

SEPT, 1970



HIGH VANTAGE POINT — Residents on Palmetto Place in Brea used their rooftops Sunday as a strategic vantage point to view the fire which raged in the hills north of the city. The fire completely surrounded the U.S. Army Nike site in the hills, but military authori-

ties reported that no damage was done to any of the underground missiles or launching facilities. After the wind shifted the fire burned over the hill into Los Angeles County territory it blackened between three and four thousand acres.

Brush Fires Sweep Trabuco, Brea Areas, Force Evacuation

Shifting Winds Ease Threat in County After Flames Scorch Campgrounds, Raze Home, Peril Gasoline Plant

BY STEVE EMMONS

Times Staff Writer

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Park, but fire officials said if winds did not whip up the fire, it might die out by this morning.

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Into L.A. County

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Sid Nelson, superintendent of the Shell Oil Co. gasoline plant north of Brea, said the flames burned within 50 feet of his plant.

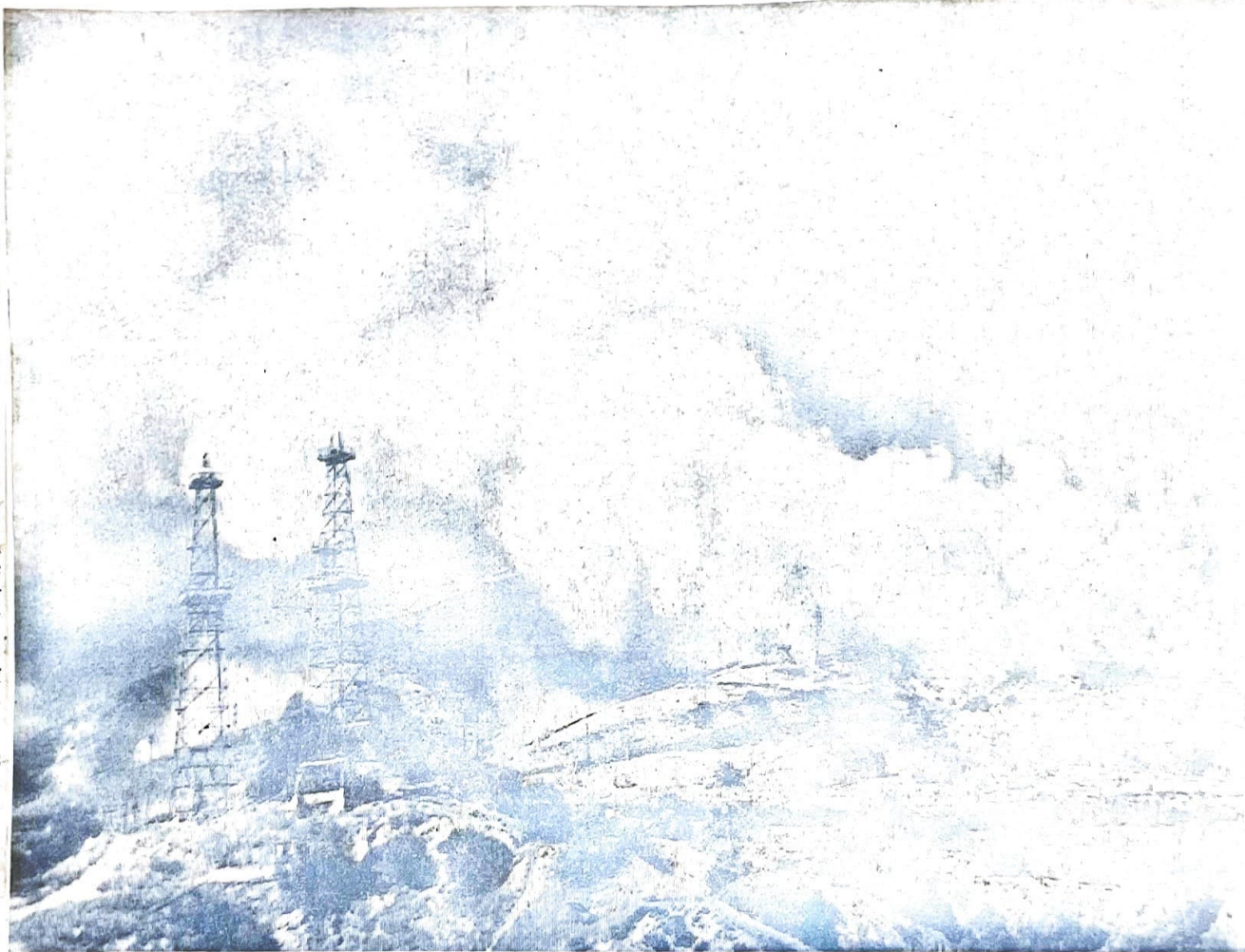
"I didn't think we'd ever save it," he said. "We had taken safety steps to prevent an explosion of the plant."

He estimated, however, that if fire had started within the plant, it would have eventually caused \$2 million damage.

Missile Site

The Brea fire also surrounded a Nike ground-to-air missile site but caused no damage. Military authorities pointed out both missile and control facilities are underground.

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FIRE BLACKENS 3,000 ACRES NEAR BREA SUNDAY
Flames and Smoke Race Over The Brea Hills Sunday Afternoon, Threatening Shell Oil Field.

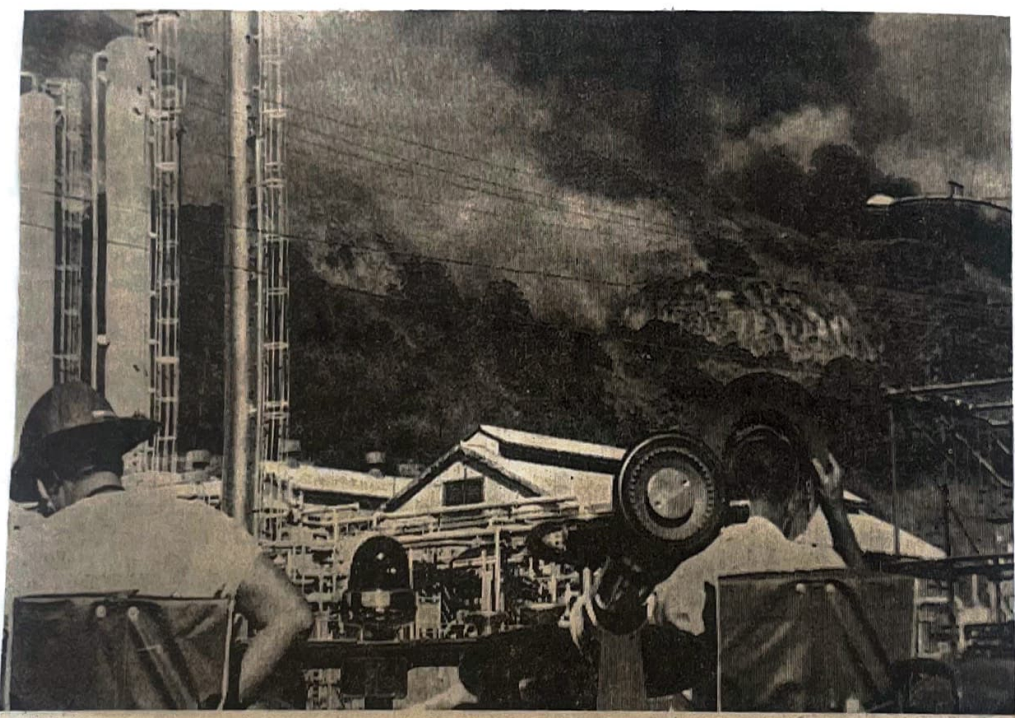
Brea Area Refinery Escapes

By **RUSS WILLIAMS**
 News Tribune Writer
BREA — A small but potentially volatile pocket nestled among 3,000 fire-charred acres in the Brea hills Sunday was the subject of more attention and concern than it has received in its 33-year history.

The pocket, surrounded by hills, harbors four tanks containing 25,000 gallons of crude gasoline.
 If the brush fire would have roared unchecked into the Shell Oil Co. absorption plant, the tanks would have blown and "it would've been all over for all of us," said a

firefighter manning one of seven hoses specially assigned to the plant.
 "I guess she was smiling on us today," said Wayne Young, Brea fire engineer, who was part of the fire fighting contingent assigned to the facility.
 Young apparently was re-

ferring to Lady Luck, who made her presence felt when gusty Santa Ana winds suddenly died at approximately 3:15 p.m., ending immediate danger of the fire reaching the refinery.
 As it was, the flames licked their way down the sides of three hills northwest of the plant, but were stopped by water streams from strategically spotted fire hoses.
 The gasoline tanks, on the extremely western edge of the plant, were being guarded by firemen who periodically doused them and the surrounding brushy area. A sprinkler system on top of the tanks also was turned on.
 Ed Neslon, plant foreman, said the four tanks have a capacity of 75,000 gallons but were only about one-third filled.
 When the wind died, Neslon began making preparations to pipe the gasoline out of the fire zone. The crude gasoline is siphoned from oil wells and stored in the tanks until it is shipped out for refining.
 Neslon said the absorption plant, with a complement of three 60-foot distilling towers and a large warehouse, has been tucked away in the Brea hills pocket for 33 years.
 The plant is situated at the foot of the Army Nike Base, which was encircled and eventually bypassed by the brush fire.



SEVEN HOSES, AT WIND'S END

Distilling towers at a Shell Oil Co. absorption plant overlook black clouds of smoke kicked up by a wind-fed brush fire in the Brea hills. When

the wind died, firemen set up a seven-hose defense around the plant and its four gasoline tanks.

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OIL FIELD SCORCHER—Aerial view shows flames raging west of Brea Blvd. north of the city and threatening the oil facility.

Times photo

The wind shifted, driving the fire back toward O'Neil Park and Trabuco Oaks, putting them in danger for the second time.

By 9 p.m., fire officials on the lines said the fire had been checked but that a new wind could revive it. They said they were hoping for a still night at least through sunrise.

As the flames approached O'Neill Park, campers were routed out of the canyon through its back door—out Coto de Gaza to Ortega Highway.

Awaiting News

Residents along Live Oak Canyon Road and nearby congregated at Cook's Corner to drink beer and soft drinks, munch snacks, and nervously await news of the fire.

One woman brought her trailer house out with her and parked it at Cook's Corner.

Telephone service was briefly knocked out, and during the night a bulldozer heading into the canyon brushed against some power lines and shorted them. There were no injuries in the accident.

During the height of the fires, both Brea Canyon Road and El Toro Road were closed off.

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Firemen made their stand along El Toro Road and held the line. Later

Blazes in County Battled

Sunday, normally a day of rest for most Orange Countians, was anything but restful for most Orange County fire departments and many of its residents as two major brush fires seared more than 6,000 acres in two fires.

Flames Trap Tribune Reporter, Photographer

By DICK HASLAM
News Tribune Writer

Panic!

Like animals in a cage, we were surrounded by walls of flame trapped in a car whose only protection was a thin wall of metal and glass.

We — myself along with a News Tribune photographer Jess Andresen Jr. and a free-lance photographer, had been covering the fire in the Brea Hills from a vantage point on a ridge road leading to the Nike missile base.

The photographers had walked east along the road to take pictures of the flames racing up the slopes towards the base and an Orange County engine company attempting to protect two oil tanks west of the site, while the reporter stayed behind to watch for flames on the west.

Suddenly the flames raced out from the north side of the base, casting embers hundreds of yards to the west and north, starting new fires in every direction.

For a time the flames appeared to be eating their way slowly towards the ridge where we watched, but it soon became apparent that the ridge was going to become a holocaust.

We barely had time to jump in the car and move east to the two photographers before the flames were racing up the

ridge from the north, creating their own fire-storm.

We attempted to outrace the flames by running west on the road, but we were stopped by flames already licking at the road and another car in front of us.

As the storm broke across the road, we reversed direction, traveling backward at speeds up to 30 miles per hour, with flames all all sides. The heat became nearly unbearable, smoke and cinders rained on the car from all sides — we were trapped.

Still the car moved backward, into dense clouds of black smoke that obscured everything within five feet.

We could easily have been traveling downhill through burned-out brush for all we knew.

Suddenly, a breath of fresher air, the scene lightened, and we were free, while the flames raced to the south downhill.

Even now, a day after the near-tragedy, it is impossible to recount the full extent of the thoughts that went through our minds as we stared at the flames. It becomes a near-blank as we think back, thankful that we're still alive.

Later, as we stood gasping for breath in the still smoke-laden air, we realized that the car ahead of us had also been trapped.

When the flames died down, we moved back down the road, along with several firemen, locating the car, now empty. The occupant, who turned out to be a

young serviceman trying to get to the Nike base to help fight the fire, was nowhere to be found and a search of the now devastated hillside turned up no trace.

Much later we learned that an oil company worker found the young man, identified as Pfc. William Thompson, far below the road near the gasoline refinery, unhurt, but very, very scared.

Both fires, one in Trabuco Canyon north of El Toro Marine Air Base, and the other in Brea Canyon, near the Los Angeles-Orange County line, broke out at approximately the same time — around noon.

The Brea Canyon blaze, which the Los Angeles County Fire Department has termed the "Fullerton Fire," charred 3,000 hillside acres, 200 in Orange County. No structures were burned.

The fire apparently started on the west side of Brea Canyon Road, then quickly moved up adjoining hillsides.

Before the first units on the scene could even get their lines established, the flames raced across the Brea Hills surrounding the Nike Missile Base, then marching west-northwest towards La Habra Heights.

A scarcity of equipment and erratic winds forced fire equipment to restrict most of their activities to protecting homes west of Brea and valuable tanks and equipment in the Shell Oil Company field scattered around the hills.

By 3 p.m., as firemen battled to keep the hungry flames from reaching a Shell gasoline refinery located northwest of Brea, several tongues of flame licked towards a cluster of homes in La Habra Heights, east of Fullerton Road.

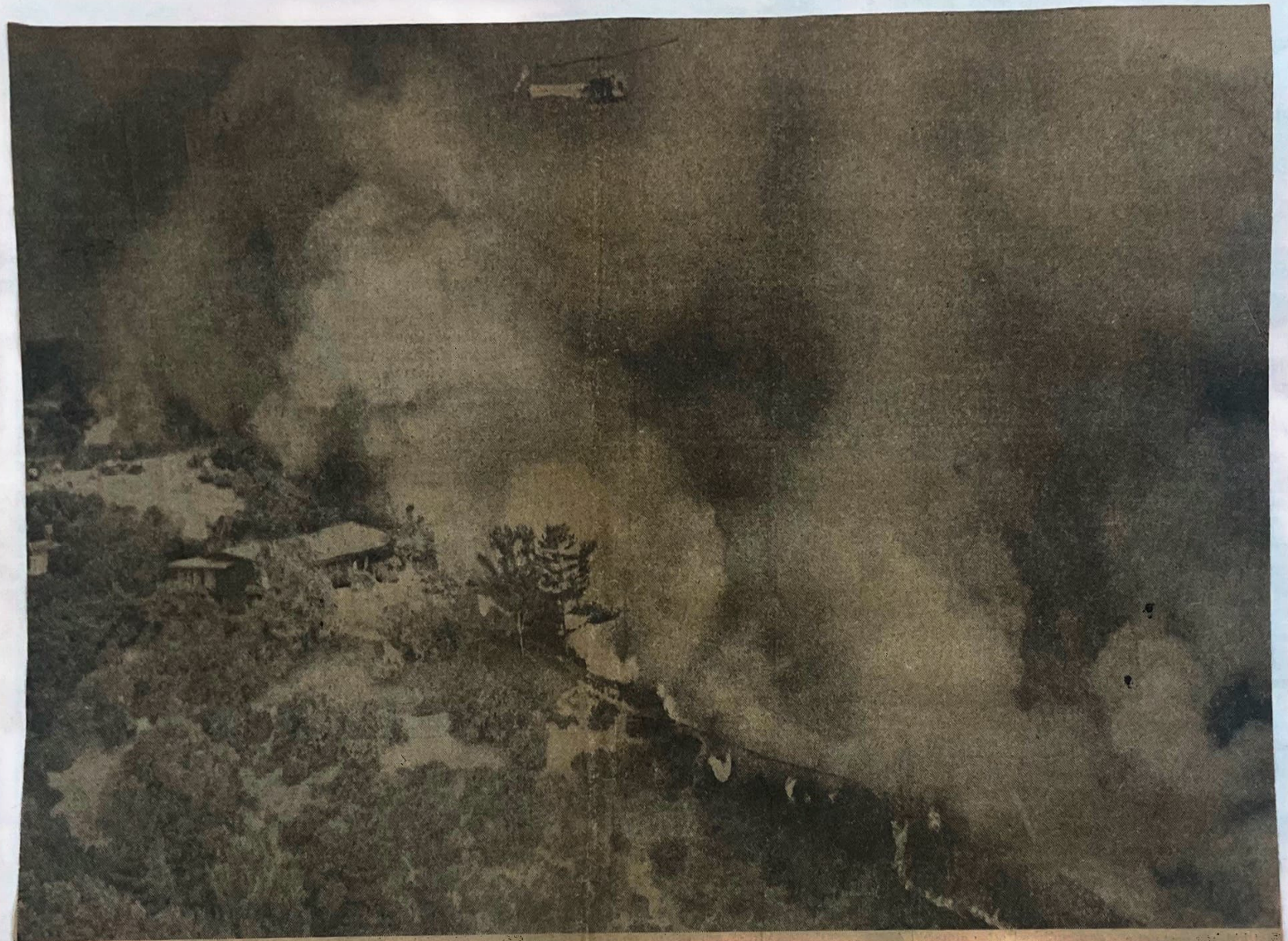


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All Resources Thrown Into Battle Against Fires Burning in Southland



RACE — Tractor driver cuts firebreak on farm as flames from Brea Canyon fire sweep in behind him.



ENDANGERED—Command post aboard helicopter makes estimate of situation as flames sweep toward hillside home north of Brea in a picture taken from a second helicopter.
Times photo by Vince Striano

Mayor's Ball masquerades for the 'Year of the Arts'



Star-Progress Photos by Jack Hancock

OKLAHOMA! — Mayor Clarice Blamer and her husband Bill, join in the festivities as they recreate a scene from the hit musical Oklahoma. Blamer, is an Oklahoma native and donned a prairie dress and bonnet, while her husband sported a cowboy hat, boots and shirt.

Blamer's table was themed "Oklahoma." (She was raised in Oklahoma). She wore an orchid, feather-stitched prairie dress with

King Arthur, killer bees, an Indian chief, clowns, Merlin the magician, and others celebrated Brea's salute to the Year of the Arts at Saturday evening's "Mayor's Ball."

A masquerade of creativity and fun, the Mayor's Ball, held in the atrium on the third floor of the Brea Civic Cultural Center, was attended by about 284 costumed residents, the business community, council members and guests.

"It was the most wonderful evening," said Mayor Clarice Blamer. "Brea was truly the winner...Everybody had such a great time. The creativity and enthusiasm of those who participated made it a highly successful evening."

Guests dined on a feast of prime rib of beef, rice pilaf, an array of salads. And they danced to the sounds of Big Band music.

Blamer, brain-child of the ball, said the grand affair evolved as a way to "unite" the community and to celebrate the city's proclamation, "1985: The Year of the Arts." The ball was held to raise funds for the city's cultural arts programs, Blamer said.

Tables of eight were decorated with a theme, in which each guest came costumed to match the theme.

Highlight of the evening was the table theme contest, in which there were three categories: most creative; most humorous and most original. "Brea: Today's Camelot" won for most creative table. The table, hosted by Council Member Norma Hicks, had a handmade castle centerpiece, made of sandpaper in a hounds-tooth pattern. The castle had little white twinkling lights and sat atop angel hair. Hicks, who wore a red velvet gown with gold and black sequince trim, said her party was "competitive" in creating their theme. "We really wanted to win," she said.

"The Mayor's Kids" captured the most humorous title. Blamer's three children, DeAnn Pruett, Debi Gilbert and Steve Blamer, dressed as "kids" in diapers, bonnets and bottles. The table centerpiece was a carousel and themed a child's Birthday Party.

The most original award was given to the "Killer Bees," created by Darwin Manuel Realty. All dressed in bright yellow and black costumes, with a beehive centerpiece.

Orange County Blazes Battled

Residents began evacuating their homes in the brush-choked area, leading livestock down narrow roads away from the fire as volunteers from the La Habra Heights Fire Department, Los Angeles County fire units and civilian volunteers fought to keep the blaze from reaching the expensive homes.

A shift and lessening of the wind helped the firefighters and they managed to stop the blaze before it reached the homes. One home was slightly damaged by flying embers, however.

At nightfall, as firemen on the west side continued to stamp out hot spots and patrol the lines, the main fight shifted to

the east side, in Los Angeles County.

Flames, which had earlier raced over and around the Nike base, briefly trapping firemen, reporters and a soldier racing to the base, marched steadily eastward through brush and light grass towards Diamond Bar.

This morning, firemen were reported to be massing equipment between the eastern flank and Diamond Bar. Helicopters, which were unavailable for anything except ferrying firefighters into hot spots Sunday, began dropping water at daybreak today and commanders in the field reported some optimism. Containment is expected today, unless winds pick up again.

At the height of the fire both Brea Canyon Road and Fullerton Road were closed to all except emergency traffic and residents evacuating their homes. California Highway Patrol officers, Los Angeles and Orange County Sheriff's Deputies and reserves, La Habra, Brea and Fullerton police set up roadblocks and patrolled the fire zones to keep out the curious, who lined all major roads on the outskirts, causing major traffic tangles from Brea to Hacienda Heights, where firemen were battling another 30-acre blaze.

At night, the glow from the flames scorching the hills could be seen from a large part of Orange County and the San Gabriel Valley. At times, the internal winds of the fire sent embers hundreds

of feet into the air.

Although winds died down Sunday night from a peak of approximately 25 miles per hour during the day, the erratic nature of the flames created numerous small fire storms, which endangered anything in their path, forcing firefighters to be more than usually cautious in battling the blaze.

One hundred men from the two counties, La Habra Heights, Brea, Burbank and civilian volunteers fought the blaze. The situation was so confused that Los Angeles County fire information officials had no idea who or what was working the fire.

Although officials had no information on the cause of the blaze, firemen arriving at the scene said it appeared to be of a "suspicious origin."

No injuries were reported by any of the departments, although a free-lance photographer reported one truck was damaged and five firemen were injured near the Nike base around 3:30 p.m.

Los Angeles County did report that five of its men suffered burns while battling the 30-acre blaze in Hacienda Heights. Two were released after treatment while the other three were reported to be in Whittier Presbyterian Hospital, one in the isolation ward and the other two in the intensive care. Names of the injured were not available.

In the Trabuco Canyon fire, 3,268 acres of heavy brush were charred, with one outlying structure destroyed. More than 500 men were still on the lines this morn-

ing, although the blaze was reported contained.

The flames surrounded the small community of Trabuco Oaks and blackened the fringes of O'Neill Park during the day, driving campers out of the area. This morning the combined forces battling the flames had gotten a temporary line around the fire.

The seriousness of the fire and a lack of equipment, forced the Orange County Fire Department to call in a number of city units to fight the blaze. Among the forces still on the line this morning were 24 county units, two county bulldozers, 10 private bulldozers, three city task forces, six county civil defense units, 14 handcrews, seven units from the state division of forestry outside of the district, 14 conservation camp crews, plus six supervisory personnel. City forces responding included Fullerton, La Habra, Buena Park, Tustin, Santa Ana, Costa Mesa and Huntington Beach.

No injuries were reported to any of the personnel and only one house was destroyed.

Winds Sunday were running from 10-25 miles per hour, mostly from the east, but shifted later several times. Forecasts for today call for northeast to northwest winds up to 10 miles per hour.

Fire officials today are hoping for cooler weather because their forces have been stretched extremely thin. Officials said that brush is still tinder dry, temperatures are expected to reach 100 degrees and humidity will hover around 4 per cent with the fire danger "extreme."



WATCHFUL WAIT—Mrs. Marcella McGlothlin helps save home by watering roof as she anxiously watches flames raging below in the Carbon Canyon area.