

Staff Ride

Resources



Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program

Loop Fire – Audio Transcript

Voice of Gordon King, Stand #4

[Interviewer] These are excerpts from my December 2003 interview with Gordon King who was the El Cariso hotshot superintendent at the time of the Loop Fire.

[Gordon] I was in sort of a draw with this tiny little thing. I could look up, I could see the county guy still down below me, and I'd look back, I could see Ray up behind me there, and I heard a helicopter. I didn't see it, never did see it, but I heard it. At first it didn't dawn on me or anything. Okay, can't see it so... And then heard the noise and later on I assumed it had passed below me in that draw, and I didn't see it because it was below me. That's when I heard somebody say something down below there about "he missed" or "he didn't do it right" or something like that. I can't really remember what, but they were yelling, and then the copter, I saw the copter after that, it was heading on out the valley, and it was climbing up and going around. Didn't dawn on me what he did at the time. He was not on the fire line, he was inside the fire going down, and I didn't pay much attention to it. And about three or four minutes later, I saw smoke, and I looked down and it was still over there. We were here, it was over there.

[Interviewer] As you look.

[Gordon] Yeah, looking down the way I had planned to go. We were here and the fire was over there. I was looking down at 12 o'clock, it'd be at one o'clock.

[Interviewer] Okay and kind of picturing this was that the river bottom down below.

[Gordon] Yeah.

[Interviewer] Almost a cliff.

[Gordon] Yeah, I couldn't see that cliff.

[Interviewer] Yeah.

[Gordon] Couldn't see that.

[Interviewer] And you got basically the banks of that river bottom and then off to your right like when you were talking about one o'clock, you actually got a little bit of a flat that's up above there.

[Gordon] Right.

[Interviewer] But you're looking almost along it and down in that alignment of that big chute, it turns into a little bit of a wedge, that's what you're talking about.

- And I was in that wedge.

[Interviewer] You're in that wedge, so you were just, from the river bottom to where you were at now you're talking maybe 100, 150 feet.

[Gordon] About that.

[Interviewer] Something.

[Gordon] Yeah, I mean, I could hear the guys clear, and I realized that it was steep going down, but I could see there was sort of an alluvial effect going out. I didn't know there was another 15-foot drop off on the other side of that by the road, but I heard something that I've heard before. It's always put a little fear in me. It's fire going through brush. When you hear it once, you'll always remember it. And I heard it. And I thought, now that's not right. There shouldn't be any fire over here. Something's not right. Then I heard the guys across the way yelling. And they were yelling at one another. They weren't yelling at me, they were yelling at one another about something, and I wasn't paying a whole heck of a lot of attention about it cause I was more interested in about what I was hearing. I turned around and looked at Ray, and Ray was just above me, and all of a sudden, he was higher than I was, so all of a sudden he yelled down, he said, "Gordon, get out of there." And I turned around to look at him because, again, I said, "Oh, man, there's something going on here." And he'd already called reverse tool an order. It wasn't just my job to do that. Not anybody could do that. And they were on their way out when I could hear this coming. No fire. I could just hear this coming. The first thing I remember is, I had dark glasses on, sunglasses. They went poof and fell off my face. Then I knew that what was happening was not right. It didn't dawn on me at the time what it was. Couldn't feel anything.

[Interviewer] Okay, why'd your glasses come off?

[Gordon] They melted. Hot air.

[Interviewer] Okay, just wanted--

[Gordon] From what I can figure, they went back when they reversed tool order, they went back into the chute. And that's when they got, the hot air hit them.

[Interviewer] Mm-hmm, and that was, when they reversed tool order, where would you anticipate they were going?

[Gordon] They were going up the rock slide. That's where our safety zone was at was the rock slide.

[Interviewer] Okay, so it was in the rock slide. That was established, out of the field bed-wise.

[Gordon] Yeah, no fuel in there at all other than rock.

[Interviewer] Was that communicated, as you came down, this is our safety zone?

[Gordon] Right

[Interviewer] Okay.

[Gordon] Yeah, that was passed on. Ray and I said, "As bad as it looks, that's gonna be the best place we got." And that was passed all the way back through the crew that that's where you go. That's where we were headed.