

■ LAFD fire companies work fast to knock down a major fire in the hills between Hollywood and Burbank.

Photos by Mike Corral



A lone fireman tries to knock down part of the Cahuenga Pass fire March 30.

Hollywood Fire

FIRE DEPT. — “I’ve spent more than 30 years in this department. It was amazing how fast the fire spread over the terrain,” said Battalion Chief Christopher Kawai, one of the leaders in the fight to knock down a major fire in the Cahuenga Pass near Hollywood, Burbank and Universal City.

“Within seconds, it went from small to the whole hillside burning. It was just so dry there, and the terrain was steep.

“It burned 258 acres,” he said. “But not one structure was lost. That’s absolutely phenomenal.”

At 12:55 p.m. March 30, 71 LAFD companies, seven LAFD rescue ambulances, three arson units, two rehab units, five LAFD helicopters, two LA County helicopters, four EMS battalion captains, nine battalion chief officer command teams, two division chief officer command teams, one deputy chief, LA County Fire, Burbank Fire, one CERT coordinator, and a variety of support staff including dozers, brush patrols and command post vehicles, all under the direction of Dep. Chief Mario Rueda, responded to a major emergency brush Fire at 3640 N. Barham Blvd. in the Cahuenga Pass.

In route to this fire, firefighters noticed a relatively small “loom-up” and, recognizing the potential hazards in this area, immediately requested additional fire companies and air support. Firefighters arrived on scene to find approximately one-quarter of medium/heavy brush burning towards the Oakwood Garden Apartments. Firefighters took up a defensive position by providing immediate structure protection for the apartment complex, thereby preventing damage to the threatened structure.

Even though winds were fairly light, humidity in the high teens, and temperatures in low 80s, the fire quickly engulfed the surrounding brush. Three hundred firefighters on the ground, aided by seven water-dropping helicopters, worked in concert for five hours to contain this fire and prevent the spread into adjacent structure. The fire rapidly consumed vegetation, which had not been burned for many years and created heavy, thick smoke that covered the Hollywood Freeway and local streets creating extremely hazardous conditions



Fire Department leadership gathers to map their strategy.



An LAFD fire engine sends the water where it’s needed most.

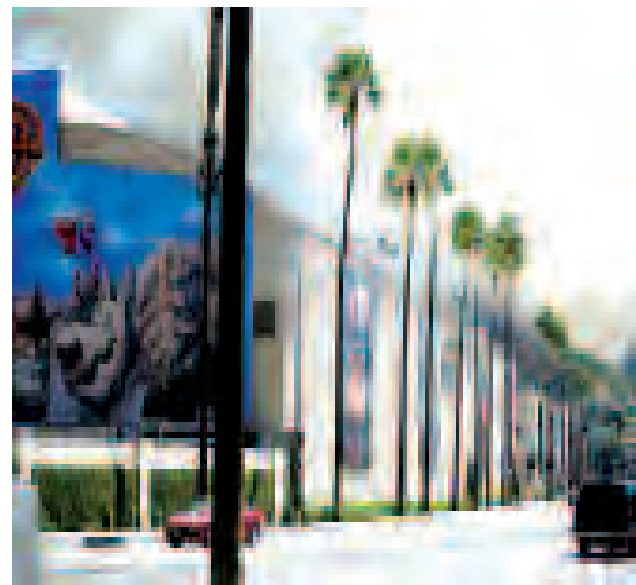
for firefighters. In all, more than 400 firefighters participated in the firefight and the overhaul of this fire, working tirelessly throughout the night to ensure that no flare-ups would occur.

One Chief Officer was injured when a hose line burst and overturned the cart he was riding in. The injured member was taken to St. Joseph’s Medical Center, treated for a large laceration to his ear, neck and back pain, and was later released. The Chief Officer, due to retire in a few days, required stitches and was placed off duty, culminating 41 years of dedication and service to the LAFD family and the Los Angeles community.

Witnesses reported two youths running from the area just after the fire started, according to the LAFD report. As firefighters were fighting the fire, two boys, 16 and 17, turned themselves into the Burbank Police Department and admitted starting the fire, according to the Fire Dept.

“It really showed our efforts to work together,” Battalion Chief Kawai said, referring to all the different agencies that came together to fight the fire. Those agencies included L.A. County FD, the Burbank FD, the Mayor’s Office, Transportation, and Rec and Parks. “Post-9/11 and Katrina, these agencies really focused on working together better.

“These efforts are really paying off. The crews did a fantastic job. That was some great firefighting.”



Smoke casts a pall over Warner Bros. Studios, just up the road from the fire.

