

# WOMEN FIREFIGHTERS PRAISED

## Working, Staying Power Of Indian and Eskimo Women Lauded by Boss

FAIRBANKS — Women fire-fighters received outstanding praise from James Huntington of Galena, line boss on two fires this season, in which women played an important part.

There has been concern about the hiring of women fire fighters by the Bureau of Land Management in some areas of the state.

Huntington said men were finding out they had to "start producing on their jobs of the past" when women entered the competition for what had formerly been only man's work.

The Round About Mountain Fire, a 9000 acre fire in heavy spruce and dry caribou moss, utilized a crew of 125 fire-fighters, 40 of which were women.

"There were no women crews," said Huntington, "They were mixed with the men and worked just as hard. Many days and nights they would put in 18 hours of work without a let-up."

"They worked under the same conditions as the men and had no privileges. They slept

on the ground and ate rations out of tin cans."

Not one of the six crew bosses on Fire 8785 complained about women not doing their job. It took forty-eight hours of intensive work to contain the fire and three more weeks to declare it out.

The women were single, married, and widowed. There were both Eskimo and Indian women, and one "outside Indian." In the scarce local job market, the women took the only jobs available in the community - fire-fighting, one of the toughest jobs there is.

On Aug. 10, Charley Mosley, Fire Attack Coordinator, sent out a call for workers to stop

(Continued on page 6)

# Indian and Eskimo Women Firefighters Praised by Boss . . .

(Continued from page 1)

the advance of a 35,000 acre fire, No. 8668. In the crew that responded, 75 of the total 142 were women.

"We used the night attack system," said Huntington, "cooling the fire with retardant and following up with crews." They cut a 50 foot wide trench, along a five mile line.

"Kenneth Sam's crew led the way, cutting the line with chain saws, while other crews followed cleaning and trenching. At noon on the second day, we could see that we were not going to hold the fire much longer."

Two crews of 42 fighters, mostly women, were pulled back

to set a back fire along a three mile line.

"Anyone who has back-fired before," said Huntington, "knows the terrible heat and smoke that you have to go through to contain the back-fire. Four hours later anyone would have been proud."

"The women's faces were black and streaked with sweat. They were tired and hungry, but they still watched the line and carried the tree taps that they used to fight the blaze with."

Airplanes flying near the area reported a blow-up at Fire 8668 with smoke reaching 3000 feet. When word came that two

loads of retardant had been ordered ten miles south, it looked as if they had lost the fire.