On October 22, 2007, at approximately 0100 hours, my Strike Team and I were enroute to the Witch Fire in San Diego County. We were traveling east on Highway 78, east of the San Diego Wild Animal Park.

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I attempted to notify MVU ECC on MVU Local net of the new incident. There was no radio acknowledgement from MVU ECC to my recollection. According to telephone records, I contacted MVU ECC via my cell phone to report the new incident at Hwy 78 at Guejito Creek under the power lines. MVU replied that I was at the Witch fire. I advised that I could see the Witch fire five to six miles distant to the east, and that this was, indeed, a new and incipient stage fire, and requested initial attack dispatch of 2 STEN any type closest, 3 WT any type closest, 4 hand crews, 4 dozers type 2, in addition to my engine Strike Team. I assumed the "78" IC.

I deployed some my Strike Team resources to hold the fire on the south side of Hwy 78, and instructed the remainder of resources to turn around to head west to triage life and property risk potential.

A few minutes later the fire crossed the road to the north side of Hwy 78. Resources at scene were unable to catch the fire due to access (steep cut bank) and rate of spread. At this point there were several miles of headlights in the oncoming west-bound traffic (evacuees). We turned all evacuees around to travel east on Hwy 78, as both sides of Hwy 78 were now on fire, with fire progressing to the west.

I recontacted MVU to inquire about additional resources that were requested. MVU advised we were on our own unless we were able to flag down other resources that may be en route to the Witch fire,; MVU suggested ST3462C, ST 2025C, ST2330C.

I established the Incident Command Post (ICP) at Hwy 78 at a turnout (Witman Ranch?).Two of my Strike Team engines were in the Ranch for structure protection.

Battalion Chief "Gerry" (619) 980-3710, City of San Diego Fire, arrived an unknown amount of time later, and stated this was the "San Pasqual" fire. He confirmed that it was within the SD city limits. I offered to assist as needed, but that this was now his incident. I advised of current sit-stat and resources.
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Animal Park, protect the City of Escondido, and local archaeological sites in the area. Gerry did not want to assume IC, BC O'Leary advised him that we were there as resources to him, and reiterated that this was San Diego City's responsibility..

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I requested a change of tactical frequencies to provide common communication from Gerry, the IC. He stated that he was now the "East" Branch and that I could communicate with him only on White 1. I advised we were following the forward progress of the fire and had assigned my ST resources along the dynamic leading edge for life and property protection. We deployed primarily in the area of the Orfila Winery at 13455 San Paqual Road for structure protection and rescue of a reporter trapped by fire.

Later in the early morning hours (before sunrise) I was recontacted by Gerry who assigned me as Division Z, to report to Tom (Bat 6, Escondido FD) who was now the Escondido Structure Branch. I was advised that this was now the "Guejito" incident, and that Chief Brewster was the Guejito IC on White 1. My assigned resources were: ST 9270C, ST 2330C, ST 2004C, ST 2025C, ST 4800A. During the early morning hours I was also given ST 9374G, ST 9375G. Later that afternoon I was given ST 9210C. My assigned division was from Sierra Linda in the City of Escondido on the west, to San Pasqual Valley Rd. on the north, to Bandy Canyon Rd. on the east, to San Pasqual Rd./Old Milky Way on the south.

We remained assigned to the Escondido Structure Branch until approximately 0400 on October 22 when we were reassigned immediate need to the Poomacha Incident in Valley Center.

Respectfully,

Suzanne Todd
Battalion Chief
CAL FIRE
Amador-El Dorado Unit

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CAL FIRE
Amador-El Dorado Unit

Notes:

The following sequence of events commenced at approximately 0105 hours on October 22, 2007.

- while enroute to the Witch Fire
- traveling east on Highway 78 east of the San Diego Wild Animal Park
- several miles of headlights in oncoming WB traffic (evacuees)
- saw multiple flashes in general direction of travel, flashes similar to lightening
- approximately two turns in road ahead of our location upon first notice of flashes
- travel time from flash to arrival at fire approximately 30 seconds
- came upon a small fire (size of a small vehicle) underneath the power lines
- south side of roadway, west side of Guajito Creek bridge
- Attempted to notify MVU ECC on MVU Local net of new incident. No radio acknowledgement to my recollection.
- Deployed ST resources to hold fire on south side of Hwy 78, remainder of resources to turn around to head west, triage life and property risk potential.
- Made contact with MVU (via cell?) to report new incident at Hwy 78 at Guejito Creek under the power lines. MVU replied that I was at the Witch fire. I advised that I could see the Witch fire five to six miles distant to the east, and that this was, indeed, a new and incipient stage fire, and requested initial attack dispatch of 2 STEN any type closest, 3 WT any type closest, 4 hand crews, 4 dozers type 2, in addition to my engine Strike Team. I assumed the "78" IC.
- Fire crossed to north side of Hwy 78
- Recontact with MVU to inquire about additional resources that were requested. MVU advised we were on our own unless we can flag down other resources that may be en route to the Witch fire,; MVU suggested ST3462C, ST 2025C, ST2330C.
- Turned all evacuees around to travel east on Hwy 78, as both sides of Hwy were now on fire, fire progressing to the west.
- Established ICP at Hwy 78 at a turnout (Witman Ranch?).
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Roster for ST 9270C
Guajito/San Pasqual/78 Fire
Start date: October 22, 0105 hours

Suzanne Todd	Strike Team Leader	530.919.4511
Justin Sanders	Fire Captain E2761	916.844.8283
Timothy Yee	Firefighter E2761	916.844.8547
Silverio Hererra	Firefighter E2761	916.837.5281
Jose Madrid	FAE E2771	530.417.3215
Erik Fiedler	Firefighter E2771	530.306.8129
Nicole Lozano	Firefighter E2771	916.508.3455
Rob Wheatley	Fire Captain E2782	530.277.8625
Scott Hertzog	Firefighter E2782	209.304.9719
Dustin Benke	Firefighter E2782	916.337.7231
Mark Brooks	Fire Captain E2753	530.417.3421
Tim McNew	Firefighter E2753	unk
Walker Exstrom	Firefighter E2753	530.417.1573
Julie Pyevach	FAE E2784	916.837.5109
Greg Schwegler	Firefighter E2784	530.957.0104
Jason Podesta	Firefighter E2784	209.768.6091

On 10-21-07 I was dispatched to the Witch Fire as part of ST 9270C. I was the operator on E2782 along with my two FF1's, Scott Hertzog and Dustin Benke. We were traveling East on Hwy.78, outside of Escondido and somewhere past the "Wild Animal Park", at approximately 0030-0100. E2782 was the last of five engines being led by B2711. The Hwy. was closed to all but evacuation traffic so there was no other traffic headed East bound, but there was an almost solid line of traffic headed West bound, towards us. The Hwy. at this point, is a two lane road and slightly winding. We could see the Witch Fire coming over the ridge several miles off in the distance. I then saw a flash in the sky similar to lightning. I asked the firefighters if they saw it and they said yes. At this point I commented that it was probably power lines slapping, as the sky was clear, so it was unlikely that it was lightning and the wind was blowing in excess of 45mph. We then saw a whole series of flashes in the sky, approx. 4-5 flashes. It appeared to be just around the corner and over a spur ridge, from our location. As we rounded the corner we saw several large power lines hanging low over the road. The other engines were on the far side of the lines along with our Strike Team Leader. Cars were still driving under the lines and it appeared that the lines might fall further so I pulled my engine diagonal across the lane to block East bound traffic, and then called the lead engine, E2761, and asked him to block West bound traffic. As I was doing this my firefighters said "fire". I looked to my right, and saw a fire approximately 3'X3', under the power lines as they sagged towards the ground. The fire was approximately 150'-200' off the road, on the South side.

The fire was burning in what appeared to be drainage or wash. The fuel was grass, brush and woody debris. I notified the Strike Team Leader and heard her call the fire in, on MVU Local. I told my firefighters to stand by, as we could not attack the fire due to the proximity of the power lines. Within seconds of my first seeing the fire, it was producing flame lengths of 30'-50' and running with the wind. I met face to face with a local Battalion Chief that was assigned to the Witch Fire and was traveling West bound, towards Escondido. Our Strike Team Leader pulled up next to us and I was assigned to take three engines and keep the fire to the South side of Hwy.78. The local BC stated that he was assigned to the Witch Fire, 5-6 miles East of our location, so our Strike Team Leader would have to take I.C. I returned to my engine and took two other engines to try and hold the road.

It had only been 5-10 minutes since we first saw the fire. I estimated the fire to be 15-20 acres, moving West. The fire was exhibiting extreme fire behavior, and spotting several hundred feet in front of itself. By the time we turned engines around and moved down the road, it had already spotted across the road in several places. All three engines attacked the spots and were able to pick them up. Just as we finished picking up the spots, a Strike Team of OES engines from Sacramento pulled up and helped hold the road. The fire had now run into an orchard and a sod farm, which funneled it away from the road and into a narrow wash approximately 300' wide.

We left the OES Strike Team to hold the road and continued back down Hwy. 78, West bound, towards Escondido, in an attempt to get ahead of the fire. We found a dirt road approximately 1/3 of a mile in front of the fires head. The road cut through the wash and tied into a sod farm. I scouted it out and decided that this would be a good place to try a firing operation. I notified the I.C. of our intentions and

after getting approval we fired the road in front of the main fire. When we started firing, the main fire was still several hundred yards away. We fired the road from the sod farm over to the orchard near Hwy 78 without problem. We had 50' of good black when the main fire hit. It never even slowed down. First it spotted everywhere and then the fire front hit and washed right past us. We left one engine to protect a structure as the fire moved by and headed back out to Hwy. 78 to try, once again, to get in front of the fire. We took the rest of the strike team West on 78 towards Escondido. As we passed the fire front again, we saw spot fires on the side of a mountain over half a mile in front of the fire. At this point we realized that our only option now was to start structure protection and evacuation in front of the fire.

Our next stop was San Pasqual Valley Rd. several miles in front of the fire. The wind continued to blow in excess of 45mph, and the fire behavior became even more extreme with flame lengths over 100'. We spent the next 30 hours in the San Pasqual and East Escondido area before being reassigned to the Poomacha Fire.

Rob Wheatley
Fire Captain

1-26-08

On October 22, 2007 @ approximately 0100 hours while assigned to Strike Team 9270C, on Engine 2761, I (Justin Sanders, Fire Captain) witnessed the following:

While driving E2761 East on Highway 78 towards the “Witch” fire, I saw two bright flashes of light approximately 3 minutes apart in front of me. I thought the bright flashes of light were Arcing Power Lines. I continued to drive towards the “Witch” fire and when I passed the "Wild Animal Park" on Hwy 78, I saw on the opposite side of the road, a small 40' X 40' fire burning under the High Voltage Power Lines. The High Voltage Power Lines were on the ground and they were in the middle of the fire. With the current weather conditions and the dangers of working around live High Voltage Power Lines, the Strike Team of Engines utilized defensive firefighting tactics (Indirect Attack) to try and put out the fire.

Justin Sanders 2/10/2008

Justin Sanders
Fire Captain
CAL-FIRE
(530)622-3858

Witness detail of Witch & Guejito fires – October 2007

I was at home on the evening of October 21 2007 during a Santa Anna wind event. Earlier that afternoon I witnessed smoke coming from Ramona. The news reported that a fire had started near Witch Creek, east of Ramona. It was named the Witch fire. The Santa Anna winds were carrying the Witch fire smoke in a west – southwest direction, just south of my home.

10:00 p.m.
The winds continued to blow harder, and the smoke was beginning to settle in the San Pasqual valley where my home is. Once darkness fell, the glow of the Witch fire was visible east of our home in the Clevenger Canyon. I heard a report that the fire would eventually crest the hills above San Pasqual, and head toward Highland valley – so I began to prepare the house.

12:45 a.m.
While outside my home I saw a couple of flashes in the direction of our corn field (west of the house). The flashes were in the area of the power lines that run east-west over our property. The wind continued to pick up speed.

1:00 a.m.
While outside my home I witnessed another flash in the direction of our corn field (west of the house). The flash appeared to be an arc from a power line down to the ground. This time the flash resulted in a fire start. The fire grew very rapidly. Once it was established I could see that it had started in the Guejito creek, just west of our property. The fire started down the riverbed, in a southwest direction.

1:30 a.m.
The head of the fire that started in the Guejito creek was almost out of sight. It appeared to have met with the Santa Ysabel creek which bisects the Guejito creek.

2:30 a.m.
The Witch fire was cresting the hills above the San Pasqual Academy – on the south side of the San Pasqual Valley. The fire began to back down the north-facing slopes, and continue west along the ridge.

2:55 a.m.
The Witch fire had backed all the way down the slopes, and met with the San Pasqual Academy. The fire at the top of the ridge was continuing west. Embers were reaching our property from the Witch fire.

5:00 a.m.
Smoke from the Witch fire had become very thick – as a result, not much of the fire was visible anymore. Embers were showering down on our property. The wind continued to pick up speed. A strike team of engines came to our house.

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6:00 a.m.
The strike team of engines departed from our house. It appeared that part of the Witch fire was still making its way down from Clevenger canyon – east of our property.

7:30 a.m.
We could hear the Witch fire coming from the east. The wind picked up to about 70 mph, embers and debris was blowing in every direction.

7:45 a.m.
The Witch fire came full force down the Santa Ysabel creek. It leaped over the highway 78 bridge (just east of our property) and continued down the riverbed toward the west. The fire was also coming from the cemetery across the highway (east of our property).

8:15 a.m.
The main front of the fire had passed us, and continued to the west. The store across the highway (north of our property) was fully engulfed. My uncle's house just west of our house was fully engulfed. We continued to put out spot fires.

Tyson Short

Tyson Short – landowner
17331 San Pasqual Valley Road
Escondido, CA 92027

October 21 & 22nd 2007

On Sunday, October 21st 2007 I was at my home on 17331 San Pasqual Valley Rd. I was with my daughter, my mother-in-law, and my husband. The Witch fire that started earlier that afternoon was visible to the east once it grew dark. The smoke that had stayed to the south of us all day was now blowing in our direction. Around 9:30 p.m. my husband started to prepare the outside of the house just in case the fire made it to us. I stayed inside with my daughter and mother-in-law.

About 1:05 a.m. on Monday the 22nd my husband came inside to wake me, and tell me that the Guejito creek east of our property was on fire. I looked out the window, and saw the fire well established, and running in a southwest direction. I began to pack a bag, and prepare to leave.

At 2:30a.m. I departed from our home, daughter & mother-in-law in tow. We attempted to go west on Highway 78, but were turned around by fire crews. We then headed east on 78, past our house. That's when I saw the Witch fire to the east cresting on the hills above the San Pasqual Academy, starting do descend down the hills. I turned and headed west on Bandy Canyon Rd.

At 2:45 a.m. we were driving approximately 1 mile east of Fenton Ranch (Bandy Canyon) still on Bandy Canyon Rd. At that time I could see that the fire that started in the Guejito Creek had made it's way into the Santa Ysabel Creek, and traveled west to the point where it was parallel to my location on Bandy Canyon Rd. The fire continued west down the creek, and was breaching the riverbed in a southwest direction through a field, toward Bandy Canyon Rd. in the Highland Valley direction. We crested the top of Bandy Canyon near the intersection of Highland Valley Rd. knowing it would only be a matter of minutes before the fire would travel up the hill in our direction. Smoke and embers were cast ahead of the fire.

At 3:10 a.m. I arrived at my parent's home at 20891 Viento Valle. From there I could see that the fire in the Santa Ysabel Creek had reached the top of Highland Valley, and crossed over Bandy Canyon Rd. like I thought it would. The same fire also continued west down the Santa Ysabel riverbed, heading toward Lake Hodges.

Lynnette T. Short

Lynnette Short
Homeowner
17331 San Pasqual Valley Rd.