

Fire#912222

Initial Attack

June 11<sup>th</sup> 09:56

B-222

Engine D-51 responded from DAF at about 10:00am with Mike BoBo + Norm Hilliker on board. The smoke was reported in Donnelly Flats, we could see the column as we drove past Jarvis Creek Bridge. I requested DAF to call pump station #9 and ask if they were doing a controlled burn, As I pass Ft. Greely main gate a fireman named Tom Lucas called me on Deltana UFD Radio channel and said the fire was in the flats off of twelve mile crossing road. At that time I called DAF and requested 1 air tanker + 1 helitack. About 15 seconds later I requested a 2<sup>nd</sup> air tanker. Once on scene with D-51, D-21(Reb) +Ft. Greely fire department. We dropped the portatank off their engine and filled it with their tanker. We ordered 2 dozers (D-8s), 4 water tenders, more portatanks and about 10,000 feet of hose, pumps etc. We ordered the local Delta type 2 crew + 2 type 1 crews out of Fairbanks. Two loads of smoke jumpers were ordered by dispatch plus helitack on helicopter 523(AFS ship) Helicopter 974(Fairbanks IA ship) was ordered. Delta I.A. Helitack from 398 began cutting a sawline on the right flank(west side) We anchored off twelve mile crossing rd. this was a wide dirt +gravel spot, excellent safety zone, this was the north end of the fire. When we first arrived the column was straight up with a slight influence out of the n/ne. When the 2<sup>nd</sup> helitack came on 523 they assisted with the right flank. At this time the hose lay from the full portatanks was going down the line, water was being pumped, Helicopters were doing bucket work, and Air tankers were dropping retardant with air attack coordinating the air show. I informed the in coming crew + jumpers on the tail (which was the north end at the time) that 8 mph SW wind was predicted sometime in the afternoon. I told Bruce Nelson (SMJ) I was concerned with the left flank if the wind shift came, I told Bruce to watch the smoke column. When the Delta 1 crew arrived I put them on the left flank with Nelson. When the first dozer arrived I put (forest tech 1) Abe Horschel with him so we had communication. They started working the right flank. When the SMJ's arrived I had Reb put Nelson + 7 on the right flank. When the FMO flew over the fire he talked with air attack, the a/a told him retardant was not effective. The FMO told him to stop using the tankers. I told the FMO we were thinking about burning from the anchor area east along twelve mile crossing road to Jarvis creek to try and secure the north end because I was concerned the SW winds would blow as predicted an the left flank would blow out letting the fire go towards Ft. Greely and the town. The FMO said that would make too much of a mess. The FMO stated we would go to plan B. Which meant going to the south end of the fire and burn along roads. The midnight Suns crew with Reb Ferguson began developing their plan to bun off the south end. I was going to send Bruce Nelson + 7 SMJ's to help with the bun but

decided against it. I again told Bruce Nelson he was to stay on the left flank and watch the direction of the smoke column. I said I think the left flank will blow out when the wind shift comes. I ask for retardant again for the left flank, and it was never sent. Somewhere during this I think the FMO told air attack no more retardant because it was ineffective. I even requested to air attack, air tankers loaded with water, and he said that they didn't believe it would be effective. Sometime after the retardant was shut down the large firewhirl developed in the black moving in a counter clockwise direction. The firewhirl was about a 100ft wide in diameter at the base. It extended straight up for several hundred feet. I watched it develop in what only took a few seconds for it to come up above the black spruce, never leaving the ground and start moving to the left flank. I called Nelson on the radio to move off the line back to the road which was our safety zone. The SMJ's + Delta Crew had already retreated and were just out as the vortices hit the line. The firewhirl came down the left flank, crossed the road, dropping firebrands as it went starting a new area on fire over the safety zone road. It picked up paracargo chutes with cargo boxes attached and dropped them right in the new fire area. Hard hats were sucked off firefighters heads along with the Crewboss's fire shelter which was still in the yellow case. This shelter was sucked out of the hand of the crewboss as he pulled it from his pack(daypack) The winds in the firewhirl were like a tornado, counter clockwise at an estimated 60-70 mph (The crew remained in the safety zone for about 2 hrs. The firewhirl went back into the fire moving up the right flank. The SMJ's on that side that weren't with the dozer went into the black for a safe zone but the firewhirl hit them in there, 1 SMJ had some 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree burns. They crossed over to the Jarvis Creek side of the fire and remained there about 2 hrs. We couldn't do a medevac because of the increased fire behavior but the SMJ's made their way to the twelve mile crossing road and the safe zone. In the mean time I walked down the road passed where the fires had blown over an called for a pickup truck so I could get the SMJ to the clinic for treatment. During the time we spent in the safe zone and after the firewhirl hit we had 2 more hits from the fire. The fire blew out the left flank first with the vortices then fire blew out of the center between flanks, then the right flank blew out. We lost the helitack + personal gear from the second blow out. This gear was in a safe area at the time, dirt +gravel about 100' to 150' from the already burned fire line, aerial fire brands got on the gear during heavy smoke. As the firewhirl hit I called air attack an told him what happened and said "send 2 airtankers, no, make it 3 air tankers" after the firewhirl hit the fire went north and never looked back. We were in a large gravel/dirt safe zone on the road, fire shelters did not need to be and were not deployed. Also if fire shelters had been deployed I think it would have been impossible to hold down against the tremendous suction of the large firewhirl.

Signed Mike BoBo I.A.I.C.type III      Fire#912222