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BRUSH FIRE INFLICTS DAMAGE TO PAGAN COCONUT GROVES

Saipan, Mariana Islands, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, May 27 - - - Brush fires which ravaged the major portion of remote Pagan Island last week inflicted approximately 80 per cent damage to coconut trees, according to estimates completed today by the office of Marianas District Administrator Peter T. Coleman.

"This fire was a hard blow to the economy of the island, since copra is the major cash crop, but the 90 inhabitants want to remain on the island and recoup their losses in their own way, and we respect them for it," Coleman said today.

Radio reports of the fire, which started in the bone-dry volcanic hills of the island on May 19 and subsided five days later, said that although the flames reached the vicinity of the island's only village, there were no injuries. However, the smoke forced the villagers to retreat to the beach areas. Trust Territory High Commissioner M. W. Goding and District Administrator Coleman flew over the island Sunday, but Radio Pagan said there was no immediate need for assistance. A Japanese fishing vessel cruising in the vicinity of the island had erroneously reported to U. S. Naval officials in Guam that the island's volcano was becoming active, but both Radio Pagan and the officials

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who flew over the island confirmed that the dense smoke was caused entirely by the surface fires.

The cause of the fire, which started in the northern area of Pagan and moved southwesterly, remains a mystery.

Trust Territory officials said that plans for assistance to Pagan's inhabitants will be worked out as soon as damage survey is completed.

The fire was the second disaster which has struck Pagan in six months. Last October, Typhoon Carmen devastated coconut trees and buildings on both Pagan and Agrihan, its neighbor to the north.

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