

Fire Ruins 3 Alcatraz Buildings; Indians Put the Blame on Whites

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Special to The New York Times

SAN FRANCISCO, June 2— The dispute between the Indians encamped on Alcatraz and the Federal Government intensified today after a series of fires destroyed a number of the old prison buildings on the island last night.

Spokesmen for the Government, while they made no direct charges, hinted that Indians had started the fires.

From the island, the Indians charged that the fires had been started by a group of whites who slipped past their security after dark.

Joseph Morris, a Blackfoot Indian living on Alcatraz, angrily branded as "damned lies" reports that the Indians had set the fires.

He said that the fires were a clear result of white backlash. "That's all it was," he said. "They are just out to make things look bad for us."

Although the total damage that resulted from the fires was still unclear, it was acknowledged that at least three buildings had been destroyed. These included the old warden's residence, a smaller adjacent building that had been used as a medical facility and the lighthouse. None of the buildings were occupied by the Indians and there were no injuries.

According to the United States General Services Administration the fires began about 10:30 P.M. and continued until about 4 A.M. About 8 A.M., the agency reported, a second blaze started. It destroyed the lighthouse.

The fire this morning prompted Thomas E. Hannon, regional director of the agency, to look with suspicion on the Indians.

"They say that someone from the outside started the fires last night," he said. "Well, my question is who started the fire this morning?" Mr. Hannon said that previous reports had reached his office saying that

the Indians planned to destroy the lighthouse.

The agency, as caretaker of unused Federal property, is the Government agency in charge of Alcatraz Island. Mr. Hannon said that a full report on the fires would be turned over to the United States Attorney's office in San Francisco. He said that it would be up to the Justice Department to decide if any action should be taken.

Mr. Hannon called the fires "just one more factor" in what he described as the mounting problems of Alcatraz since the Indian take-over. He also mentioned filth, vandalism, infighting and disease.

Those who blamed the Indians for the fires said that the action represented their answer to the Government's insistence on turning the island into a national park.

The Indians began their encampment on Alcatraz last November, saying that they had a right to the island under the terms of an old treaty that gives them the right to any unused Federal land.

Shortly after their take-over, the Indians came up with a plan to convert the island into an educational and cultural complex. They asked Federal assistance for the project but were turned down. The Department of Interior said that its studies showed that the island was not conducive to the type of use planned by the Indians. It then suggested the park as an alternative proposal.

The Indians rejected the park as a suitable compromise and announced on Sunday that they would consider the island their property and proceed with development.

When the fires were discovered last night Coast Guard boats raced to the island. They merely stood by after they were informed by the Indians that no assistance was needed.

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