

Fire officers come home with honours



Western Australia's US firefighting team, CALM fire officers (from left) Terry Maher, Roger Armstrong, Kevin Haylock, Lachie McCaw, Greg Mair and Kevin White. They were pictured on their return to Perth. Photo by Ernie McLintock

SEVEN of our firefighters returned to Perth after more than five weeks of arduous work tackling some of the United States' biggest forest fires.

CALMfire Manager Rick Sneeuwjagt, Terry Maher, Kevin White and Roger Armstrong from Bunbury; Kevin Haylock from Harvey, Greg Mair from Walpole and Dr Lachie McCaw from Manjimup contributed significantly to the enormous effort needed to save the lives of US citizens, stop towns being incinerated and protect forests.

They received an enthusiastic welcome home from Perth's television, radio and print media, and special congratulations from Premier Richard Court, Environment Minister Cheryl Edwards and US Consul General, Sallybeth Bumbrey.

As cameras rolled and mikes were thrust under noses, the firefighting contingent told their stories to the public. But before they even arrived in Perth there was praise from a Sixty Minutes program filmed in Montana with Roger Armstrong from Bunbury.

Their arrival in Perth in late September was punctuated by TV, radio and print interviews, hugs and kisses from families, and requests for future interviews. There was even a cocktail party hosted by the Environment Minister at Parliament House a couple of weeks later.

continued page 2

Fire officers come home with honours cont'd

THE men were part of an 82-strong Australian and New Zealand contingent which spent five weeks managing the worst US

forest fires in 50 years.

Uncontrolled fires raged across 13 US states, burnt more than 2.7 million hectares of forests, hundreds of homes and killed 11 firefighters—something that Premier Court said should send a powerful message to WA people.

Our men were based in one of the worst-hit areas in north-west Montana (the other areas being Idaho and Wyoming) fighting fires started mostly by lightning. The fires were fanned by hot, dry winds through steep, inaccessible mountains within forest which hadn't been

burnt in more than 100 years. The total damage bill is estimated to be billions of US dollars.

Their effort was part of an international firefighting force from the US, Canada, Mexico, Australia and New Zealand assembled to control the fires.

The WA team members held senior positions with the Incident Control System including controller, planner, liaison officers, fire behaviour analysts and tactical, divisional and incident commanders.

Environment Minister Mrs Edwardes said a big

vote of thanks went to the families and friends who supported our men on their tour of duty.

She said people often forgot that CALMfire officers were the ones who regularly gave up their holidays, family Christmas dinners and New Year's eves to protect the WA community from wildfires.

This year CALM plans to carry out prescribed burns to more than 300,000ha across the state this year—200,000ha of south-west forests and 100,000ha in the South Coast, Mid West and

Kimberley regions.

Mrs Edwardes acknowledged the "tremendous dedication" shown by our people.

"They put their lives on the line and showed the world that in Australia, firefighting is more than just a job," she said.



Rick Sneeuwjagt

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20/9/00 PHOTOGRAPHER: ERNIE MULLINTOCK
CALM FIRE OFFICERS RETURN FROM TRIP TO
UNITED STATES (TO FIGHT FIRES) TAKEN AT
PERTH DOMESTIC AIRPORT - PREMIER RICHARD
LOWEAT @ US CONSUL GENERAL SALLY BETH
BUMBERY PROVIDE OFFICIAL WELCOME. ENVIRONMENT
MINISTER CHERYL EDWARDS ATTENDS.
SUE.