

North Bay Fires—Narratives

Report of Actions of Strike Team 2254A—AC Tom Siragusa

On October 8, 2017, multiple wildfires broke out in the Sonoma and Napa county regions. Strike Team XSF2254A was assembled, and left for Sonoma County in less than 1 hour. En route to the reporting location, the Strike Team was first on scene of an approximately 200 acre grass fire in the area of Hwy 37 and Sears Point Raceway. The Strike Team attempted to contain the fire until Marin and Sonoma units arrived, at which time 2254A continued to the reporting location in the town of Glen Ellen.

Upon arrival in Glen Ellen, fire had already entered the town, and dozens of houses were burning on both sides of Warm Springs Road. DC-3 from Glen Ellen directed units to O'Donnell Lane, with the objective of saving as many structures as possible. As units were positioned, it was discovered that some houses had not been evacuated. Members had to rapidly evacuate the neighborhood while attempting to defend structures. After approximately 2 hours, the fire became too intense and 2254A units were forced to retreat quickly to the south end of O'Donnell Lane where 2254A was asked to attempt to defend a 120+ year-old wood frame church. The Glen Ellen Chief stated that it was an important local landmark. In order to accomplish this task, 2254A units had to protect 2 other homes. This required them to work very close to hot burning structures with propane tanks and many rounds of ammunition that could be heard discharging in the fires. By 7am, the church was no longer in danger. The church, 2 houses, and the main business district of Glen Ellen was saved by the stand made at the church by the members of 2254A.

Throughout the day and overnight, members continued to engage fire in all parts of the Glen Ellen area, including an interior fire attack which saved a residence. By 10am Tuesday morning, the fire had passed through the area and members began assisting residents who were returning to check the condition of their homes. At approximately 2pm, 2254A was reassigned to Bennett Valley to assist with fire encroaching on homes in the Sonoma Mountain Road area. Throughout the night units repelled fire from structures on Sonoma Mountain Road.

By Wednesday morning, members were now working on their 3rd 24-hour shift in a row. No relief was available. Units were assigned to protect structures in the Bennett Valley Road area, and actively engaged fires in their positions throughout the day. In addition, 2254A worked with several Type 1 and Type 3 engines to prevent the fire from advancing across Sonoma Mountain Road, while protecting multiple structures. Units continued to engage throughout the night. In the morning, 2254A was notified that there was no relief, and the strike team was assigned to patrol for hot spots on Sonoma Mountain Road. At 2pm, on October 12, over 80 hours after their arrival in Glen Ellen, Strike Team 2254A was released from assignment, and directed to rehab and restock equipment at Base Camp.

Another assignment followed the next morning at 7am, only 17 hours after first relief. The day included patrol in Oakmont. In addition, 2254A discovered, reported, and assisted at a new fire in the hills on the opposite side of Highway 12. By midnight the Strike Team was headed to the City of Sonoma where fire had reached the city limits. 2254A was assigned and successfully defended the Bartholomew Park Winery, and several historic buildings in the same area. In the morning, once the fire had passed their position, 2254A was reassigned to the Oakmont Branch of the Nuns Fire, where they assumed Los Alamos Structure Protection Group supervision and responsibility, for 4 hours past the end of their shift.

Dangerous situations were encountered countless times, nearly 100 structures were saved, civilians were evacuated to safety, and parts of the fire were brought to a halt. The members of 2254A rose to the challenge. Each time they were asked if they could give more, they did so without hesitation, and the quality and dedication of their service never wavered, and countless lives were made better through their service.

Reports from Strike Team XSF 2255A

Strike Team Leader—Pablo Siquenza

XSF 2255A arrived in Santa Rosa approximately 06:30 and encountered whole neighborhoods on fire, including commercial structures such as KMART and Kohl's Department Store. The team extinguished fires at multiple homes to stop the forward spread in that area. The team was then assigned extinguishing fires among homes in another neighborhood, and fighting a structure fire in a commercial building, Keysite Technologies.

Acting/ Strike Team Leader—Brook Baker

There is massive destruction here, as the team moves from structure to structure saving as much as possible. It is a very dynamic, fast-moving situation. The team is now heading to a complex of large industrial buildings that. Our team is doing a great job, and was the first to arrive in Santa Rosa. It is difficult to give an accurate number of structures saved, but we are directly engaged with saving numerous structures.

Report from OES 2815A (EMA 361)—Lt. Mark Macias

The Strike Team arrived at 3381 Foothill road (Hwy. 128), and met with our strike team leader Chief Joe Novelli, who informed us that there was no IAP as of yet. The team were assigned to the Tubbs Fire. E361 was assigned 5 structures on Foss Hill Rd. (18501, 18640, 18655, 18775, 18777). There, we found active fires surrounding all of these structures. We did a quick triage and went to work putting out a fire on a roof of a garage, and protecting the surrounding homes. The owner of what was believed to be 18501, was relieved when we arrived due to the fact that his 5th wheel vacation trailer was about to be destroyed. However, the team stopped the fire just short of any damage. All of the other structures were prepped and defended until relief was provided by the Cal Fire Unit.

The team was then assigned to a tactical patrol along Hwy. 128, where the team found a fully involved garage at 3514 Hwy 128. The fire was extinguished, and did not spread to the main residence.

Falling trees were a major hazard in the areas where the fire had ran through. At one point, a large tree approximately 75' X 40" diameter had fallen across Hwy 128, halting all emergency traffic. Chief Novelli assigned a crew from one of the other engines to start cutting up the tree. Seeing that this would take approx. 45 minutes to clear, E361 hooked a chain to the tree and pulled it out of the way in less than 5 minutes, opening the road to traffic.

The team was then assigned to tactical patrol and structure protection along Yellow Jacket Ranch Road, Tubbs lane, and Hwy. 29. The team received its first break after 72 hours. After a long needed break, 2815A was assigned to Yellow Jacket Ranch Road to support a back firing operation. We cut the line, performed a progressive hose lead of approx. 800', and put out spot fires until we were pulled out due to dangerous conditions.

2815A worked the next 48 hours performing tactical patrols, putting out spot fires, and mopping up along Hwy. 29 where high winds were driving the fire over Hwy. 29, threatening numerous structures. At approximately 0430 hours, 2815A was assigned to Oakmont structure protection. E361 was assigned to access the juvenile detention center for structure protection. E361 forced open the main, rear, and side gates, opening up the main yard as a "safe zone" for all units involved in Oakmont structure protection. 2815A was relieved for a 24 hour break.

2815A was then assigned all of Wood Valley Road for the next 24 hours performing "mop up" and "hazard mapping." Upon completion of our assignment, 2815A was sent to base camp for 24 hours.

2815A was assigned to Adobe Canyon Road for the next 24 hours, for structure prep and defense, active fire extinguishment, and to support back firing operations. E361 found a burning tree, which had fallen and was threatening a home at 970 Adobe canyon Road. E361 made a progressive hose lead defending the house, and extinguishing the fire. 2815A was relieved and sent to base camp.

2815A was reassigned to Adobe Canyon Rd. for the next 24 hours "mop up", however at 1600 hours, due to rain, 2815A was sent back to base camp for "demobilization."

I would like to commend the following people:

Chief Novellie for his command, and professionalism. Chief Novellie took the utmost care of his Strike Team, making sure we were well fed and rested when possible, and ready for any assignment.

FF Giacomini, FF Noel Moroney, and FF/Paramedic Lorenzo Ibarra are the hardest working crews I ever had under my command. These men were professional, highly motivated, needed very little if any direction, to make the SFFD shine, as always. It was a real pleasure to work with a crew who really know there job.