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THE VALUES OF FIRE CONTROL EXPERIENCE

TO THE STUDENT FORESTER

A seasonal job in fire control would be of great value to every student forester. The particular position that will be referred to in the paper is a typical forest-fire-suppression crewman's. It will be assumed that the protection zone of the crew is in an area of high fire occurrence and rather heavy recreational use. The work will be with a large, widespread organization, affording travel. It will further be assumed that the crew is an initial-attack unit of small size, stationed at an important point. The crew will be a versatile tanker outfit, adapted to any type of fire fighting. The crew foreman will be a highly rated man of considerable experience and cognizant of all aspects of the work including public relations. This fire crew job will present a constructive environment for the working student.

The most obvious factor is the living conditions. The student, whether he lived away from home or school, will take room and board at the crew quarters. He will find himself away from parents, old friends, and convenient, large city life. Though he will be under guidance and regulation, he will experience being more on his own than ever before. He will find much more expected of him in self-reliance. He will have the opportunity to display good personal habits or a marked change or failure. The importance of keeping himself fit and clean will be made clear to him. Silly and
babyish habits, should he possess such, will necessarily be ridiculed out of him. He will have to show his stuff twenty-four hours a day in both competition with his fellow fire fighters and in maintaining his status as member of the little team he belongs to. He may suddenly be made aware of radical alteration imperative in his daily routine. He will get a good look at himself through the eyes of his fellow workers and his foreman. An addition to and strengthening of his education in personal maintenance is sure to come.

Along with amelioration of personal habits will come an alignment of personal conduct. For twenty-four hours per day for a five to seven day week he will live closely with the rest of his crew. One barracks, beds side by side, common facilities will make it rough for the spoiled, egotistical, or otherwise selfish student. The class of home he comes from or the ways of his college life will be of little weight in his getting along at the fire station. He will be forced to become "one of the boys" and a loyal, willing member of the team or actually lose his employ.

In two principle ways his behavior at station and with crew will be governed. The foreman will enforce a list of station regulations and the crew-living will bring out consideration for others. Such things as hours of retiring, rising, meals, and work will be laid down on paper. Other aspects such as cleaning of quarters, making of bunks, and straightening of personal gear will be inspected by the foreman.
Perhaps the most important aspect called regard for fellow-men will come with this type of living. Trouble will come to the student who is not able to subordinate his own wishes to the harmony of the crew. Looking at the others will educate him to his own faults or attributes. Others will, by word or action, tell him of his faults should they persist.

The "working together" theme makes its way into his thinking with the forced review of his personal traits in hygiene, appearance, and behavior. The actually written rules even point him toward teamwork. He will do well if he recognizes this fact. He learns to work with the other men in the morning cleaning and straightening. He will begin to see that this cooperative effort will, in reality, add to the ease and pleasantness of living. Only through complete cooperation in carrying out of mandatory and voluntary chores and in observing the wishes of his mates as well as his own the new crewman find enjoyment in his work. Little difficulty will be encountered by the man who tries. — The man who maintains an antagonistic attitude and remains aloof in such a crew will "find out".

These aforementioned forces, having more influence upon a poor or green man than a wiser one, are all very important in the development of the student yet have nothing at all to do with fires. These are the basic educators introducing a fellow to living with people and making his way among men. The right training in group living, with the type of individuals found in forestry circles, can and must be put with his
technical training to make a successful forester.

The cooperative idea is a necessary part of the actual work of fire suppression. More so than in many lines, a good fire crew works in coordination at all times. The student will learn to fit into the close-knit outfit. The speed, safety, and effectiveness of the pumper operations depend on simultaneous action. The foreman will train the student in his part of the attack and illustrate how the crewman would "hold up the works" in failing to do his task. Long drill will form the crew into an efficient team, working at fire with the tanker. The student will see this growing unit and skill, and will begin to take pride in his crew. Pride in the condition of the station will come with pride in crew ability in this work. The foreman will let each crewman work at all of the other positions on the tanker until he can do each in case of need. This makes the man versatile and confident and gives him a knowledge of the whole picture.

In all the methods of attack including hand tools, line building, tanker use, and backfire the student will be trained. He will learn his organization up to the highest level. He will be taught all of fire control his interest permits. He will find where his work fits into forestry. Techniques of fire fighting and all background material he will learn. He will benefit in that he will be paid for a thorough schooling in fire control. He will also learn how much, experience counts in any profession, especially forest-fire protection.
His foreman and many of the men he will meet will show him what he doesn't know in practical fire fighting and keep him from becoming the "forester and fireman of all time." This humbleness he might need to put with his wealth of technical college knowledge.

Fire control, a valuable thing to know, well for any forester, will be learned by him. He will learn to be tolerant and cooperative with other men in his control unit. He will learn to live without parental or college guidance. He will learn to be a little humble at times; to recognize that some people know much more than he does. He will learn pride in what he does, in the fellow he works with, and equipment he works with. He will pride in the ordinary role of housecleaning.

As the season moves on and the student works with his unit, he will begin having loyalty to the crew. He will have respect for his foreman and purpose in putting out fine performance in action. With the loyalty will come a sense of responsibility. He will turn out good work because he knows he is a key man in the little organization, with a key part in a vast organization. Loyalty, pride, and responsibility combine to improve him on the job. That improvement will never be lost. It seems that this type of work is conducive to development of those three qualities.

The fire crew position used as a basis for this report will give the student a chance to assist in public relations. The foreman will school his crew in the handling of people. The important prevention patrol work will give the student
a good idea of methods of enforcing laws with no loss of public support. What to say to an illegal truckman and how to teach each person something will be learned. Proper courteous treatment of visitors to the station will be given the crew and expected to be used. The student will learn to meet people as well as the organization policies. The thorough knowledge of the field of fire in forestry, the background and organizational training will enable him to answer questions and to find new friends.

With the type of work he does, he will run into another maturing influence. The student will make use of his training under pressure. At times extreme pressure, of fatigue, excitement, and seeming danger will make the performance of his job difficult. From the simple, relaxed camp ground maintenance to the fast-moving coordination of the initial fire attack he will find himself expected to do his part. Good fire experience can toughen a man and make him realize a lot of things besides providing suppression training. He may get the chance to watch other men's reactions when "she gets hot." He may observe how character traits like mental stability, that old consideration of others, cool thinking, and perseverance come forward during tight spots on going shows. He will profit by by noting facts leading to discussion and judgement by overhead personnel. He may, after becoming qualified have opportunity to make decisions and give orders himself.

The importance of proper use, care, safety, precautions
and inspection of equipment will be impressed upon him. The periodic checks he will see, take part in, then actually run on tank trucks, hand tools, pump units, and accessory equipment will help form careful habits for his own use. Explanation of reasons for each going-on, and observation of the results of carelessness should assist him in grasping the "whys". His work demands efficient and neat equipment. Again the care and use of living quarters and facilities he will have to learn. The proper maintenance of his station, and its grounds he will have close knowledge of in his work schedule. All of this routine safety, cleanliness, and work-ind order should turn his attention in the right way for future employment of any kind.

A fire crewman, in the best of surroundings, will be under the influence of the forces mentioned. It must be noted that rarely will the ideal situation exist, however at least some of the value can be realized from any fire control job. The more intangible values having little to do with actual fire-fighting are what will add to his technical background. Working, and earning his pay, away from previous guidance will certainly help him gain confidence and value to a future employer. A good review of living will be made. The value to the forestry student or any student are high and numerous enough to make it well to have each underclassman in fire control at least one season.