

Fire at Paper Mill Burns Piles of Logs, Warehouse

Hundreds of Fire Fighters Battle Millwood Blazes

(See pictures on page 18.)

A wind-whipped fire yesterday destroyed a warehouse and attacked huge piles of logs at the Inland Empire Paper company mill in Millwood.

Late last night the flames still were eating through the 30-foot high stacks, stretched about 2½ miles along the south side of the Spokane river from the Trent drive-in theater to about a mile east of the mill.

As hundreds of professional and volunteer fire fighters battled the log blazes, flames erupted at one of the firm's warehouses, about one block from the main plant on Argonne road. The structure was destroyed. It housed paper, pulp, a small quantity of butane gas and acid.

A/2c Charles Leaper, Fairchild air force base, was overcome by toxic gases while assisting in fighting the warehouse fire. He was taken to Sacred Heart hospital, where he was in satisfactory condition.

The original fire was discovered in a pile of logs about one mile east of the mill at 12:48 p. m. The pile extended for eight blocks alongside the river.

Fire broke out in two piles a few yards east of the Trent drive-in theater about 3:45 p. m.

Burn Fast

The flames consumed the logs like matchsticks and sent billows of thick black smoke into the air. A wall of flames leaped more than 100 feet in the air.

More than 250 airmen from Fairchild arrived at the scene in mid-afternoon to assist hundreds of other firemen and volunteers. Col. Sidney S. Pidgeon, deputy base commander, said the men were from all squadrons at the base.

A 10,000-gallon pumper unit also was sent from Fairchild and two 550-gallon pumpers were sent from Geiger field, one a municipal unit and the other from the air force.

Fire fighters tried to confine the fire to the one pile of logs. They feared a shift of the wind would send flames leaping over railroad spur tracks and into long, dry grass adjoining a cluster of homes at the north end of Davis street on the banks of the river.

At this site, firemen poured streams of water on a stand of dry pine trees and grass.

At times embers carried by the wind caused several grass fires on the north side of the river. These were brought under control by a detachment of fire fighters from the state forest department at Spokane.

The Spokane Valley fire department, county and civil defense, the naval supply depot at Velox and Millwood fire department equipment was used in combating the flames.

Plea to Spectators

Hundreds of volunteers were enlisted as a shovel brigade to construct firebreaks near the fireline. Thirty truckloads of airmen from Fairchild air force base arrived to help fight the fire about 3:45 p. m.

As the fire ate westward in the long line of logs, a power crane was brought into action to help in efforts to prevent the fire from consuming the remainder of the stand of logs and possibly igniting near-by piles.

Hundreds of onlookers and automobiles cluttered the area near the fire.

The Valley fire department fought the log fire from the north side and pumped water from the river. Residents of Millwood were asked to refrain from using any water except that which was absolutely necessary so that pressure could be preserved for fire-fighting equipment.

The fire first was spotted at 12:48 p. m. at the east end of the log pile. It quickly ate into the pile and had gained considerable headway before fire-fighting equipment could get to the scene.

the north side of the river by spectators watching the spectacular blaze.

When the warehouse caught fire, five pieces of equipment sped to the blaze, but two were delayed when held up by heavy traffic and onlookers crowding the street just off Argonne road.

State patrolmen, deputy sheriffs and civil defense workers were busy attempting to control and regulate traffic on Argonne.

Black, acrid smoke poured up from the warehouse which housed pulp, paper and a small amount of butane gas at its east end. The south wall and roof of the structure caved in minutes after the fire started. Fire fighters were forced to jump quickly, dropping hoses, to avoid being caught in the falling mass of burning debris.

Flames from the warehouse fire leaped more than 100 feet in the air and licked in and out of the pall of smoke arising into the air.

At the Dalton street location where the logs were stored, the fire ran east along the Spokane river for three-quarters of a mile. William Seitz, deputy sheriff sergeant estimated. It burned three 30-foot stacks of hemlock, spruce and fir logs used in making paper.

A small five-room house at E9304 Empire owned by James P. Trecca, was vacated when the warehouse fire was at its worst. The house wasn't damaged, however.

Several women volunteers leaved the intense heat to carry cold drinks to firemen. Four of them, Mrs. Bruce Tackett, E8709 Knox, Mrs. Jack Meyer and her daughter, Vivian, E10414 Empire, and Mrs. I. E. Rhoades, E1011-Dalton, moved into the worst area with their cups and pitchers.

The Salvation Army and Millwood residents furnished coffee and doughnuts for weary fire fighters.

Clyde Friend, head of the Spokane city civil defense, said auxiliary police, deputy sheriffs and firemen were called to assist in combating the fires and control traffic.

The strong north winds kept the fire from spreading through residential districts on the south side of the river.

Dean Banta, general manager of the paper mill, last night expressed his gratitude to the many volunteers who assisted in combating the fire.

"They did a terrific job in containing a bad blaze," he said.



One of the piles of logs which were hit by the fire shortly after midnight yesterday. The fire raged out of control for more than six hours as hundreds worked to halt it.