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## **Firefighters died in effort to escape**

**Authorities believe Ted Hall and Arnie Quinones were searching for a way out for personnel trapped at Camp 16 when overrun by fire. Their vehicle plunged down a mountain, killing the two men.**

By Scott Gold and Ari B. Bloomekatz

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Reporting from Los Angeles and The Angeles National Forest -- Everything that has made the Angeles National Forest wildfire so fierce and intractable -- extreme heat, treacherous terrain, bone-dry conditions left by years of drought -- seems to have converged on the lonely hilltop where Ted Hall and Arnie Quinones died.

Hidden in the forest, high above the Antelope Valley to the north and Los Angeles to the south, the hilltop is a hostile place now. By Monday, the flames had reduced the bluffs in every direction to a blackened moonscape, interrupted only by boulders, plumes of smoke and downed power lines draped like bunting from the gnarled limbs of charred trees. Dust devils, tiny tornadoes of ash and soot, raced up the hills, and small rodents overcome by smoke lay dead on the ground.

Until Sunday, this was home to tiny, remote prison Camp 16, where Los Angeles County Fire Capt. Tedmund "Ted" Hall, 47, and Firefighter Specialist Arnaldo "Arnie" Quinones, 34, had worked for eight years and four years, respectively, supervising inmates trained in wilderness protection.

Hall, who was married and the father of two grown sons, and Quinones, married and expecting his first child in the next few weeks, were killed Sunday when their truck went over the side of a dirt road and fell 800 feet into a canyon.

### **Selfless act**

Although the investigation was just beginning Monday, state corrections officials said it appeared Hall and Quinones may have died while searching for an escape route for three corrections workers, other fire personnel and 55 inmates who rode out the fire inside the

camp's dining hall as flames roared up the adjacent hills.

Hall and Quinones were repositioning their truck on the small path, a stone's throw from the camp, "apparently taking action to protect the camp facilities and personnel," county Fire Chief P. Michael Freeman said in a statement. No one knows why the truck went off the road, he said; it appears, said Capt. Michael Brown, that Hall and Quinones may have been "overrun by fire."

Investigators said they were not yet sure how all the survivors got down the mountain after the fire passed.

But California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Secretary Matthew Cate said in a statement that Hall and Quinones "are to be credited with helping to save the lives" of the others. "If it wasn't for their selfless actions, the loss of life could have been greater," Cate said.

Word of the deaths raced through firefighting circles Monday; between them, Hall and Quinones had been firefighters for 34 years and had worked in more than a dozen stations throughout L.A. County.

Tributes to the two men poured in, from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, from U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, from local elected officials. In Sacramento, the Assembly planned to adjourn in the firefighters' honor. And at a fire camp near La Cañada Flintridge on Monday, a flag was lowered to half-staff and firefighters who were touched by the incident -- those who knew Hall and Quinones or took part in retrieving their bodies -- met privately with a chaplain and counselor.

Still, there was little time to mourn; the blaze, dubbed the Station fire, had ballooned overnight and was advancing in three directions.

"We all grieve together," Brown said. "But we all understand the dangerous nature of our job. There is still a job to complete."

## **Special place**

Camp 16 was part of an unusual collaboration between the county and state corrections officials.

Roughly 100 state inmates were serving their sentences at the camp, one of six inmate camps in L.A. County. The men lived in a single-story dormitory now reduced to a concrete slab and cinder block walls, and many were trained in frontline wildland management, sent into wilderness areas that machines could not reach.

They hauled around sandbags to protect against winter floods, cleared hiking and running trails, "anything where additional hands are needed," Brown said. Some of their most

important work came during fire season, when they helped clear brush and establish breaks to halt advancing flames -- under the watchful eye of Hall, who served as their superintendent, and Quinones, one of their foremen.

The camp positions are considered prestigious and are sought after within the department, said Battalion Chief Nick Duvally. Firefighters interviewed Monday said their work is invigorating but that flurries of intense activity are often followed by hours spent idling on fire lines. At the camps, Duvally said, "You are always on the edge."

On Monday, reflecting the chaos surrounding the incident, abandoned hoses were still strewn around, and even getting to Camp 16 was hazardous. Tree limbs, still smoldering, had fallen across the access road, and flames licked at its edges wherever there was unburned foliage.

At the camp, east of Mt. Gleason and west of Mill Creek Summit, solemn-faced investigators from the Fire Department and the California Highway Patrol huddled on the dirt path where Hall and Quinones last drove.

The gates of the camp had been burned away, leaving jagged stumps on both sides of the path. The wind surged up the side of the ravine where Hall and Quinones died, coating investigators' faces with soot, sweeping in swarms of bees and sending huge crows somersaulting through the air.

Officials said it was clear that Hall and Quinones had died during a harrowing firestorm.

## **Tough job**

About half of the inmates housed at Camp 16 had been evacuated earlier in the weekend; the 55 who remained were trained in wildfire suppression, officials said.

When flames approached the facility, the prisoners, corrections employees and other personnel ran into a parking area, where they watched the structure burn, said corrections department spokeswoman Terry Thornton.

She said it appears that Hall and Quinones were looking for a way out when their truck slipped off the road. All inmates have been accounted for, officials said.

Quinones joined the county Fire Department in 1998 and graduated from the Fire Academy three years later.

He served at stations in Palmdale, Covina and La Cañada Flintridge and joined the crew at Camp 16 after being promoted to specialist in December 2005.

He is survived by his wife, Loressa, and his mother, Sonia Quinones.

Hall joined the department in April 1981 as a student worker before he had even been

accepted into the academy.

After graduating in 1983, he served at a host of fire stations and facilities, including stations in Lakewood, Whittier, La Puente and La Cañada Flintridge.

He was promoted to captain in January 2001 and began working at Camp 16 a few months later.

He is survived by his wife, Katherine; sons Randall, 21, and Steven, 20; and his parents, Roland Ray and Donna Marie Hall.

County Fire Capt. Rudy Gilson on Monday recalled sharing eggs and sausage with Hall while battling another recent fire in the national forest. Hall spoke, as usual, about two things: fire tactics and his family, his colleague remembered.

"He spent every free moment with his family," Gilson said. "Camping, get-togethers, motorcycle riding -- anything outdoors. . . He lived life to the fullest."

As the flames marched through the forest last weekend, Hall took pains to ensure that firefighters sent there to battle the blaze had cots to rest on and enough food and water.

"He was a person who would do anything for you," said county Fire Investigator Gil Sanchez, as he stood on the charred hilltop Monday afternoon. Sanchez, a leader of the accident investigation, counted Hall among his close friends.

"He wanted to make sure everyone was taken care of -- before he took care of his own needs," Sanchez said. "This is taking a toll on all of us."

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