



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

A CONVERTED World War II "Flying Boxcar" contracted by the state during spring fire season, dumps up to 2,000 gallons of chemical retardant on a blaze during a single run. Based at the Bear Pen air strip, it serves a five-county area.

'Flying Boxcar' Fights District's Woods Fires

It arrives like clockwork at the Bear Pen airfield in mid-March of each year, just in time for the spring fire season in eastern North Carolina.

Before the World War II vintage "Flying Boxcar" departs in late May for its Greybull, Wyoming, base or other fire zones, it will have played a key role in containing the forest fires that sweep through the five-county district each year, dropping up to 2,000 gallons of chemical fire retardant in a single run.

Late Thursday pilot Daryl Nobbyley and copilot Charles Peterson made two drops on a fire at Grissetown shortly after the bomber's arrival one day earlier than scheduled.

It was called out again Friday and Saturday, when an afternoon drizzle temporarily dampened most of the district.

Each year for about the past 20 years, said District Forest Ranger Willard Lane of Whiteville, the N.C. Division of Forest Resources has leased a "fire bomber" for the district to help contain and out wildfires while they're small and less dangerous and to help bring major fires under control. A second bomber is stationed at eastern regional headquarters at Kinston.

This year the contract price is \$300 an hour for flying time and \$700 per 24 hours on standby.

In a "good" fire season here, Nobbyley said, he and Peterson might put in 25 hours in the air, guided into fires by a small lead plane piloted by Gene Parsons of Clinton. By Saturday evening they had logged about two hours of air time in three days of duty.

"It's just like being a real fireman," said Nobbyley.

"Hours and hours of boredom and then the alarm rings."

District 8, with a diameter of about 100 miles across, includes Brunswick, Pender, Columbus, Bladen and Duplin counties—and about 2.1 million acres of forest. Laird Davison, district forester, estimated last year that the districts' woodlands had a value of about \$640 million.

While the severity of the fire season varies from one year to the next, bomber pilot Nobbyley said fires in the Carolinas are hotter than those he typically fights elsewhere in the county. That's apparently because of the pine trees and the heavy undergrowth typically found in most timber stands.

"It's a lot harder to spot fires here because there are no landmarks," he said, adding that fellow Hawkins & Powers contract tanker pilots who have worked the area before warned he could easily get lost.

Loading the bomber's tanker takes about seven minutes, Nobbyley said. And with an air speed of up to 170 mph, the average drop takes about 20 minutes once the converted C-119 leaves the 6,000 foot state-owned airstrip deep within the Green Swamp.

The tanker supplements district firefighting equipment that includes 12 tractors with plows. Another three plows will soon be equipped and assigned, one each to Brunswick, Bladen and Columbus counties. Brunswick's new plow and crew will be based at Maco. Lane said existing plows are located at Bolivia and Shallotte.

Three smaller bombers called "snows" with a tank capacity of 250 gallons are also available from a field near Jacksonville.



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A STATE-OWNED PLOW cuts a fire lane around a LP gas tank at Longwood Thursday morning. A runaway trash fire crept within several feet of the tanks, also threatening several homes.

Volunteers From Five Units Help Fight Fires

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Volunteer firefighters from Calabash, Waccamaw, Sunset Beach, Ocean Isle and Shallotte helped keep fire off threatened houses and chased and outed spot fires that developed, Logan said. Clivietown brought a tanker. Calabash and Waccamaw tankers were out of service, one with transmission trouble, the other with

clutch problems.

"It has probably been a record-breaking week as far as response from volunteer fire departments is concerned," he said. "Every fire the forest service went out on, one or more volunteer departments responded also."

Both Logan and forest resources officials cautioned county residents

against burning while the ban is in effect and against leaving a fire unattended at any time.

"Every seven out of 10 of the fires has been from negligence—people starting fires and not staying to watch them," said Logan. "They're going to have to stay with it as long as we have the high winds and the dry conditions."



A 558-ACRE FIRE near Grissetown Thursday evening brought flames dangerously close to these residences and destroyed two barns and four cars.

Auctioned Property Check Received

A check for \$12,500, the down payment on land that will net the schools \$100,000, has been delivered to the Brunswick County Board of Education.

Several lots in Pender County were recently auctioned by the school board for \$100,000, the minimum amount the schools were awarded in bond forfeitures for James Horne, formerly of Sunset Beach, a defendant in the December 1980 U-Haul drug smuggling case.

Although the N.C. Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the schools receiving the bond forfeitures, land in Pender County was used as collateral for the fines. The schools had the choice to either retain the property or to sell the lots as a whole parcel, said school board attorney E.J. Prevatte.

The board agreed to sell the property as a whole, but with a release clause to grant individual lots to the

owner as they are paid for. That will allow the board to receive an even flow of cash from the sale within the next year, said school finance officer Samuel Adecock.

Horne was one of several defendants arrested Nov. 20, 1981 in connection with the conspiracy to traffic into the county more than 10,000 pounds of marijuana.

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