say that you are going to control a controlled burn is foolish. Sometimes you can do it and sometimes you cannot, but your predictability is pretty low. Controlled burning has a real place and can be employed mainly on ridgetops, swales, in areas of more gentle slopes where erosion is not a problem and where we can actually modify the fuel to get a permanent cover-type conversion.

**Q. — How do you feel about the protective system which had been in force for 64 years on the slopes behind Carpinteria? Was it good to have protected the brush over a number of years or could the Romero Fire have been lessened had there been some minor burns during that time?**

A. — Again you have to define protection for what and from what. Maintaining the chaparral cover intact until it become decadent — its going to go up in flames, one way or the other. You can't protect it forever from burning.

But, you have to measure the downstream values — the protection of the agricultural lands, structures, etc. from the fire-flood sequence. What are the values gained by foregoing burning regularly? And that answer I don't know. So, in saying whether it is worth it or not, it is a matter of whose ox got gored, whose paying the cost of protecting that chaparral? When it does burn you are going to pay a lot to stop it.

**Q. — How do you evaluate the winter dangers to Carpinteria?**

A. — According to a Corps of Engineers' report and the county flood control engineer, James A. Stubchaer, this is the most critical area. The stream channels probably will clog and cause a complete interlacing of flood flows — that's the gravel, the rocks — everything

that's carried downstream after a fire. Under normal flows, these materials don't move. With heavy flood loads — and this can occur in unburned watersheds too — you can have a tremendous deposition of materials to the flood plain below.

**Q. — What responsibility does the Forest Service have in regard to the transportation lines outside of its boundaries — such as the Southern Pacific railway and U.S. 101, when and if bridges are washed out from the flow coming from the burned slopes?**

A. — It's an act over which we had no control and had taken every precaution — fire inspection, control and firetanker air attacks, etc. As far as I know there would be no liability on the part of the Federal Government.

Now let me give you an example. If we had been conducting a controlled burn and had had the same results as the Romero Fire, we would be responsible. Or, had we bungled the fighting of the fire through carelessness or other such acts, a citizen through court could legally start adversary proceedings against the Forest Service to determine blame.

**Q. — Have the reports been completed yet on the four fire deaths?**

A. — No, in fact the report now is in draft form and is being circulated to team members of the investigating group — two people from the Chief of the Forest Service office in Washington, D.C., a representative of the regional forester and our deputy forest supervisor. The principal responsibility for preparing this report lies with Miles Hawlett, director of engineering for the forest service in Washington, D.C. The report should be in final form to present to the chief forester by the end of this month. It should be returned to the regional forester by the middle of November.

**Q. — Was the coroner's report completely accurate about the event of that evening?**

A. — No. His responsibility was to determine if there had been a wrongful death and he had to make that determination quite rapidly and once he is satisfied — was there foul play, was there gross negligence, the cause of death, etc., he releases the victims' names and their remains from his custody.

**Q. — Why is the Forest Service conducting its own investigation; that is, why is it investigating itself on this matter of deaths?**

A. — The problem of cause of death, blame and foul play was answered by the coroner's report. Our investigation is to seek further into the causes so that they do not happen again. We don't put fire protection over human life. The only time you would risk a life would be when human lives are at stake — such as occurs commonly with city and county firemen. It becomes less clear in fighting brush fires, when you can't completely predict or control the wind conditions and other factors. We don't plan to lose people — we sure don't. But when a brush fire is sweeping along uncontrolled in an area directly above places of human habitation, it requires the best men and the closest type of figuring to try to control it and there are risks inherent in this type of work. There is no such thing as completely safe fire fighting in brush.

**Q. — Mr. Lancaster, on the night of the firestorm — Thursday night, did a motion picture crew hired by the Forest Service record that on film?**

A. — I'll tell you what happened there. The California Division of Forestry and the Forest Service are engaged in developing training films. And it just so happens that the crew that was lost, some of them, were shown on the original filming of the building of the firelines in the area earlier in the day. This film was made for training purposes.

It was taken about five o'clock that afternoon. It was a State Forest officer doing the filming, a trained photographer. At nine o'clock, because the fire was heating up, he came back to one of the camera points where he originally started filming. He was not aware the tractors were still down there when he began but he did get the sequence. That is why we know the exact time that the men probably died.

**Q. — Did he get the actual firestorm itself on film?**

A. — He got the firestorm. One of the tractors is visible. It also has given us valuable pictorial evidence of where the fire was when they were committed down there and, in my view, why the strategy was correct.

It's just one of those things. I'm speaking for myself. I don't know what the report is going to say. But, in my view of the cumulative effect that led to the tragedy — you know, firefighting is risky — and everything you do has a certain risk to it — you can't make a quick or completely rigid decision. But you take safeguards. So if that plan goes sour you go another way you see. Or you've got another option.

All the options selected in that fateful three

or four hours before the men lost their lives lessened their margin of safety. The decisions weren't made that way, to lessen it. But each of those series of coincidences kept lessening the safety margin until, finally, all they had left to do was climb under those cats — and that wasn't good enough. Good enough for the upper two men, but not good enough for the four down below.

**Q. — Who was the tractor boss and how well qualified was he?**

A. — The tractor boss was highly experienced. His name was Tom Klepperich. He rated way above his fire job at the time. He worked for me in the Cajon District in the early 1960s and was trained by some of the best firefighters in the U. S.

**Q. — Had he been in fires like this and of this size before?**

A. — Yes, in fact lot bigger fires. You can play Monday morning quarterback but they never fully realized the fire was going to hit them until the last minute. They still thought they had a way out. It's just one of those things.

**Q. — What about the statement of Jimmy Ames, quoted by his wife, who said, "I gotta get outa here"?**

A. — This is always a problem when you import people from other areas and put them in a fire. Ames had the advantage, he lived here, he knows the area, he has worked on fires in the area as a bulldozer operator. Each area is different. We had "a normal" weather phenomena here. As a matter of fact 50 percent humidity had been predicted for that night. We may have had it somewhere down below but not in that fire area. This may have led to a misreading of the rate of fire spread. I don't know.

**Q. — You said earlier that there was a firebug loose. Do you have actual proof that arson was the cause of the Romero Fire?**

A. — No, we do not. What we do have is a five year average of incendiary fires on the forest showing that nine of our fires each year are of incendiary origin. In 1971, on the Santa Barbara front country alone we have had 15 incendiary fires. About the Romero Fire, we've narrowed the origin to a 10 foot diameter area. It was in high grass near some sycamore trees. They have not been able to find an actual device. They have also narrowed the human factor down to the fact that there was no one there within 10 minutes of the start of the fire — and it started nearly 60 feet from the road, inside a closed area — closed by mutual agreement with other agencies because of the high fire danger.

The likelihood of somebody seeing you, if the person starting the fire were there for some innocent purpose such as hiking or picnicking, would have been good. You don't normally go 60 feet off the road unless you go for a specific reason. Because it was above the road it could not have been something casually thrown from a car. We've narrowed it down to the most probable cause — deliberate.

**Q. — Civilly, would a person or persons be held responsible for a portion of the suppression of the fire, or the total fire cost?**

A. — Under the California Health and Safety Code, Section 13007, provides liability for damage caused by the fire. Section 13009 makes the persons liable for the full suppression cost. This suppression cost would be approximately 1.8 million dollars on the Romero Fire. Watershed and structural damages add another 3.1 million dollars to the loss.

**Q. — Did weather put out the fire or was it a basic contributor to the stopping of fire?**

A. — Had the weather conditions continued the way they were the first couple of days, we could very easily have had that fire go all the way around. Without that Santa Ynez fuelbreak, this fire would have been much larger, even without those conditions. What weather does is, it allows you to get control of the fire. If you had left it alone it wouldn't have gone out. It would still be around and until we got some heavy winter rains the fire would still be making runs, taking out canyons here and there.

**Q. — When you get a fire that's trending east or west you tell us you can hold it on these fuelbreaks up here or down there. Do you anticipate putting in some lateral fuelbreaks down these ridges?**

A. — Yes. They are not nearly as effective as the top of the ridge and bottom of the range fuelbreaks and they will have to be built principally by hand, but they do need to be put in. In fact, my people are figuring on the cost of that right now. I think we can predict that the slopes behind Goleta, to the west, are going to burn off one of these days in the same way this did.