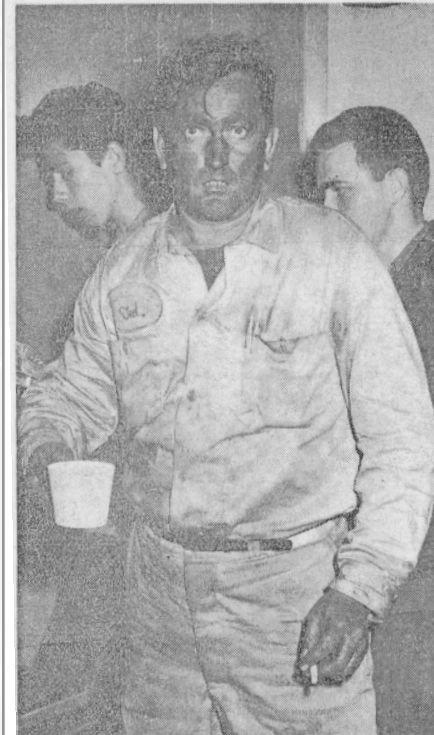


Fire in the Oswegatchie Hills

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Raging Woods Fire Sweeps 400 Acres; 250 Battle Flames



Ten Towns Send Help To Niantic

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EAST LYME — A raging fire fanned by 25-mile an hour northwest winds destroyed 400 acres of woodland at Oswegatchie Hills in 11 hours yesterday afternoon. The alarm came into the Niantic and Flanders Firehouses at 3:45 p.m.

Volunteer firemen from a town area deployed 250 men from 25 fire-fighting units around a perimeter of Oswegatchie Hills a mile and half long and a half mile wide to battle the blaze, which sent smoke towering into the sky.

No serious injuries were reported, although four young men were hurt. The most seriously injured was William C. McCormack, 17, a junior fireman of Waterford's Columbian Fire Company. He was admitted to Lawrence Memorial Hospital at 4:30 p.m. with first, second and third degree burns of the left arm.

Another youth, Robert Carlson, 17, of the Flanders J. V.'s, incurred a clipped nose and laceration of his right leg. He was given outpatient treatment at the hospital and released. Donald Johnson, 17, of 36 Kenyon Rd., Waterford, was taken to the hospital in the East Lyme Ambulance at 2:15 a.m., given outpatient treatment for bruises and exhaustion and sent home.

800 Yards to Go
Several homes in the Quarry Dock Rd. and Oswegatchie Hills Rd. area were threatened by the flames but crews of firemen with Indian tanks and booster lines killed the first 800 yards from the roadway.

On May 10, 1962, a large and still remembered brush fire swept over the Oswegatchie Hills. Fanned by 25-mile an hour northwest winds, the fire consumed most of the 400 acres of forest in an 11-hour epic event for the town of East Lyme. Twenty-five fire-fighting units consisting of 250 men, including fire personnel from 10 other surrounding towns, battled the blaze. The alarm came in at 3:45 p.m. and the firefighters fought the blaze until 2 a.m. the following day. According to an article in *The Day* newspaper, "Flames were spotted from the Gold Star Memorial Bridge. Fire companies from Middlesex County answered the call for help. Clinton, Old Saybrook, Essex, Westbrook and Killingworth brought engines and crews. Waterford sent all but two of its fire engines to the East Lyme blaze."

Newspaper caption:

WEARY—Old Lyme fireman Ted Ely takes a coffee break during 11-hour battle against a raging forest fire in East Lyme yesterday. Firemen from a town area joined forces to combat the blaze, whipped by gusty northwest winds. A total of 400 acres was burned.

NEWS, NIAN TIC, CONN., THURSDAY, MAY 17, 1962

Weary Area Firefighters Welcome Rain

Rain early this week was a pleasant sight to hard working volunteer firefighters of the area who, after a miserable week of April brush fires, found the month of May even worse.

Ten towns sent help to Niantic on May 10 when a raging fire consumed 400 acres of

the Hills. The weary firefighters did well to subdue the fire by 10:30 p.m., but it was rekindled the following day.

The fire took up a new front as a 25 acre tract near Saunders Point was blackened. Officials continued to worry about rekindling of the blaze in the area and prayed for rain. A soaking rain fell on Monday of this week.

Newspaper caption:

JOB FOR A SMALL MAN—This young fireman in the catch basin is about to crawl through a culvert under Saunders Point Road taking a fire hose with him. This extra trouble saved the precious hose from being run over by the countless vehicles that passed over the heavily traveled street.



Thought to be extinguished, the fire rekindled and raged out of control again the next day, threatening homes in the Saunders Point area. A similar fire in 1952 also burned the Oswegatchie Hills area. After three days the fire was finally said to be secure, and a soaking rain the following week put an end to any further fire threats.

The fire completely reset the clock for decades in terms of ecological succession. Due to the drastic change in habitat, the variety of bird species changed after the fire. Sixty years later the species



Blue-winged warbler



Ruffed grouse



Whippoorwill

found in the preserve have changed again due to forest succession. Of the 178 species observed after the fire, including blue-winged warbler, ruffed grouse and whippoorwills, 55 of the species are no longer present in the now maturing forest.



Evidence of the fire can still be seen today.

Pictured (left) is a fire scar left from the 1962 fire. As a windswept fire rushes up a ridgeline, the flames wrap around the base of the tree and on the opposite side creating a hot eddy of flames that burns through the bark and outer layers of the tree. The flames leave a scar that looks like a cavity at the base of a tree. Most of the scars in the preserve face uphill towards the top of the ridge. Also, the small cluster of 10-to-15-foot pitch pines found at the northern end of the red trail on the ridge top are thought to have been spawned by the 1962 fire.



The entrance arbors to this park contain scorched pieces of oak and laurel branches to symbolize the 1962 fire. The method of scorching wood also acts as a preservative. This is the reason that carbon fire scars can still be found in the preserve today.

The Japanese use this method of scorching wood, called *Shou-sugi-ban*, to preserve the cedar siding of their houses.

