

49/68

FIRE SWEEPS FOREST - 71 DEAD

A fortnight after the first outbreak of fire South of Bordeaux, flames continue to sweep unabated through the Gironde province. Advancing on a 30-mile front - and fanned in some places, by a 20-mile-an-hour breeze - the blaze trails havoc through the rich vineyard countryside. Already, 200 square miles of timber and farm land are laid waste - whole villages wiped out. Damage is set at ten million pounds. Graver still is the toll of human life - 71 confirmed deaths, mostly among troops fire-fighting - many more feared lost.

With the flames at their doorstep, forest-dwellers flee from the path of the terror, fearing encirclement by the raging inferno. Three hundred homes and farms are devastated.

Fresh outbreaks of fire are spotted, as French police announce that arson is suspected. Arrests have already been made. Meanwhile, a division of soldiers is called out to try to arrest the march of the fire through land tinder-dry after the arid summer. As these pictures are taken, news come that British volunteer firemen were racing by car to join the French. As day turns into night, and night into day, France's government votes swift emergency aid to the victims of her greatest national disaster since the war.