

# Newsletter



## Southern California Association of Foresters & Fire Wardens

### OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

2012-2013

#### OFFICERS

President Robert Michael—RRU  
First Vice President Frank Vidales—LAC  
Second Vice Pres.— Tom Plymale—LPF  
Secretary Gordon Martin—CNF  
Treasurer David Leininger—LAC retired

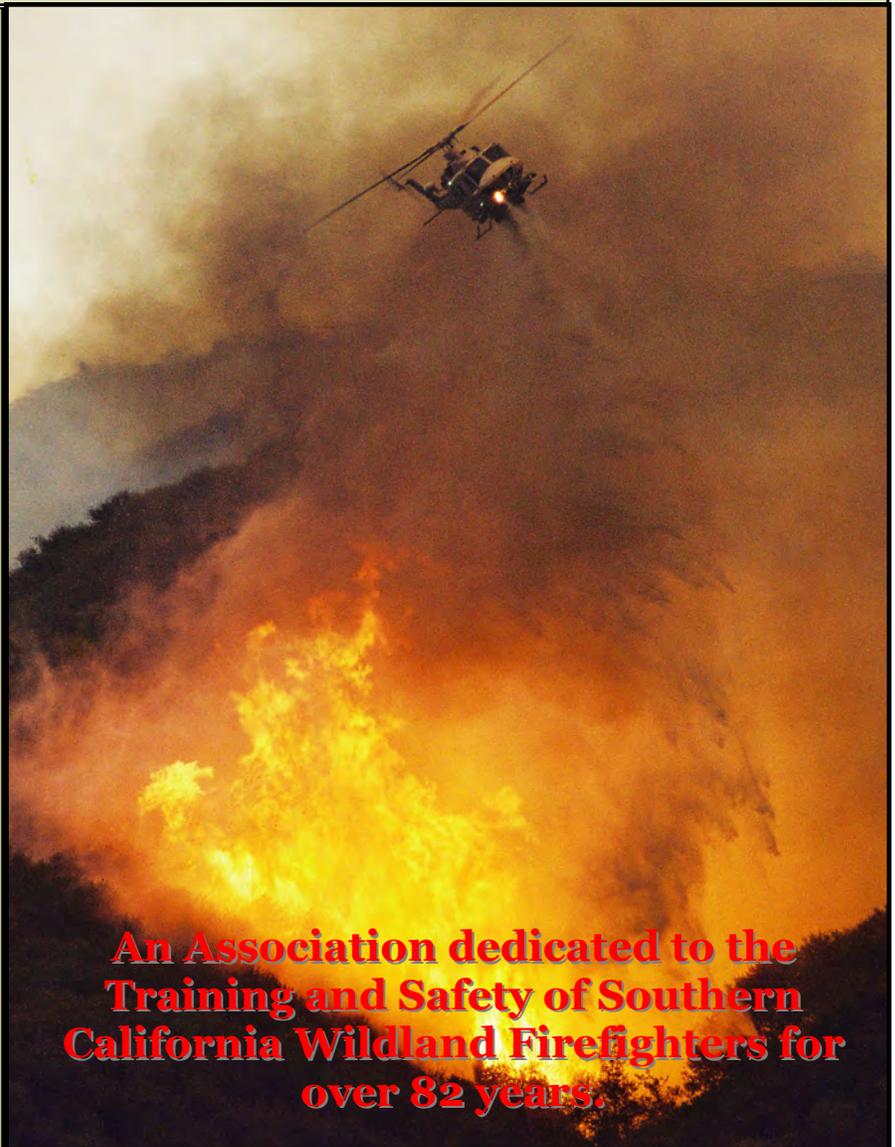
#### DIRECTORS

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Dan Snow—BDF  
Brian Skerston—ANF  
Bart Kicklighter—SQF  
David Allen—MVU  
Ken Cruz—ORC  
Dave Witt—KRN  
Vaughan Miller—VNC  
Tim Ernst—LFD  
Ron Janssen—BDU  
Chris Childers - SBC  
Abigail Srader—CSR  
Steve Reeder—SLU  
Ed Shabro—Vendor Representative  
Paul H. Rippens—Newsletter Editor  
Doug Lannon—Arrangements  
Don Forsyth—Arrangements/Safety

*We, the members of the Southern California Association of Foresters and Fire Wardens, do band together for the purpose of strengthening inter-agency cooperation, fire safety coordination, and fellowship.*



**The Agony of Engine 57—an interview with John Maclean— page 6**



**An Association dedicated to the  
Training and Safety of Southern  
California Wildland Firefighters for  
over 82 years.**

Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Southern California  
Association of Foresters and Fire Wardens  
April 5, 2013, Orange County, California

## Fire Whirls

By President Robert Michael



We're just days away from our Annual Wildland Fire Training and Safety Conference and to say I'm excited about this year's conference would be an understatement. This is going to be one of the best conferences this association has offered, and I'm extremely proud of the board members who have dedicated so much time and effort towards this event. I just hope you're making plans to attend.

Making a move to a new conference site has been a real challenge this year. Everything is different and we hope all of you who attend will be pleased with the Irvine Ranch Outdoor Education Center. Again, our board members have put in countless hours making sure that everything will be perfect for this conference. From the outstanding speakers, entertaining Master of Ceremonies, exhibits and demonstrations, to the evening events with the usual Bingo and music provided by the band *Full House*, this is going to be a special conference.

This year has been special for me with the opportunity to serve as president. This is not a job to be taken lightly and I want to take this time to thank the Board of Directors and those who fill appointed positions for their hard work and their help in keeping things running smoothly. I could not have done my job without their help.

Several years ago we began a "new era" for the Foresters & Fire Wardens when we presented a new format for our newsletter. Prior to that time the newsletter consisted of only the minutes of our board meetings. Now we have a beautiful, color publication with stories that we hope you find

interesting. Besides the newsletter, we have our web site ([www.SCAFFW.org](http://www.SCAFFW.org)) that has recently been completely revamped, we have a Facebook page, and we're on Twitter. This enables us to reach more people and, hopefully, draw more interest to our organization. Again, this only happens because of the dedication of board members and appointed positions, and I again thank them for their dedicated service.

So, in my last article for *Fire Whirls*, I say thank you for the opportunity to serve as president and thank you to everyone who works so hard to keep the Southern California Association of Foresters and Fire Wardens running.

### Early Start to Fire Season?

Fire officials had an early start to fire season with a 300-acre wildfire near Jurupa Hills in Riverside County. The fire started on February 28 along the vegetated Santa Ana River bottom between Riverside and an unincorporated part of Riverside County and was 80% contained by March 2. Jody Hagemann, a spokeswoman for the Riverside County Fire Department said a team of six engines, two fire crews and two water tenders continued to "work on some hot spots" amid temperatures forecast to rise into the 80s. At its peak, the fire pitched flames as high as 30 feet and quickly spread through the south end of the Rancho Jurupa Regional Park, northwest of Riverside Municipal Airport.





Joe Lackie and T.T.O. Gordon Rowley on the Monrovia Fire in 1958. Tanker 2-11 - Lower San Antonio 1949 Ford MH with Edwards 120 A Slip on unit. On Rincon to Red Box Truck Trail—ANF—doing mop up. *Gordon T. Rowley*

## 2013 ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF FORESTERS AND FIRE WARDENS

The Board of Directors is working on the **83rd Annual Wildland Fire Training and Safety Conference** that will be held on **May 2 & 3, 2013** at the *Irvine Ranch Outdoor Education Center* in Orange County, California. We're excited about the proposed programs and the new conference site. If you have any questions, please contact us through our e-mail address at [SCAFFW@aol.com](mailto:SCAFFW@aol.com)



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You can now go directly to our web site by scanning the QRC (quick response code) with your smart phone.



“Like” us on Facebook at  
**Southern CA Foresters and Fire Wardens**

*Did you or are you thinking of changing your E-mail address? Please remember to contact the SCAFFW at [SCAFFW@aol.com](mailto:SCAFFW@aol.com) and let us know so we can send you your newsletters and other important information.*



**Cover Photo** LAC Copter 17 delivers an accurate drop on a large open flank of fire saving several vacation cabins during the 1999 Bridge Fire in the ANF above Azusa. Photo by Ken Morris.

**SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF FORESTERS AND FIRE WARDENS  
83rd ANNUAL WILDLAND TRAINING AND SAFETY CONFERENCE.**

# May 2 & 3, 2013

Check our web site for further information [www.scaffw.org](http://www.scaffw.org)

**SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION  
of FORESTERS & FIRE WARDENS-  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING  
April 5, 2013**

The meeting of the Southern California Association of Foresters and Fire Wardens was called to order by President Robert Michael at 0915 hours at Orange County's, Irvine Ranch Outdoor Education Center Irvine, California on April 5, 2013.

**Officers and Directors Present:**

Paul H. Rippens – Newsletter Editor  
David Witt – Kern County Fire Dept.  
Dan Snow – San Bernardino National Forest  
Gordon Martin – Cleveland National Forest.  
Rod Megli – Ventura County Fire Dept.  
David Leininger – Treasurer  
Vaughan Miller – Publicity Chair  
Doug Lannon – Arrangements Chair  
Frank Vidales – Los Angeles County Fire Dept.  
Robert Michael – CAL FIRE – Riverside County  
Ken Cruz – Orange County Fire Authority  
Don Forsyth – Safety Chair  
Troy Whitman – Southern California Edison  
Ed Shabro – Vendor Representative  
Bart Kicklighter – Sequoia National Forest

**Officers and Directors Absent:**

Abigail Srader – CAL FIRE – Southern Region  
Steve Reeder – CAL FIRE – San Luis Obispo Co.  
Tom Plymale – Los Padres National Forest  
Tim Ernst – Los Angeles Fire Dept.  
Dave Allen – CAL FIRE – San Diego County  
Chris Childers – Santa Barbara County Fire Dept  
Ron Jansen – CAL FIRE – San Bernardino Co.  
Brian Skerston – Angeles National Forest

**Guests:**

Kenny Duvall – Life Member and Past President (2001).

**Minutes:** President Michael presented the minutes of the February 1, 2013 meeting. Motion by Director Whitman, seconded by Director Magli to approve the minutes. The motion was approved.

**Treasurer's Report:** Treasurer Leininger presented his report covering February 1, 2013 to April 5, 2013.

Balance as of 2-1-13	\$26,798.10
<b>Receipts:</b>	
Dues and Conference Registration:	\$2,902.40
Total Receipts:	\$2,902.40
<b>Disbursements:</b>	
TIROEC (Meeting Room)	\$300.00
Jim Bunte (Web Site Development)	\$900.00

Dave Leininger (Registration Supplies)	\$274.65
Dave Leininger (Conference Insurance)	\$300.00
Total Disbursements:	\$1,774.65
Balance on hand:	\$27,925.85
Last year at this time:	\$22,474.35

Motion by Director Whitman, second by 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Vidales to approve the treasurer's report as presented. The motion was approved.

**Committee Reports:**

**Arrangements:** Chairman Lannon reported that things were going well. President Michael confirmed that he would have the radios again this year. Chairman Lannon stated that the bike patrol would be available. Director Megli confirmed that Ventura County would provide one van this year and Director Cruz stated that he could provide a second if needed. Co-Chairman Forsyth stated that the OCFA hand crew is available to help with the conference and camp cleanup. He also confirmed that the overflow parking at Irvine Park. President Michael will ensure that six "pine tree" signs will be ready for the conference. Chairman Lannon will take care of the signage within the Conference. Director Snow will get an electric sign set up near the park entrance.

**Program:** First Vice President Vidales went over the program to confirm the agenda. Orange County Fire Authority will provide the Honor Guard and Pipes and Drums. They will also provide a chaplain to give the invocation. The emcee will be Steve Martin. The keynote speaker will be Will Metz, Forest Supervisor, Cleveland National Forest. George Broyles will speak on smoke impacts on firefighter health. Second Vice President Plymale and Vendor Representative Shabro will introduce the vendors. Drew Smith and Don Boursier will give a presentation on Advanced Fire Technology. Author John Maclean will speak about his new book *The Esperanza Fire – Arson, Murder and the Agony of Engine 57*. There will be demonstrations outside of a helicopter hoist rescue and Fire Block gel. Friday we will have Fireline Factors from Brad Mayhew. Drew Smith will give this year's fuel and weather update. Gordon Graham will present on Risk Management in the Fire Service. Everyone responsible for a speaker needs to have them fill out a speaker sheet and get them into First Vice President Vidales. He will check with some of the absent Directors to see if anyone might have a backup presentation.

**Exhibits and Demonstrations:** Representative Shabro reported that we are looking good with 14 vendors confirmed so far. We need to find out about the availability of tables and chairs from the Center, vendors will need to provide their own shade. Co-Chairman Forsyth is arranging to have 5-10 antique fire engines for display. He and President Michael will check on the availability of agency rigs for display.

**Registration and Membership:** Treasurer Leininger reported that he has ordered the registration supplies that Director Srader needed. Online registrations are down over this time last year. Editor Rippens suggested that a questionnaire be circulated to find out how the membership feels about the new site. This will be done on-line following the conference.

**Entertainment and Raffle:** There will be no movies shown this year. Full House will be the band at this year's conference.

**Publicity:** Chairman Miller reported that the Facebook page and the web site are up and running and the flyer is out and being circulated. He will be including information on the program content, the band, the vendors, etc. He asked that the departments repeat our message on Twitter.

**Historian:** Historian Whitman reported that he was able to recover 90% of the pictures from last year's conference. He will be taking pictures again this year and requested that the board members let him know if any VIPs are attending that should be photograph.

**Safety:** Chairman Forsyth reported that we will have a CHP or Sheriff's officer to give the safety speech. There will not be any on-site paramedics this year due to the availability of 911 service in the area.

**Golf:** Director Snow reported that interest in the golf tournament is way down this year and requested that all of the directors push the tournament with their agencies. If we cannot get at least 30 golfers registered by the 15<sup>th</sup> we will need to cancel the tournament. The golf tournament will be held at the Green River Golf Course this year.

**Newsletter:** Editor Rippens stated that the newsletter is ready to go except for the meeting minutes. He requested that people send him articles to be included in future newsletters.

**Old Business:** There was a discussion on the gift for this year. We have challenge coins left from two years ago and thumb drives left from last year. It was previously approved that the coins be sold for \$5.00 each and a motion was passed, introduced by Director Cruz and seconded by Director Whitman that the thumb drives be sold for \$5.00. The band would be considered the board's gift to the membership. A motion was made by Director Whitman and seconded by Director Witt to authorize up to \$200 to Director Snow to have the speaker plaques produced. The motion passed. There was a discussion on Director wear. A motion was made by First Vice President Vidales, seconded by Director Kicklighter that the Directors wear nice long blue denim pants. The motion passed. There was a motion by First Vice President Vidales, seconded by Director Whitman that we go with the green polo shirt with the pine tree logo and the words "Southern California Association of Foresters and Fire Wardens" "Established 1930". The motion passed.

**Life Membership Recommendations:** There were no Life Member nominations.

**New Business:** Chairman Miller reported that he had received an offer for exchange of service from Wildland-Fire.com that they would give the conference billing on their home page in exchange for a booth at our vendor fair. It was so moved by Director Megli and seconded by Director Witt. The motion passed. Director Megli announced that he would be stepping down as the Director for Ventura County and that Vaughn Miller would be taking over. Chairman Forsyth announced that he had represented the Association at the funeral of Life Member Jerry Logan. Anyone that has had a line of duty death this year should get the names into President Michael as soon as possible for reading at the opening of the conference.

**Next Meeting:** The next meeting of the Board of Directors of the Southern California Association of Foresters and Fire Wardens will be held May 1, 2013 in Orange County, CA at 1600.

President Michael thanked Director Cruz for making the arrangements for the meeting. He also thanked Chairman Lannon, Treasurer Leininger and Chairman Forsyth for their work on arraignments. The meeting was adjourned at 1205 in the memory of Life Member Jerry Logan.

Respectfully submitted,  
Gordon P. Martin,  
Association Secretary



Photo by Ken Morris

## The Agony of Engine 57: Documenting the Esperanza Fire

### *Book Details Arsonist's Conviction for the Murder of Five Firefighters*

By Steve Wilent

From The Forestry Source, January 2013.

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John N. Maclean's *The Esperanza Fire: Arson, Murder, and the Agony of Engine 57* is not a book about a wildfire. It is much more than that. With a keen eye and ear for detail and raw emotion, Maclean dissects the tragic circumstances surrounding the deaths of five firefighters in 2006 after a wind-driven fire burned over their position on a ridge amidst a sea of chaparral and a few trees. Whether or not you've ever been on the front line of a wildfire, this book is a gut wrenching, compelling narrative. It reads like a taut murder mystery, a whodunit novel you can't put down, with a cast of fascinating characters that includes shady suspects, a dogged detective, DNA evidence, a divided jury, and the victim's grieving family, friends, and colleagues.

The fire, stated by an arsonist on October 26, 2006, burned about 42,000 acres and destroyed 34 homes. The arsonist was caught, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death. Maclean, a seasoned journalist with storytelling in his blood, spent six years piecing together the story of the crime. As for the deaths, he also answers the question "Why?" as well it can be answered—Why did the crew of Engine 57 hold its position on that hilltop, with a fire driven by Santa Ana Winds below them? And was anyone, other than Raymond Lee Oyler, the arsonist, ultimately responsible for the deaths?

Maclean worked as a writer, editor, and reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* for 30 years. During that time he helped his father, Norman, edit *Young Men and Fire*, the elder Maclean's account of the 1949 Mann Gulch Fire in Montana and the

13 men who died there. (Norman Maclean, who died in 1990, may be best known for his book, *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories*, and the 1992 film based on the title story, directed by Robert Redford. In 1995, John Maclean left his job with the *Tribune* to write *Fire on the Mountain: The True Story of the South Canyon Fire*, an account of the deaths of 14 firefighters in Colorado in 1994. Since then he has written *Fire and Ashes: On the Front Lines of American Wildfire* and *The Thirtymile Fire: A Chronicle of Bravery and Betrayal*.

Maclean's fourth book, *The Esperanza Fire*, was released in February. I recently spoke with Maclean about the book and his recounting of events before, during, and after the fire. What follows is a portion of our conversation.



### The Tragedy

According to the *Esperanza Fire incident investigation report prepared by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire)* - the fire occurred within Cal Fire's jurisdiction—the crew of Engine 57, a U.S. Forest Service Type III engine, was overrun by the fire near an isolated, vacant residential structure called the Octagon House. Engine 57's five crew members—Captain Mark Loutzenhiser and firefighters Pablo Cerda, Jason McKay, Jess McLean, and Daniel Najera—were fatally burned during the fire's sudden, intense run up a steep drainage below their position, where the slope averages 50 percent. At the time of the burnover, the fire was several hundred acres in size and burning rapidly in dense chaparral, pushed by north/northeast

*Santa Ana winds of about 13 miles per hour, with gusts up to 31 miles per hour (according to Maclean, some of the firefighters say wind gusts exceeded 50 miles per hour). Relative humidity was between 5 percent and 6 percent. Several spot fires and other factors created an “area ignition.” The fatalities occurred in the rural mountain community of Twin Pines, which is wildland urban intermix with an “extreme threat” rating for potential destructive impacts from wildfires.*

### **What led you to look at the Esperanza Fire?**

With Thirtymile and Esperanza, both of those stories came to me. One of the mothers [of a firefighter] on Thirtymile got in touch with me and said, “The investigation blames our children for their own deaths, accuses them of disobeying a direct order. We don’t think that’s what happened—would you please come and look into this?” In the case of Esperanza, a couple of the engine captains who were with Loutzenhiser on that fire came to me and said, “Are you doing a story on Esperanza?” I said, “No, I’m not.” I had started to look into it, but Cal Fire didn’t want to screw up the prosecution of Raymond Oyler, the arsonist, and they had sent out a memo that told people not to talk to the press and, specifically, not to me.

**The two Forest Service captains, both of whom are close friends of Loutzenhiser, convinced you to continue. You eventually interviewed them, as well as most of the crew members from the other engines who were on the fire that day near Engine 57.**

To me, that’s what makes these stories. You get detail, you get a democratic view of it; you don’t just get a one-person look at it. You get a look from the back of the engine and from the captain’s seats, as well as from the supervisors on the hill, of what was really going on, of what was

going on in people’s minds at the time. The only way you get that is by sitting down with them and spending a long time talking. That’s hard to do, but the results are what I want. And it seems to have resonance with the guys themselves, because in the end you have a text in which they participated. Not everybody who was mentioned in the book got a chance to read it ahead of time, but a lot of the did, and they corrected it. We’re still making corrections on the final galleys. So they’ve bought into it. I get the byline, but I couldn’t have done it without those people.



**I imagine that each person remembers what happened in his or her own way. In Chapter 7 you devote considerable attention to the exchange between Loutzenhiser and Cal Fire Battalion Chief Bob Toups just before the blowover. There’s some controversy about exactly what Toups said at that time, whether or not he told or encouraged Loutzenhiser to abandon the Octagon House. What really happened?**

They had some kind of a talk. Everybody that I’ve talked to, and not just Loutzenhiser’s buddies, said it was the briefing of a lifetime. You know, they went over the 10 [Standard Fire Orders], the 18 [Watch Out Situations], LCES, everything. It didn’t happen quite the way Toups said it did—he claimed a little too much. But there were people going around saying that Bob Toups killed our guys. *That didn’t happen.* That’s *nonsense*. Toups didn’t send him down there, and he sure didn’t tell them to set up at the Octagon.

The engines had been sent down there to do triage, get people out of there, and set up where they thought it was appropriate. That was the order. There wasn’t somebody conducting oversight, with the exception of Bob Toups, who at least questioned where they were and said to

Loutzenhiser, “I’ve just set up four units at the doublewide [a home on a nearby property] and your position seems more exposed.” At minimum, that’s what happened.

**Why did Loutzenhiser, an experienced engine captain, elect to stay at the Octagon House? Was the “can do” attitude that you wrote about in the South Canyon Fire book a factor?**

Absent the area ignition, they would’ve had a very rough time at the Octagon House, but they would’ve made it. There might have been an injury, minor burns, but everybody would’ve lived. You cannot predict an area ignition. They’re not rare, they happen with frequency. When I was in Colorado giving a talk on the fire recently, a guy came up to me—he had fought fire out there—and suggested that [Loutzenhiser and the other captains] were freelancing, that they were not formed up into a formal strike team—all of which is true. *But*, if you’re going to fight fire in Southern California, you’re going to wind up in situations similar to that. I discuss in the book where a Cal Fire engine gets assigned to go down there late, much later than Loutzenhiser and the rest of the engines, when the fire has developed more and you can figure out more about what’s going to happen. They set up directly above the Octagon, and they got hit with the area ignition. But by that time it has spend a lot of its force and they’re not killed. Does that tell you anything? It does me.

There had been a fire there in the 1990s, and Cal Fire had parked an engine down at the end of the driveway [to the Octagon House]. The fire never made it to the house, but it could have. If you’d had a Santa Ana and an area ignition, the same thing could have happened. But Cal Fire parked there. That’s what you do if you fight fire in Southern California.

**After the South Canyon Fire, people asked why were they risking all those lives to put out a fire in scrub oak on steep slopes, saying that the value of the resources didn’t justify that**

**risk. Might the same have applied to the Esperanza Fire?**

And the next time they had a fire there, the Coal Seam Fire [in 2002], that’s exactly the way they behaved. [The incident commander] looked at it and said, “Back off.” They wound up losing 29 structures, but nobody got a hangnail over it.

**You’ve been at the scene of the fire, the Octagon House. Why was it worth risking a single life, once they were certain there were no citizens in harm’s way?**

We all know the three top priorities: protect people’s lives, forest values, and property, in that order. That’s what [firefighters] are paid to do. You cannot fight fire in Southern California without engaging in structure protection.

### **The Trial**

*The deaths of the firefighters, as well as a string of arson and suspected arson fires that summer, spurred an intensive search for a suspect or suspects. Scott Michaels, a Riverside County homicide detective, pursued Oyler despite opposition from other law-enforcement officers. It was largely due to Michael’s efforts that Oyler was arrested on October 31, 2006, just five days after the fatalities. In 2009, Oyler was convicted of five counts of first-degree murder and sentenced to death. He was the first person in the United States to be sentenced to death for wildfire arson. He is currently serving time in California’s San Quentin State Prison.*

**Aside from Oyler, does anyone else bear responsibility for the deaths of the Engine 57 crew.**

Well, there’s a lot of responsibility to be assigned to Oyler. There would not have been a problem if there hadn’t been an arsonist. Did he time it to match the Santa Ana? Was he that sophisticated? Probably not. From his point of view, he got lucky.

I've corresponded with Oyler a lot [since the trial]. He claims that he didn't set the fire. He is not what you think of when you think of a murderer, a mass murderer, someone who is deliberate, violent, vicious. An arsonist is by definition a coward, and that's what Oyler is. He complains to me that he is on Death Row, where he has to rub shoulders with murderers. Well, what the hell do you think you are, Ray?

When I started my correspondence with him, I told him two things: first of all, I will not lie to you. I think that the jury verdict was handled properly, and I also think the same about their recommendation of the death penalty. Second, if we're going to correspond, I'm going to ask you some questions about these other fires where there is, in fact, irrefutable evidence—DNA, for example.

### He admits to setting the other fires?

No, he doesn't. His lawyer did. His lawyer said, find him guilty of all of the June fires that involved the layover [incendiary] devices, two of which were DNA hits. But Raymond has never admitted that. He didn't admit it to me, because he has an appeal pending.

This was not a lightning strike; it was not nature at work. It was an unnatural, criminal act, and I don't think you have to go beyond that in terms of blaming anybody. The firefighters—the Forest Service and Cal Fire people—did most things right. They did their jobs. When their supervisors testified under oath in court, they said they would pretty much do it the same way again. In fact, the Forest Service, after looking at the whole thing and trying to decide whether structure protection was a reasonable requirement for Forest Service engines in that area, decided that it was, and that they're going to continue to do that.

### Do you think Oyler set the Esperanza Fire?

Yes. I think the judge had it right. There is no such thing as absolute certainty, but there is such a thing as reasonable doubt, and I have no

reasonable doubt that Raymond Oyler set the Esperanza Fire.



John N. Maclean's *The Esperanza Fire: Arson, Murder, and the Agony of Engine 57* is not a book about a wild-fire. It is much more than that.



*Memorial to the Engine 57 firefighters who lost their lives on the Esperanza Fire, October 26, 2006*

This article was printed in the January 2013 edition of the *Forestry Source*, a publication of the Society of American Foresters and was reprinted with their permission. The author, Steve Wilent, is the editor of the *Forestry Source* and we thank him for allowing us to use his article.

## About Gordon Graham

Gordon Graham is a 33 year veteran of California Law Enforcement. His education as a Risk Manager and experience as a practicing Attorney, coupled with his extensive background in law enforcement, have allowed him to rapidly become recognized as a leading professional speaker in both private and public sector organizations with multiple areas of expertise.

Mr. Graham is a product of "The Greatest Generation." Raised in San Francisco in the 1950s, he not only learned that love of God, love of Country, and love of family was critical, but he was also taught the immense value of continuous learning, hard work and the importance of always doing the right thing. These beliefs and values have become a constant and a catalyst in his busy life.

After his first twelve years of formal education in the Catholic school system, Gordon began his undergraduate work at San Francisco State College during the tenure of S.I. Hayakawa who further reinforced those basic values and beliefs. He was graduated in 1973 with a B.A. in Business.

In 1973 Gordon was selected as a candidate for a major west coast law enforcement agency. Thereafter, he proudly served as a motorcycle officer for most of his first ten years in the Los Angeles area. In addition to his patrol work, he helped design the first DUI task force, assisted in the development of the DRE (drug recognition program), was an instructor in the initial "Mod I and II" Haz Mat program, and wrote his first of many technical papers: "PCP-An Officer's Survival Guide."

Simultaneously he was furthering his formal education during his off hours. Spending two years at Long Beach State College under the tutelage of Dr. Richard Kaywood led to his receiving a Lifetime Teaching Credential.

Following this degree, he attended University of Southern California in their Institute of Safety and Systems Management. He will quickly tell you that this was the best education he ever received from the best and the brightest people in the field. His professors included Chayton Mason, Ted Ferry, Bill Petak and Harry Hurt. His relationship with Professor Hurt let to his being selected as a team member collecting data for *The Hurt Report*. Published in 1980, this report on motorcycle fatalities was and is recognized as the single greatest treatise on motorcycle safety.

After completing his Masters, his off duty time was then spent at Western State University School of Law, where he was graduated in 1982 with his Juris Doctorate. He passed the California Bar Exam the same year and opened his law offices in Hollywood,



where he focused his efforts on family law, immigration and personal injury work.

In his law enforcement life, Gordon was promoted to Sergeant in 1982 and supervised his former unit - the motorcycle cops of his agency assigned to Los Angeles. He and his fellow Sergeants on "B" shift stressed the values and beliefs and built the most productive team of motorcycle officers in the history of the department.

During this time period, he saw deficiencies in how officers were trained, and revolutionized law enforcement training in California with his SROVT program: Solid, Realistic, Ongoing, Verifiable, Training. This daily training bulletin concept resulted in his later being awarded the California Governor's award for excellence in law enforcement training.

His personal life took a definite change for the better when he met his lovely bride, Renee, and they were married in 1983. In 1992 Gordon was transferred to a staff position and assigned to headquarters where he continued his work in law enforcement training. He also sharpened his focus on how his education and training in systems and his legal background could work together to improve the quality of law enforcement operations by incorporating real risk management into police operations.

During this time window he commenced delivering his training programs to private sector organizations, including those involved in commercial real estate, hospital operations, manufacturing companies, aerospace operations, nuclear power plants, auto racing operations and many other.

He also expanded his efforts to assist other public safety organizations and in 2002 worked with

Chief Billy Goldfeder to develop [FireFighterCloseCalls.com](http://FireFighterCloseCalls.com) which is now recognized as “the source” for information about fire fighter safety. This effort led to his assisting the International Association of Fire Chiefs with a similar effort—and the development of their [FireFighterNearMiss.com](http://FireFighterNearMiss.com) safety site. In 2005 the IAFC awarded Gordon with the Presidential Award for Excellence for his lifelong work in improving firefighter safety and performance.

In 2002, along with Bruce Praet and Dan Merkle, Gordon became a founder of [Lexipol](http://Lexipol.com)—a company designed to standardize policy, procedure and training in public safety operations. Today, most of the law enforcement agencies in California are using the Lexipol Knowledge Management System and nearly half of the States are now using this approach to law enforcement operations. This effort has greatly improved the safety of police personnel while also influencing a dramatic reduction in claims, settlements and verdicts adverse to law enforcement agencies.

Gordon held his law enforcement headquarters assignment until his service retirement in 2006. In 2008, he was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from California POST.

Today, Gordon divides his time between study, research, writing, speaking, and consulting in the discipline of risk management. His innovative programs, based on the values and beliefs he learned as a child along with a passion for continuous improvement, are the standard for any organization that wants to improve existing operations and prevent things from going wrong.

He and “Mrs. G” are the proud parents of two adult children—who hopefully will take the values and beliefs along with them in their personal and professional lives. A resident of Southern California, he enjoys spending every possible moment with Mrs. G “cruising the coast” either in their vintage wooden boat or their wooden car and finding new adventures and new places to enjoy a great meal.



Photo by Ken Morris

## California Firefighters Face 2013 Wildfire Season With Less Help from Inmates

As they confront an early start to the 2013 wildfire season, California authorities are scrambling to avoid the slow gutting of a program that delivers a crucial source of frontline manpower: felons.

The arrangement, in which nonviolent offenders dig fire lines and clear debris while professional firefighters attach the flames, dates back to World War II, and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection has grown to depend on it. But the program is in danger of being whittled away.

The reason is a court-mandated shift in custody assignments that keeps non-violent offenders in county jails to reduce overcrowding in state prisons. As current members of the Cal Fire Conservation Camp Program get paroled, and the pool of potential replacements shrinks, the inmate corps is starting to decline. The attrition so far has been slight, but Cal Fire fears that the numbers will start dropping much faster.

To understand the importance of the inmate brigades, look no further than the recent 350-acre fire near Riverside. It is the third or fourth large-scale wildfire this year, marking an unusually early start to the burning season, which typically ramps up in May or June. Of the 200 firefighters who were working the blaze, nearly two-thirds were inmates.

Cal Fire owns 39 minimum-security camps around the state, which are staffed by corrections officers and house a total of 4,300 volunteer inmate firefighters who earn new skills, and time off their sentences. Under the new realignment, state officials estimate that the camp program will shrink to about 2,500 inmates later this year.

Jessica Mazium, the corrections department's deputy chief of external affairs, said her agency has started offering contracts to individual counties, which would pay the state to send its low-risk offenders to the camp program. County officials initially balked at the price—\$46 per inmate per day—but many seem to have come around, she said. So far, no county has signed such a contract.

“We have no intention of closing any camps,” Mazium said.



# 83rd Annual Wildland Fire Training & Safety Conference



**May 2 & 3, 2013**



**NEW CONFERENCE  
LOCATION**

## 83rd Annual Conference Programs

Smoke Impacts on Firefighter Health by George Broyles, USFS

Advanced Fire Technology by Capt. Drew Smith, LAC & Capt. Don Boursier, ORC

The Esperanza Fire—Arson, Murder, and the Agony of Engine 57 by John Maclean, Author

Fireline Factors by Brad Mayhew, Fireline Factors Consulting  
Fuels and Weather Update by Capt. Drew Smith, LAC

“The Ten Families of Risk and The Impact of Transparency on Public Safety Operations” by Gordon Graham, Graham Research Consultants

Helicopter Hoist Rescue and Fire Block Gel Demonstrations

**The Irvine  
Ranch Outdoor  
Education Center**

**CONFERENCE COST: \$125.00 at door  
\$110.00 pre-registration**

Includes 2013 membership dues, meals, lodging, refreshments and entertainment. Registration opens at 8:00 a.m. on May 2

**Southern California Association of Foresters & Fire Wardens**