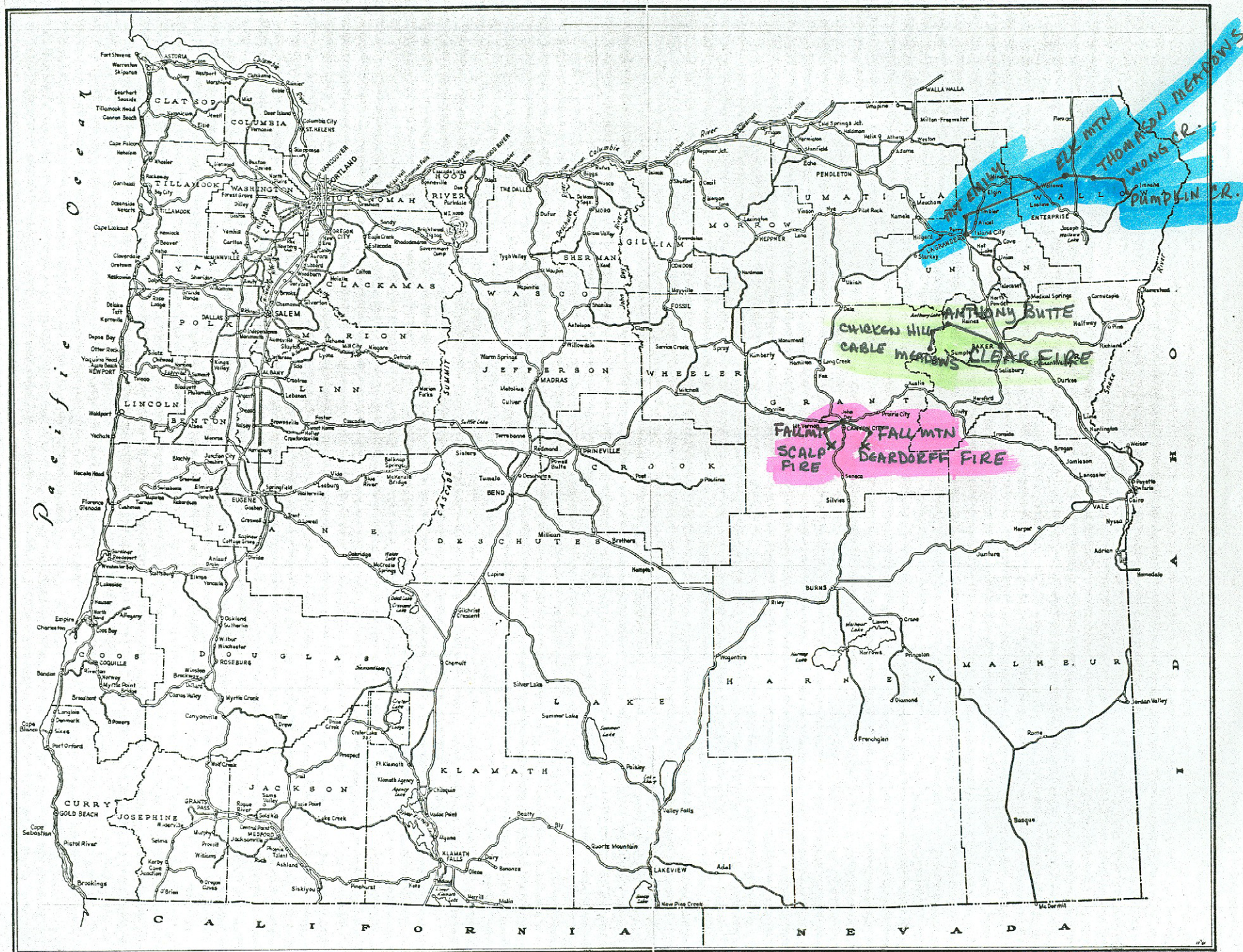


# **EASTERN OREGON FIRES**







## **OREGON AIR NATIONAL GUARD FIRE FIGHTING SUPPORT**

The Fire Camp supports and controls firefighting crews in the suppression of forest fires within the immediate area. They are usually located within several miles of one or more fires, at a safe distance. They may be on State, Federal, County, Municipal or Private land.

The organizational structure of a Fire Camp Management Team is very similar to a military unit. The incident commander has overall authority at the Fire Camp. His primary staff consists of a Plans Chief, Operations Chief, Logistics Chief and Financial Chief.

Firefighting crews consist of 20 members. Crews range in experience from the HOT SHOT – MOST EXPERIENCED – to NEW RECRUITS. Professional firefighters, students and summer workers comprise the majority, with many young men and women on the crews.

Communications at a Fire Camp include: Fire Camp to Fire Site – hand held portable radios which usually includes a relay and Fire Camp to Forest Service Headquarters/SOCO's – limited communications provided by Forest Service single channel radio. The Air National Guard provided multi-channel wideband systems, including one or two dial lines for access into commercial telephone systems and three or four hot lines to their SOCO's. These systems usually required one or more relays due to the rugged terrain. At several locations one dial line was used for data terminal input to a Federal Forest Computer Center.

The Air National Guard provided generators used primarily for communications equipment, but produced sufficient reserve power to meet the requirements for data terminals and large area lighting.

A Fire Camp operation revolves around a twelve hour shift for most personnel. The Air Guardsmen usually worked 14 to 16 hour days.

The life cycle of a Fire Camp consists of:

1. An Installation Phase, growing from a few to over one-thousand personnel within 48 hours, with supporting facilities.
2. An Operational Phase, where most of the camp works on a shift basis to combat the fires in the area.
3. A Demobilization Phase, which occurs when the fires are controlled. It is during this phase that data terminals are used extensively to reassign personnel and equipment to the next Fire Camp or staging area for the next assignment.

In total, the Oregon Air National Guard provided complete communications systems and transportation in support of eight major Fire Complexes. This support involved over 160 personnel and nearly 80 vehicles and prime equipment items. Every organization in the Oregon Air National Guard would be pressed into service before the danger was considered under control. This emergency provided all personnel an excellent opportunity to apply the technical expertise gained from their Air National Guard training and assist in the preservation of our States' natural resources.

The 244<sup>th</sup> participated in what would have the broad term of Easter Oregon Fires.

The month of August marked the largest peace time mobilization the Oregon National Guard has experienced. The first call for help on a forest fire came on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August. Selected personnel were called and four radio terminals and two relay teams, complete with ground power and life support were headed for a link up with Forest Service officials at the John Day Supervisors Office Coordinating Organization (SOCO). The 244<sup>th</sup>'s job was to provide communications from fire camps to SOCO. One fire named "Deardorff Fire" was located in a canyon near Deardorff Creek so the 244<sup>th</sup> established the Deardorff Relay. Another fire was burning with the name "Scalp Fire" and another relay was established at Fall Mountain. Both relays were tied to the SOCO at John Day.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of August the Scalp Fire was controlled and the relay teams were released and on their way home. Before they arrived home another call for help came in. This time their help was needed in the Wallowa Whitman National Forest with the SOCO at Baker. The relay team was re-provisioned with additional equipment and manpower and went back to the Eastern Oregon fires. Their turn-around took less than 10 hours. A radio relay system was established for the "Clear Fire" from the SOCO at Baker to a relay at Anthony Butte on to a relay at Chicken Hill with termination at the base camp at Cable Meadows.

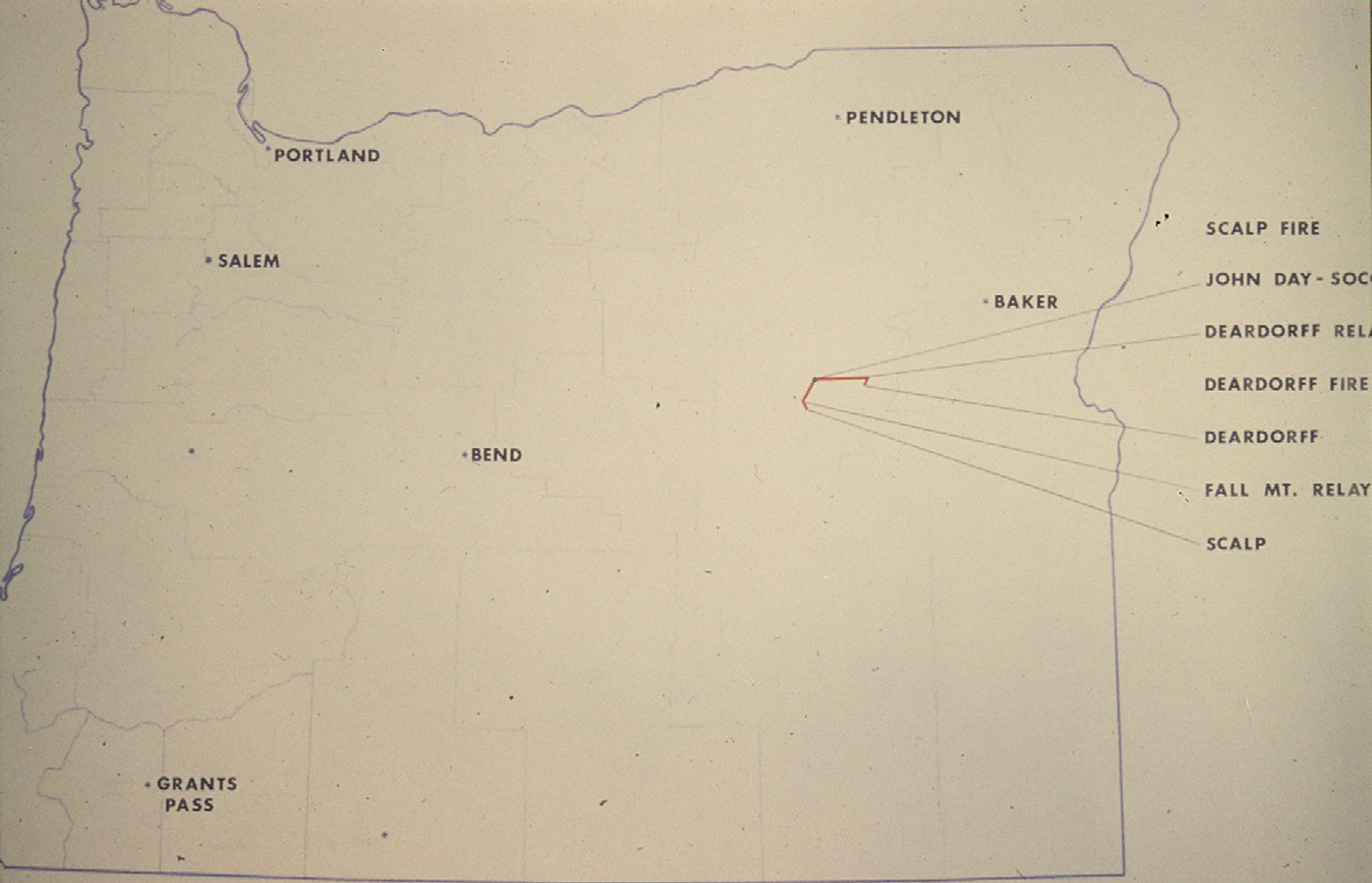
The crew at the Chicken Hill relay spotted a lightning-generated fire approximately one-half mile from the site. The Forest Service was notified but was unable to provide a suppression crew. TSgt Gary Chandler hiked to the fire and dug enough of a containment trail to suppress the fire until the Forest Service could respond.

The "Deardorff Fire" had been renamed the "ABC Lightning Fire" and the communications relay team released, with their next assignment the "Buckhorn Complex Fires" in the Wallowa Whitman National Forest with the SOCO located at La Grande.

By Now, August 13<sup>th</sup>, the Forest Service was no longer naming individual fires but instead naming geographical areas in which numerous fires were burning. An additional radio relay team was sent from Portland to assist the teams from the "Deardorff Fire" in establishing communications from La Grande to Mt Emily with a relay to Elk Mt and into the Fire Camp at Thomson Meadows. After the "Clear Fire" was demobilized the radio relay team was sent in to help on the Buckhorn Complex fires. Communications was extended from the Thomason Meadows Fire Camp with a relay at Wong Creek down into a steep ravine near Imnaha to another Fire Camp called Pumpkin Creek. This put the 244<sup>th</sup> communications radio relay teams in the Hells Canyon Nation Recreation Area. Up until this time all communications support was handled by the 244<sup>th</sup> Combat Communications Flight and Squadron.

The fires go bigger and additional Air National Guard units were deployed to help with the communications support.







BUCKHORN COMPLEX FIRES

THOMASON MEADOWS

ELK MT. RLY.

EMILY MT. RLY.

LA GRAND - SOCCO

CLEAR FIRE

ANTHONY BUTTE RLY.

CHICKEN HILL RLY.

CABLE MEADOWS F. C.

BAKER - SOCCO

• PENDLETON

• JOHN DAY

