

Texas Wing helps fight forest fires

Contributed by 1st Lt. Jeff Roberson
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TEXAS -- CAP Flight 4227 flew from Tyler Pounds Field Jan. 7 on another routine fire watch flight.

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The mission required an over flight of Freestone and Limestone Counties.

Many of these flights find nothing to report, or the aircrew sees fires that are already in the process of being extinguished. But some of the fires are new, small and unattended, which are the most dangerous kind. That lack of attention can give them the time to fan out into full-fledged forest fires, capable of great destruction.

The mission had been flown with "negative results," and there wasn't really any reason to stay in the area any longer. But, on a hunch, the pilot, Capt. Mark Johnson with Tyler Composite Squadron, decided to take one last look before returning to base. On that final pattern, he spotted smoke off the nose of the aircraft, about 10 miles away. Capt. Bryan Smith, observer/photographer with Anderson County Composite Squadron, and Maj. Butch Ragland, observer/scanner with Gladewater Composite Squadron, confirmed the find.

As they neared the smoke, some underlying fire became noticeable. At 3:21 p.m. the aircrew contacted the Waco Department of Public Safety and reported the fire approximately two miles northwest of Dew, Texas in Freestone County. The DPS relayed the coordinates and situation to the Freestone County Dispatch.

The aircrew circled the area until the fire crews arrived and began fighting the fire, then returned to the base.