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CONTROL
Suppression
1910 Fires

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During the summer of 1910, the writer was assigned to the Clarksfork district of the Pend Oreille Forest as Forest Guard, along with Jimmie Thornton, Arlie Decker, Uel McCurry, and Lyle Prather, all having just completed our Freshman course in Forestry at the U. of I. We were organized as a trail crew to cut trail up Lightning Creek, beginning at a point 6 miles north of the town of Clarksfork. However, before we had really made a start on the trail work fire broke out in reproduction near the town of Clarksfork, and we were called in to fight it. From that time until the end of the season the trail crew was fighting fire. They were split up after the first fire, some being assigned to patrol old fires, and some placed in charge of fire crews. Just prior to the blow-up on the Coeur d'Alene Forest, or approximately August 15, 1910, Thornton and I had charge of the Dry Creek fire near Cabinet, Idaho, one in charge of the night crew and the other the day crew. The fire was nearly under control when Thornton obtained permission from the supervisor to go to his home in Coeur d'Alene to attend the wedding of his sister who was to sail for Alaska to make her home immediately after the wedding. On the same day, or the day before, I was called into the Supervisor's office to assist in the clerical work and in rustling fire crews. Thornton left one of the crew foremen in charge to finish corralling the Dry Creek fire, and Billy Brashear, a patrolman for that district, was also to keep an eye on the fire.

On August 21, the crew was working on the fire when Billy Brashear on patrol noticed a wall of fire and smoke break over the divide from the Coeur d'Alene side and head down towards the Dry Creek fire on Pend Oreille. He realized the danger and rode with all possible speed via saddle horse to where the crew was working, had them throw down their tools and run back to camp which was in a clearing near the road leading to Cabinet. He ordered them all to wet their blankets, lie down in the middle of the meadow and cover themselves with the blankets. They all obeyed but ~~two~~ two men, who were greatly excited over the fire which was roaring down upon them. They failed to estimate the speed the fire was traveling, and stated they were going to beat the fire to Cabinet, a distance of about four miles. However, they only traveled a few hundred yards down the road before the fire overtook them. Deputy Supervisor Eddie Stahl, and Ranger John Keefe made their way into the fire camp late that evening when the worst of the crown fire was over and came upon the two dead bodies in the road where the fire had overtaken them. The balance of the crew, who remained in the clearing, came through all right, except that the eyes of some of them were badly inflamed by smoke and heat.

The names of the two men burned are no doubt in the files of the Pend.

Oreille Forest. I believe one of them was Post.

I first met "Cap" White that summer at Sandpoint. He had been sent there by the Fiscal Agent as special disbursing agent to pay off fire fighters. Believe me, he was busy, both day and night, and is probably suffering now with his eyes as a result of long hours on just such work. (Some time slips were hard to read.)

Since there was no provision made for the Government to bury their fire fighter dead at that time, the supervisor, Mr. J. E. Barton, took up a collection from the members of the Pend Oreille force to pay the undertaker. The graves were dug by Forest officers.

If I am not mistaken, the Forester called for contributions from all Service members to pay funeral expenses of the men killed on the Coeur d'Alene.