

RHODE ISLAND FIRES THREATEN TO OUST 50 TO 150 FAMILIES

Flames Start at Four New
Spots in Coventry Section
and Old Blaze Revives

MORE SOLDIERS CALLED

Martial Law Is Continued as
3,000 Press Battle in Forests
for the Third Day

By MILTON BRACKER
Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

PROVIDENCE, R. I., May 2—At least four new forest fires broke out in Western Rhode Island today and a resurgent old one threatened to bring about the evacuation of fifty to 150 families in the township of Coventry, name of tragic associations.

Announcing that martial law, proclaimed yesterday morning, would continue in the affected areas until the emergency had "cleared up," Governor J. Howard McGrath said early tonight that the situation at one point in Coventry, near the Connecticut line, was worse than it was yesterday.

In general, he added, "I think we have more individual fires today but of less intensity."

At the State Defense Council office here Governor McGrath completed arrangements for the dispatch of a fleet of evacuation trucks to the flame-menaced sector and revealed that 200 more Regular Army men were on the way from Niantic, Conn., to help. Fort Devens in Massachusetts sent 200 yesterday.

Fight in Its Third Day

With more than 3,000 fire fighters from scores of communities plainly showing the strain of a battle that began Thursday afternoon, the problem was aggravated by another warm, dry, gusty day.

The new fires tended to cut down the reports of incendiarism, but the Federal Bureau of Investigation continued non-committally with its inquiry into possible criminal intent behind the fires, which have already caused an estimated \$2,500,000 in damage. Thirteen homes have been destroyed.

Although the little Luttit School at West Greenwich remained general headquarters for the fire-fighting agencies, the center of tension shifted during the day to a small shack at Greene, a tiny community in Coventry Township not far from the worst-menaced farms.

Here Ed Arnold, chief of the West Coventry fire district, presided grimly over one of the few

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telephones in the area. The shack is normally used as a post for observers of the Army's First Interceptor Command. Mr. Arnold wore his spotter button on his hunter's cap. The rear wall of the shack was covered with color photos of American fighting planes.

The phone brought a request for fire apparatus.

"You've got everything I've got," Mr. Arnold insisted. "The only available piece I'm keeping for when the house gets on fire—that's what it's set up for."

Gets New Call for Aid

He hung up, watched a skirl of dust along the porch.

"Don't tell me that wind's shifted," he muttered.

Sure enough.

The phone rang again.

"Yes," Mr. Arnold said. "Yes. You need one man and a nozzle? Right away."

An alert volunteer stepped forward. "Orders, sir?"

"Yes. Back of Mrs. Briggs's house, it broke out to beat hell there. One man and a nozzle."

Last reports indicated that the eight-room house of Mrs. Sanford Briggs had been saved. But talk of the possible evacuation of the area persisted. Smoke from the encroaching blaze built up like a thunderhead, hanging gray and evil in the warm air.

The strain on the members of the State Guard and other policing forces was evidenced in unshaven faces, reddened eyes and fatigued voices. More than 100 men and boys have been treated for burns, cuts, the effects of smoke or exhaustion.

Under martial law are the "towns" of Coventry, Exeter and West Greenwich and parts of Scituate, Foster and Hopkinton. Every one in Rhode Island calls them towns, although they are more clearly portrayed as townships; each spreads out amazingly for so tiny a State and none has any business center larger than a postoffice and a half dozen stores.

Swamp Saves Fire Fighter

On an automobile tour today one saw clean sun-bathed farmhouses and fields with cows calmly chewing their cuds. But over these bucolic scenes hovered real danger, foreshadowed in the grayish smoke clouds.

The perils which the fire fighters were undergoing were reflected in countless stories. One of these was told by Corporal Ralph Walsh of Woonsocket, who had become cut off from his fellow-Guardsmen and was badly hurt before being rescued.

He purposely bogged himself in a swamp when a raging burst of crown fire threatened to bombard him with flaming branches.

"I've been a woodsman for a good many years," he said, "but I never saw any fire as swift as this one. The lieutenant sent me for water and I guess I got lost because of the smoke. The next

thing I knew, flames were rushing toward me in the underbrush. I started running ahead of them. It was terrible."

His eyes seemed to interpolate "But you haven't heard anything yet." Then: "I happened to look up in the air and there above me the flames were leaping from top to top among the pines. I had to keep going. Finally I saw an opening in the woods. I made for it and it was a swamp. I waded through the mud and that's the last I remember."