



Fire Watch

Los Angeles Fire Department Newsletter

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Our Mission

"To preserve life and property, promote public safety, foster economic growth through leadership, management and actions, as an all-risk fire and life safety response provider."

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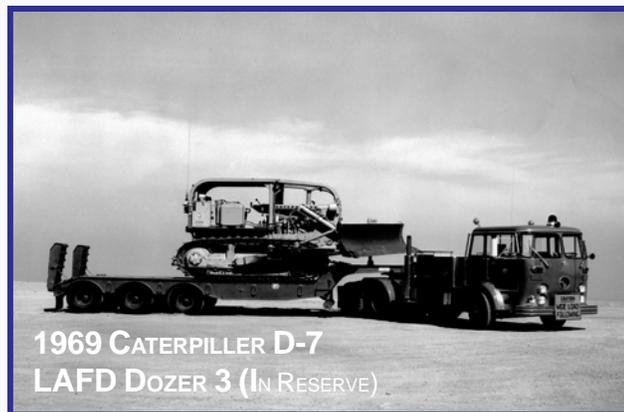
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Los Angeles Fire Department Wildland Fuel Management Unit

During the early 1920's, the Los Angeles Fire Department began to realize the potential for disaster if a fire broke out in any of the 108 square miles of brush within the City of Los Angeles. In 1924, the Department obtained two Water Department buildings located along Mulholland Drive and opened them as Mountain Patrol 1 and Mountain Patrol 2. Mountain Patrol 1 was located at Franklin Canyon Drive, in Coldwater Canyon, while Mountain Patrol 2 was located on Mulholland Drive at Sepulveda Canyon.

During these early times, a Battalion Chief, Firefighters and civilian employees staffed the Mountain Patrols. Horses and automobiles were used by both Firefighters and civilians to patrol the mountains. The area was divided into eight areas from Griffith Park on the east, to Topanga Canyon on the west. One "Patrolman" was assigned to each district and it was his job to patrol the area and make the initial attack on any small fire. The civilian workers cut and maintained fire roads, trails and breaks. Within the first decade of the Mountain Patrol's operations, its resources grew to 28 pieces of apparatus. Along with pickup

trucks and horses, two large trucks and trailers transported the two Cletrac tractors used to build fire roads and maintain firebreaks. Also available were two 100-gallon water trailers that were pulled by the tractors to get water into remote areas.



1969 CATERPILLER D-7
LAFD DOZER 3 (IN RESERVE)

By 1932, the Mountain Patrol maintained 115 miles of firebreaks, 75 miles of trails and 29 miles of roadway. During the early years, a Federal Agency called the WPA (Work Projects Administration) built many of the fire roads in the Santa Monica Mountains that still exist today.



Los Angeles Fire Department Newsletter

In the late 1940's, the Department obtained military bulldozers to replace the aging Cletrac tractors. These dozers lasted until the late 1960's when the City purchased new equipment.

During the early 1960's, the Mountain Patrol's tractor company (staffed by Firefighters) worked out of Fire Station 109 while the civilian employees worked at Fire Station 108. There were nine platoon-duty Firefighter/Operators working at Fire Station 109 whose primary duties were to build firebreaks and to respond to brush fires and overhauls. The civilians working out of Fire Station 108 consisted of a Foreman, two Dozer Operators, one Motor Grader Operator, and three laborers. Their primary responsibilities included building fire roads, maintaining trails, installing drains and repairing the fire road gates.

In November 1961, Department dozers were used during the Bel Air fire and were partially effective during the early stages of this historic conflagration. As the raging fire burned into Mandeville Canyon, it leaped across the west wall of the Canyon but was confined along the West Mandeville Fire Road by engine companies and Department dozers. By the next day, dozers and water drops from air tankers helped control the fire moving north toward Mulholland Drive. On the following day, dozers widened firebreaks, saved homes

by placing lines around them and assisted with backfire operations.

In 1968, the Mountain Patrol was closed and the Brush Unit was



**2002 CATERPILLER IT-28
LAFD LOADER 2 (INTERGRATED TOOL)**

formed. The civilians who were once assigned to the Mountain Patrol were reassigned to the Brush Unit and were kept on for several more years.



**LAFD TRANSPORT 2002 PETERBILT
LAFD TRANSPORT 1 WITH 2002 MURRAY TRAILER**

In 1969, the Jacobs Survey recommended that the Tractor Company portion of the old Mountain Patrol be reinstated. Once that happened, the civilian workers were placed with the Tractor Company. This

reorganized Tractor Company was stationed at Fire Station 109. The civilians continued to maintain the fire roads (including the drains and gates) while the Firefighter/Operators maintained the firebreaks and responded to fires and overhauls.

By 1971, the Tractor Company was commanded by a special-duty Captain, nine-platoon-duty Operators, a civilian Foreman, three civilian Operators, four Laborers and a Mechanic. During that era, there were numerous vehicles and apparatus assigned to the Tractor Company which included:

- 4 - Bulldozers
- 2 - Loaders
- 3 - Transports
- 1 - Dump Truck
- 1 - Stake Bed Truck
- 4 - Tractor Tenders
 - 1 - Plug Buggy
 - 1 - Motor Grader
 - 1 - Jeep
 - 1 - Farm Tractor
 - 3 - Trailers

In 1975, the Tractor Company moved from Fire Station 109 to its current location at Fire Station 88 where the Department had built a new building especially for the Tractor Company. The building was located behind Fire Station 88 and was named the "B" building.

In 1980, due to budgetary constraints, the civilian crew was released; however, the lone civilian Foreman who was also an Operator stayed on.

In 1981, the Tractor Company was "closed." The Captain retired, the



remaining civilian operator transferred to the Department of Sanitation, and three of the six Operators were assigned to Fire Station 88 (one on each shift, to be used as needed). The other six Operators either retired or were transferred to other assignments.

In 1983, the Company again re-opened with one Operator assigned per shift at Fire Station 88. This member was considered separate from the Task Force, but reported to the Task Force Commander at Fire Station 88.

In 1988, the Tractor Company again "closed" and the Operators were assigned back to Task Force 88, (one on each shift). The Fire Road Maintenance Program was contracted out to the Los Angeles County Fire Department. When tractors were needed for either brush fires or overhauls, Light Force 88 would "close" to support the requested tractor operations.

In 1995, Deputy Chief Donald F. Anthony, Bureau of Fire Suppression and Rescue, began rebuilding the Tractor Company by requesting a new Peterbilt transport and trailer.

Chief Anthony transferred Captain II Richard Cotterall to Fire Station 88

in 1996 to "revitalize" the Tractor Company. Due to the cost associated with contracting out the fire roads, the Operators began maintaining the 36 miles of fire roads at a considerable savings. Within a few years, the number of miles of fire roads grew to 41 miles, not counting the



**2002 CATERPILLER D-8 BULLDOZER
LAFD DOZER 11**

access roads located in Debs Park.

Upon Chief Anthony's retirement, Deputy Chief Robert Neamy took over and continued the support for the Tractor Company. By 1999, a new Dozer Tender was in service. By the year 2000, an additional Operator was assigned to each shift at Fire Station 88 bringing the total number of Operators back up to six.

In 2003, the Heavy Equipment Company was tasked with aiding

in the rescue of an elephant at the Los Angeles Zoo. Using a large loader and a special net owned by the Zoo, members lifted the elephant back onto its feet. These actions saved the life of the pachyderm and

made the Fire Department the recipient of congratulatory messages from many who watched the televised rescue.

During the four years following the additional Operators being assigned, the Heavy Equipment Company received another Dozer

Tender and two new Murray dozer trailers. In addition, the Department acquired a Case Backhoe, 931-track loader, a 10-yard dump truck and a 4000-gallon water tender from salvage.

In January of 2004, Chief Neamy retired and Deputy Chief Mario Rueda was assigned to command the Bureau of

Emergency Services. Chief Rueda continued support for the Heavy Equipment Company and under the direction of Fire Chief William R. Bamattre, the Wildland Fuel Management Unit was created. Captain Cotterall was transferred from Fire Station 88 to command the Wildland Fuel Management Unit. This Unit now reports to the Departments Special Operations Division.

Today's Heavy Equipment Company consists of a Captain II assigned to a special-duty schedule, and 6 Operators assigned to Fire Station 88 (2 on each shift). Using variable staffing hours, these members work for the Wildland Fuel Management Unit for 12 hours a day, 5 days a week. An Equipment Mechanic assigned to the Valley Shops does the bulk of the required maintenance work on the heavy equipment.

Currently, the following equipment is assigned to the Wildland Fuel Management Unit:



2002 CATERPILLER IT 28 WORKING ON A LAND-SLIDE AFTER A RAINSTORM



- 1 - Suburban (soon to be replaced by a 4-wheel drive pickup truck)
- 1 - D-8R Caterpillar Bulldozer
- 2 - D-7F Caterpillar Bulldozers
- 3 - Peterbilt Truck Tractors
- 2 - Low Boy Murray Trailers
- 1 - 48' Sliding Axle Trailking Trailer
- 1 - Caterpillar 955 Track Loader (soon to be replaced by a new Caterpillar 953C)
- 1 - Caterpillar 931B Track Loader
- 1 - Caterpillar IT 28 Wheel Loader / Fork Lift
- 1 - Case 590 Wheel Loader / Backhoe
- 1 - 5-yard International Dump Truck
- 1 - 10-yard Peterbilt Dump Truck
- 1 - 4000-Gallon Peterbilt Water Tender
- 2 - Ford F-350 Dozer Tenders
- 1 - Caterpillar Motor Grader

Past major incidents and current work responsibilities for the Heavy Equipment Company include the following:

Department dozers have responded to major brush fires in the City, and throughout the Southern California area, during the last several years. These fires included the Marple fire (in Castaic), Pine Fire (San Diego), Shannon Valley Fire (Palmdale), Victory Fire in Fire Station 105's district, Reseda Fire in Fire Station 93's district, Foothill Fire in Fire Station 91's district, and several other fires from Vandenberg Air Force Base south all the way to San Diego County.

Department dozers have also been used to build sand berms at local beaches, open roads that were washed out due to storms, and divert swift moving water during floods. Other fairly common emergency activity includes responses to overhaul large structure fires, recycling yard fires, fires in baled goods, and cargo truck fires.

Non-emergency tasks include delivering vehicles to training sites for extrication drills, hauling large objects, transporting antique fire vehicles, digging trenches for Urban Search & Rescue training, demolishing buildings, clearing lots, maintaining the 41 miles of fire roads, repairing washed-out fire roads, building and maintaining drains, maintaining fire road gates, hauling broken apparatus, hauling disabled helicopters, and performing routine maintenance on all 21 pieces of assigned apparatus.

During the recent January/February 2005 floods, the Heavy Equipment Company was called on to remove mud slides, pull disabled cars out of mud, protect homes, clear drains, divert water in the Big Tujunga Wash, reopen an abandoned fire road, build drains, and open washed out roads. Between storms, Operators also skillfully overhauled a structure fire for three days. Had this same overhaul been done manually it would have taken many firefighters a week or more to accomplish, and the potential for personal injury would have been increased.

In conclusion, personnel assigned to operate the Department's heavy equipment are tasked with a myriad of important projects and emergency duties. Their commitment to duty, dependability and personal initiative is truly worthy of praise!



Special thanks to Captain Richard Cotterall, a 37-year veteran of the Los Angeles Fire Department and current Commander of the Department's Wildland Fuel Management Unit who provided this month's article.