# Baton Rouge Fire

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## Baton Rouge Complex

It happened on a Monday afternoon three hours before the crew was going off the clock. We had been told the week before that there was really not much happening throughout the country relating to wildfire or fire management in general. Being 4th on the list to go out of region didn't help either. I knew that the likelihood of getting an assignment was unlikely and this was somewhat frustrating as it was my last two weeks on the crew before my student season ended and I had to go to school back in New Mexico. With my mind set on it being a long week in station, I was totally caught off guard for what happened that day. I was sitting in the commons when people said that we were going to gather up in 15 minutes. I really had no idea what was going on so I asked what the meeting was going to be about and one of the crewmembers said that we might have a fire that we were getting assigned to. I didn't really know what to think, was it out of state? Would I be able to go because I had to leave the next week and I couldn't do a 14-day role? Did I have everything I needed? I knew all this information was going to come to me soon enough although it just kept running through my mind. Upon gathering in the commons, Paul told us that we had been ordered for immediate assistance on a fire that had started in southern New Mexico and that we were going to leave ASAP. After everything was done and the trucks and crewmembers were ready we loaded up and headed south towards the fire.

Earlier on I overheard Mark say that we were going to spend the night in Las Vegas. I thought how funny, we were going to spend the night in my hometown. During the drive down I gave my parents a call to let them know what was happening and that we were going to spend the night there but wouldn't get in until late. They were also very surprised because I had told them about the likely hood of us going out and how slim it was and yet here we are heading to a fire. I told them that there was really no need for them to come to town because I had seen them the week before and I was going to see them next week when my student season was up.

About 4 hours into the drive we pulled into a gas station in Pueblo and I jumped out to do all the usual duties expected. Windows, trash, and anything else that has to be done to get back on the road. We were also told to get something to eat; it was either Carls Jr. or Subway. Our truck, 56, decided to go with Carls Jr. While in the line I always think about what I am going to order because it needs to be something that they can make fast so that I'm not the last one to the trucks. Never be last! I decided to get what everyone else got, just a regular hamburger with some chili cheese fries. Slowly people began to get their orders and head to the truck, but I am still there. I started to get a little antsy because I really didn't want to be the last one. Ultimately I ended up being the last one waiting for my food and getting to the truck.

When we finally got to Roswell we immediately headed west towards Alamagordo. The fire was somewhere between Roswell and Alamagordo. After about 45 minutes of heading south, we turned off onto a dirt road and headed into the middle of nowhere. I remember thinking, what could possibly be out here that there was such a need to put this fire out. Once we got to ICP, which was a small volunteer fire department called the Flying H, we waited until Mark and James (captains) got what was needed

to inform the crew on what our assignment was going to be. It ended up being that we were only one of a couple crews that were currently on this fire and at the moment there was very little communication on what was going to be our assignment for this fire. That afternoon we ended up cold trailing a slopover section that could not be accessed by engines. That night as we were eating our dinner, Mark informed us that there was a possibility that we were going to be reassigned to a fire that was not far off but as to when it was going to happen he didn't know. Then all of a sudden the radio goes off. It's the incident commander calling Alpine to come back to ICP so that they could give us instructions for reassignment to the Baton Rouge fire.

The most enjoyable part of the Baton Rouge fire for me was the last day that we worked. Our crew was assigned to a burnout operation along a primitive road. The reason that I had so much fun this day was because I got to be a burner. I jumped out of the truck and walked over to where we were going to be briefed. Becker was going to be in charge of the burn and he needed two burners. Tom already was one of them and he needed one more, I raised my hand not really thinking that I was actually going to get it, but I did. I was going to be the igniter on the road burning out along the edge. I remembered that I had to keep an eye on Tom to make sure that he was always ahead of me so that I wouldn't overrun him with the fire. Our fuel type was light flashy fuel so when the grass would catch it was HOT and fast. I kept thinking that I had to make sure that I got a good black edge, which at times was difficult because there were patches that just wouldn't catch. Burning really helped me with my situational awareness because I had to pay attention to Tom for one, where I was laying fire, how much fuel was in the torch, and how my body was reacting to the heat and ensuring that I remained hydrated.

On the second to last day of the fire a type two incident team took over and for me it was amazing to see how much of a difference there was in communication, organization and just how much smoother the fire was running in terms of logistics.

The Baton Rouge complex was my last fire with the crew. It was a great way to spend one of my last weeks on the crew.