

Green River Star
July 20, 1977
Three Men Killed

Crews Mopping Up After Fire Rips 1,400 Acres Near Gorge

About 100 firefighters remain to mop up after a 1,480 acre forest fire killed three men just west of Flaming Gorge Dam earlier this week. Forest Service Officials said the fire was declared under control Monday morning, and they began demobilizing crews that represented more than 100 firefighters in the area.

Crews were called from as far away as Oregon to battle the blaze that started just after noon Saturday when lightening ignited a dead ponderosa tree, according to information officer Dick Hininger.

Within three hours the original burning tree has spread to about 40 acres, Hininger said. About 2:30pm, he said, high winds, rapidly changing directions, fanned the blaze around fire crews. Hininger said a 20 foot wall of flame raced over three firefighters, burning them to death within 50 feet of safety.

The three men were part of two six-man crews, and the rest of the crews were safe, only 50 feet from where the other men were killed.

The fire spread along the canyons and over hills only a few hundred yards south of Flaming Gorge Lodge and Bootleg campground.

Eyewitnesses at Bootleg campground said the unpredictable winds Saturday afternoon switched direction about three times within a half hour when the firefighters were killed.

Killed during the fire were lifelong Manila resident Gene Campbell 57, Dave Noel 36, of Dutch John, and summer employee Dwight Hodgkinson 23, of Vernal. Campbell was a forester in charge of timber management and sales, and Noel was a forester who directed Youth Conservation Corps camps in the forest.

The fire was generally located in the Cart Creek area and was plainly visible from Flaming Gorge reservoir at Buckboard and points south.

Air crew and heavy equipment are being dismissed from the fire scene today and tomorrow, according to Ashley National Forest officials, and most mop-up operations are expected to be completed by the end of the week.

