

Northern Command Mission Summary for California Fires

Press Release

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Posted Nov 03, 2003 at 12:37:PM MST

The weather finally cooperated with firefighting efforts in southern California. So much so, that on Saturday, Nov. 1, the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) released all federalized military units that assisted with fighting the wildland fires.

Air Force Lt. Col. Roberto Garza spokesman for the U.S. Northern Command Public Affairs Office, said, "the snow and rain couldn't have come at a better time to help us contain and put out the fires."

All eight C-130 aircraft equipped with the Modular Airborne Firefighting System (MAFFS), and 6 helicopters with fire suppression buckets returned to their units. The units flew more than 70 missions and dispersed more than 195,000 gallons of retardant or water in the fire fighting efforts. "Both Air Force and Marine units were flying missions within a day upon receiving notification from U.S. Northern Command to deploy," stated Lt Col Garza. "They were very responsive and proved to be invaluable to the fire fighting effort."

The C-130s provided aerial assault on the fires with the Modular Airborne Firefighting System, or MAFFS. The MAFFS is a modular unit, inserted into a C-130 aircraft. Each MAFFS unit is capable of carrying approximately 3,000 gallons of fire retardant. When discharged from about 200 feet above the tree lines the system is capable of covering an area of about 60 feet wide and one-quarter mile in length in approximately 10-11 seconds.

The CH-53 is designed for heavy-lift capabilities and was considered ideal for this joint operation due to the weight standards of the Bambi Buckets when fully loaded. The Bambi Bucket is a proven, helicopter-borne integrated firefighting system in service worldwide. Three different types of buckets were used -- one 1,340-gallon, two 900-gallon and three 660-gallon.

A mission summary of military units involved with the firefighting effort:

While homeland defense is the primary mission of the command established as a result of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, U.S. Northern Command also provides "one-stop shopping" for military assistance to civil authorities in the event of disaster relief operations to include wildland fires.

When NIFC determines military firefighting assistance is needed, the center sends a request for assistance to the Department of Defense. Once authorized, the tasking is sent to Northern Command to execute.