

# First of Its Kind: A Historical Perspective on Wildland Fire Behavior Training

M.E. Alexander and D.A. Thomas

In 1957, the Chief of the USDA Forest Service appointed a task force to study ways of preventing firefighter fatalities in the future. A review of 16 fatality fires found that the associated fire behavior in all but one case was unexpected by those entrapped or over-run. One of the task force's major recommendations was an intensified program of fire behavior training.\*

The recommendation led to the first National Fire Behavior Training School. Trainees assembled at the Smokejumper Center in Missoula, MT, for a course that lasted from March 31 to May 1, 1958. Bacon (1958) has written a good account of the 5-week course.

The 28 trainees came from all regions of the Forest Service, various forestry schools, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and the National Association of State Foresters. The instructors came from the Forest Service, the U.S. Weather Bureau, Yale University,



*Students and instructors at the first National Fire Behavior Training School, held in spring 1958. Front row (left to right): A. Brackebusch (INT), E. DeSilvia (R-1), J. Philbrick (R-6), E. Marshall (R-6), M. Lowden (WO), E. Williams (R-8), J. Coleman (R-9), E. Bacon (WO), and W. Moore (R-1). Middle row (left to right): F. Brauer (R-1), K. Knutson (R-2), K. Wilson (R-2), J. Koen (R-8), J. Kilodragovich (R-1), C. Phillips (CDF), D. Pomerening (R-8), B. Emerson (R-9), H. Reinecker (CDF), and J. Dieterich (INT). Back row (left to right): L. Biddson (R-5), C. Fox (R-4), S. Moore (R-6), K. Scholz (R-2), J. Davis (RMF), K. Thompson (R-2), B. Rasmussen (R-4), J. Keetch (R-7), T. Schlapfer (R-5), L. Kelley (R-7), T. Koskella (R-4), W. Murray (R-4), K. Weiesenham (R-3), F. Mass (R-1), J. Franks (BLM), C. Hardy (INT), W. Krumm (WB), and J. Barrows (INT). Abbreviations: BLM = U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management; CDF = California Division of Forestry; INT = USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station; R-1 = Forest Service, Northern Region; R-2 = Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region; R-3 = Forest Service, Southwestern Region; R-4 = Forest Service, Intermountain Region; R-5 = Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region; R-6 = Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region; R-8 = Forest Service, Southern Region; R-9 = Forest Service, Eastern Region; RMF = Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station; WB = U.S. Weather Bureau; and WO = Forest Service, Washington Office.*

*Marty Alexander is a senior fire behavior research officer with the Canadian Forest Service at the Northern Forestry Centre, Edmonton, Alberta; and Dave Thomas is regional fuels specialist for the USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Region, Ogden, UT.*

\* The task force's full report is on the World Wide Web at <[http://wildfirelessons.net/Libr\\_History.html](http://wildfirelessons.net/Libr_History.html)>.

and the Munitalp Foundation. Trainees and some instructors are shown in the group photo below (from Bacon 1958).

## Acknowledgment

The authors wish to thank Mike Hardy and Colin Hardy for their

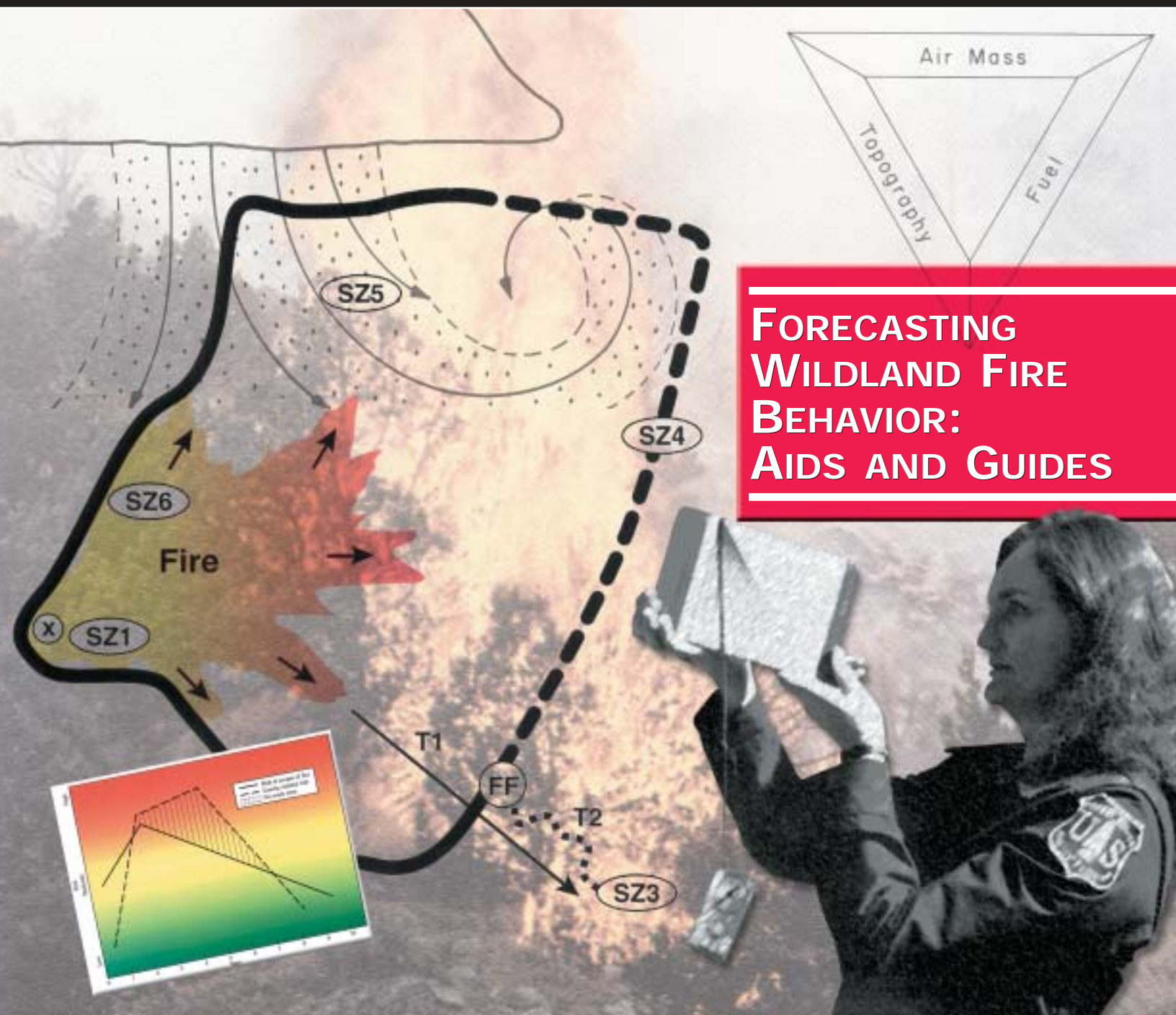
help with naming the individuals shown in the photo.

## Reference

Bacon, E.M. 1958. Training in forest fire behavior. *American Forests*. 64(7): 24-25, 47-49.

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## FORECASTING WILDLAND FIRE BEHAVIOR: AIDS AND GUIDES



United States Department of Agriculture  
Forest Service

## On the Cover:



*Aids and guides from the past, some illustrated here, can help improve the fire behavior forecasting capabilities needed today in both fire use and fire suppression. See the articles in this issue for descriptions.*

The FIRE 21 symbol (shown below and on the cover) stands for the safe and effective use of wildland fire, now and throughout the 21st century. Its shape represents the fire triangle (oxygen, heat, and fuel). The three outer red triangles represent the basic functions of wildland fire organizations (planning, operations, and aviation management), and the three critical aspects of wildland fire management (prevention, suppression, and prescription). The black interior represents land affected by fire; the emerging green points symbolize the growth, restoration, and sustainability associated with fire-adapted ecosystems. The flame represents fire itself as an ever-present force in nature. For more information on FIRE 21 and the science, research, and innovative thinking behind it, contact Mike Apicello, National Interagency Fire Center, 208-387-5460.



**Firefighter and public safety is our first priority.**

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