

## Incident Summary Page for the 100 Fires Project

Incident Name: Dutchtown Road Fire Sometimes referred to as the Hammonton Fire	<b>Incident Date &amp; Time:</b> 03/26/1943 in the afternoon
<b>Incident Location:</b> Elwood and Mullica Townships, Atlantic County, New Jersey	<b>Incident Size:</b> Unknown
<b>Types of resources involved:</b> New Jersey Forest Fire Service firefighters	<b># of Fatalities/injuries:</b> 4 fatalities
<b>Reason this fire was selected for the 100 Fires list:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 3 or more firefighter fatalities by entrapment</li> </ul> This fire is <u>not</u> documented in the official NWC Historical Wildland Firefighter Fatality publication PMS 822/NFES 1849	
<b>Conditions leading up to the event:</b>	
The spring weather in New Jersey during 1943 had been noticeably colder than normal and the area had experienced widespread frost kill in much of the lighter spring vegetation.	
World War II was in full swing and manpower shortages though out the nation were hampering many non-war industries. The need to fight fires remained, but the United States was taking every available individual into the armed services. Those who remained were pressed into jobs, on an as needed basis, throughout the nation; sometimes putting younger individuals into positions normally filled by more experienced personnel.	
<b>Brief description of the event:</b>	
On March 26, a fire was reported at 15:52 near the community of Elwood, New Jersey; most probably started by a train from the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. New Jersey Forest Fire Service Engine C7, based in the community of Mays Landing, was instructed to assist by holding a firing operation on the Dutchtown Road. While proceeding to their assignment the engine crew drove into the site of a cabin, turned around and then proceeded out Dutchtown Road toward Columbia Road. Witnesses stated that at this time the wind increased and caused the main fire to cross Dutchtown Road at the location of Engine C7.	
As the fire closed in, all four firefighters got into the cab of the truck and attempted to escape by driving down Dutchtown Road. When the truck stalled, all four exited the cab as the fire arrived at their location. Two were found dead at the scene, two died later in the hospital. All four died from burn injuries. The names of the fallen were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Carl Luderitz, age 16</li> <li>➤ Ralph Luderitz, age 17</li> <li>➤ Alfred Ingersal, age 19</li> <li>➤ Bill Hoover, age 27</li> </ul>	
The investigation report stated that another fire fighter received burnt ankles and the Section Forest Fire Warden (who was Fire Boss on this incident) was <i>“laid up for two weeks due to illness caused by this fire.”</i>	
The report went on to state <i>“Because of the fact of their age, more intensive training was given to this crew than to the average operators and when on major fires always worked under the direct supervision of a qualified Warden ...This crew has proven itself in the operation of the truck that they were appointed as patrol crews, the foreman received \$130, the helpers \$100 a month.”</i>	
<b>Fire behavior factors that were present during the event:</b>	
Unusually dry fuel conditions due to frost kill. Sudden unexpected wind change during a firing operation.	
<b>Operational lessons available for learning from this incident:</b>	
Driving in an environment where smoke, flames and confusion can lead to delays in using a road as an escape route.	
The fire history for an area should play an important part in the development of fire tactics. The Chatsworth Fire burned through an area not known for highly aggressive fire behavior in most circumstances, but with the capability and history of extreme fire behavior when conditions align. This has led to several fatal fires (Dutchtown Road in 1943, Black Saturday in 1963, and Bass River in 1977) in very close proximity to the Chatsworth Fire. In the conditions found on these fires, the standard methods of initial attack, (direct attack using water in closed canopy timber and unanchored firing at the head of the fire) were overwhelmed with disastrous results.	
The need for available personnel to conduct fire operations outweighed the need for experience or training. The prevailing attitude in this era was that, while wildland fires were considered a national threat, the personnel needed to work on fires needed little or no	

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training. This attitude can be seen in the four major tragedy fires the Civilian Conservation Corps program suffered in a four year span (1936 Chatsworth Fire in New Jersey; 1937 Blackwater Fire in Wyoming; 1938 Pepper Hill Fire in Pennsylvania; and 1939 Rock Creek Fire in Nevada).

#### Notable impact or historical significance for the wildland fire service from this incident:

The Dutchtown Road Fire was not historically significant, nor did it have a notable impact on the wildland fire service. However, it is one of the many multi-fatality fires during this Historical Era that have been forgotten to history. If this fire had occurred today, it would have been considered a major tragedy prompting an extensive investigation process and most likely a number of directed safety action items.

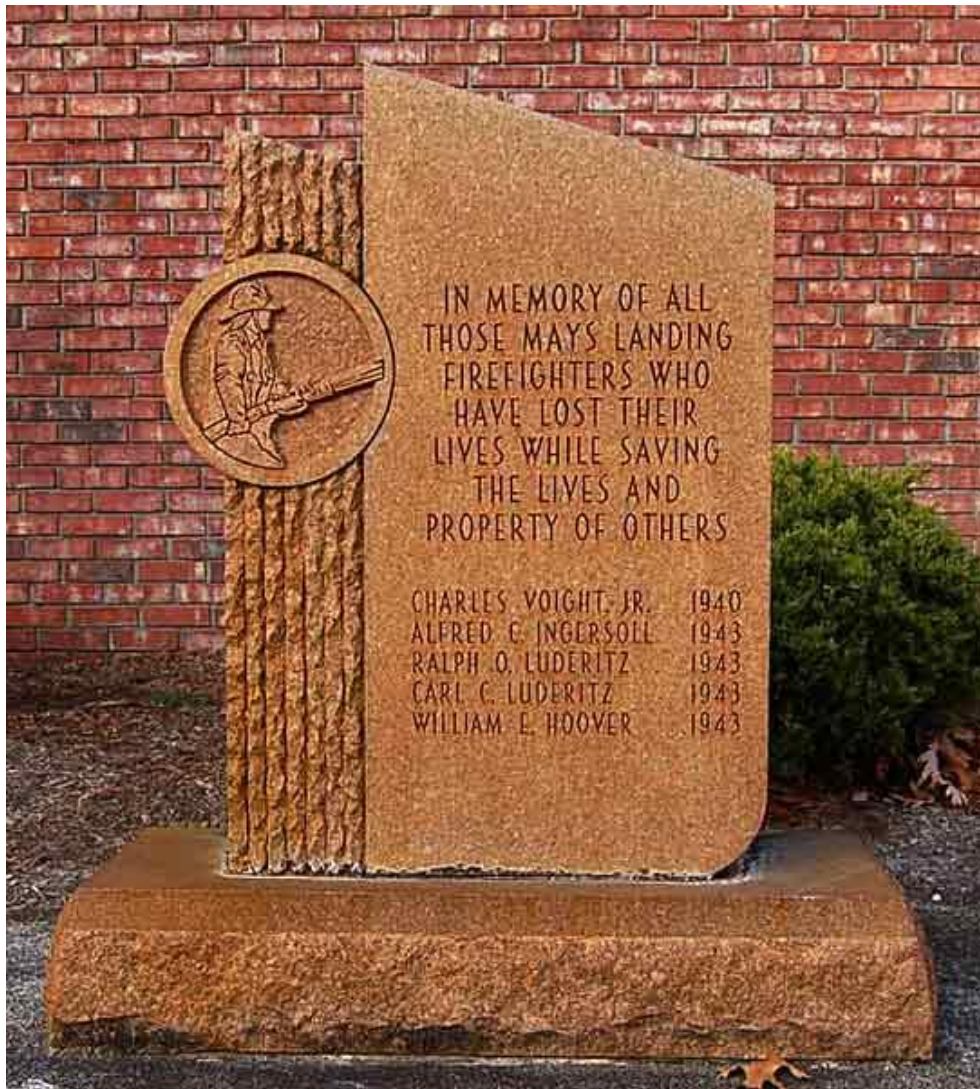
#### Links to more information on this incident:

<https://wlfalwaysremember.net/1943/03/26/luderitz-luderitz-ingersal-hoover/>

**This summary page was proudly provided by:**

Jim Cook & Kurt La Rue

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**New Jersey Forest Fire Service Memorial at Mays Landing Firehouse**