

## **From the President's Desk**

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### **"What Would Ranger Ed Say.....?"**

As I start writing this version of my thoughts and ideas as the IAWF President, I see that it's August 20<sup>th</sup>: perhaps the most important date ever in the history of wildland fire in the United States. 95 years ago, in 1910, this was the day of the "Big Blowup" that burned more than 3 million acres in northern Idaho and western Montana, killing at least 78 firefighters who came out of the logging camps, ranches and bars of Spokane, Washington and Missoula and Butte, Montana. Many of them were never identified, and it's believed that there were many others who were out in the woods, trapping and mining, that were killed by the fires, but never found.

But on that day, a remarkable event occurred: US Forest Service Ranger Ed Pulaski herded 45 firefighters into a mine shaft outside of Wallace, Idaho to protect them from the fire's intensity. When the heat and smoke became almost unbearable and some of the men tried to run in panic, Ranger Pulaski held them in the mineshaft at gunpoint to prevent their deaths. Many, including Ranger Pulaski, passed out from the smoke. Five of the men died, but 40 survived, including Ed Pulaski.

The "Big Blowup" of 1910 changed the course of wildland fire in the US for the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century for the US Forest Service and the other Federal land management agencies: suppressing each and every fire became the driving motivation for all firefighters, often to detriment of firefighter safety. As the years went on, the recognition of the need to reduce firefighter fatalities and improve firefighter safety led to the adoption of the 10 Standard Fire Orders and the 18 Situations that Shout "Watch Out",

as well as numerous other rules and guides. But firefighters continued to die on the job, even into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Then, in the Spring of 2005, the US Forest Service announced that it was convening its first-ever "Pulaski Conference" on wildland fire (by invitation only), to look at the way they fight fire, and recommend new methods for the remainder of the new century: a new "Fire Suppression Foundational Doctrine" for the way the world's largest fire organization would do business!

USFS Fire Director Tom Harbour started off the Conference saying that "we are focusing on defining those simple, clear principles that will encourage complex, intelligent behavior." National Fire Safety Manager Ed Hollenshead, who played a critical role in formulating the ideas that led to the Conference, followed up with his ideas on rules: "Rules are those decisions you would not leave to the discretion of your best fire fighter." Quite a change from the folks that developed the 10 Standard Fire Orders and 18 Situations that Shout "Watch Out" nearly 50 years ago!

Key areas the Doctrine addressed include:

- Defining the Operational Environment
- Mission
- Roles
- Operations
- Leadership and Accountability
- Cost Management
- Risk & Risk Management

The group of firefighters and fire managers selected to participate in the first "Pulaski Conference" realized the critical importance of their work on fire suppression operations in the coming years, and they did an excellent job of taking the "big picture" view of where a 21<sup>st</sup> Century fire organization should be in the coming years.

IAWF strongly supports the concept of the "Pulaski Conference" and its recommendations for doctrinal changes. We'll be watching for and reporting on the results in the coming years! Detailed information about the "Pulaski

Conference" can be found on the Web at  
[www.wildfirelessons.net/OrgLearning.aspx](http://www.wildfirelessons.net/OrgLearning.aspx)

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While the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is getting beat bloody for their inability to perform successfully in response to the effects of Hurricane "Katrina", member of the wildland fire community have again shown their ability for timely and effective responses to disasters when called: as of September 11<sup>th</sup> (14 days after "Katrina" made landfall), the wildland fire forces from across the US have provided eight (8) Type 1 Incident Management Teams, nine (9) Type 2 IMTs, five (5) Logistic management Teams, and numerous hand crews and other overhead support personnel; more than 3000 wildland fire folks were committed. Good job, everyone!