

August 23, 1923

MEMORANDUM FOR MRS. TURRELL

At Mr. Morrell's request and your suggestion, I submit for whatever value it may have for you, a statement of my activities in connection with the peak of the 1910 fire season. I believe my part was very small and contained but little human interest but since I feel that every man should be willing to record for your assistance all that he can remember of what he did on the chance that it may be of some use to you, I am doing this in the hope that it may stimulate others who have more to tell to do likewise.

During the season of 1910 I was in charge of a reconnaissance crew on the Kaniksu. During the months of June, July and August our crew of eight men and cook, spent considerable time on 10 or 12 little fires in the ^{Lower} ~~Bole~~ Priest River country. Practically all of us were green men and we learned that a difficult physical job as is reconnaissance in north Idaho, there was one job more difficult and that is fire fighting. With the enthusiasm of youth and general interest in forestry we earned the reputation of being the first ones on fire anywhere in our vicinity.

On August 20, 1910 half our crew was patrolling a fire on Quartz Creek on the Kaniksu, presumably started by a careless smoker which had been put under control by the whole crew on the job the day before; the other half had resumed its daily quota of timber survey lines. It had been a long, hot, dry spell and the few

of us on the fire line were beginning to welcome a huge black storm cloud which we could see off towards the west from which the rains usually came. ^{after} it was in sight for about an hour, it was with great awe that we recognized that it was not a storm cloud, but instead a smoke cloud when pieces of ashes and charcoal on a rising wind started to fall about us. A very ^{short time} ~~few minutes~~ after that a messenger arrived from the Supervisor's headquarters directing the disbanding of the crew and the assignment of the individuals to various portions of the forest. In that crew, as I recollect, were J. B. Somers, now Supervisor on the Beaverhead, and Arthur F. Bishop ^{PP} whose home is in Missoula, the only two men who I think can be located at present.

My personal instructions were to proceed immediately to the town of Priest River and there await further instructions. It was with a feeling of youthful "do or die" spirit and help in an emergency that we separated, buoyed with the enthusiasm of youth to put in every ounce of effort of which we were capable. I walked and trotted the 15 odd miles to Priest River after closing up camp and disposing of our equipment after supper that evening. The job in Priest River was not at all a heroic flamboyant one. It was only the drab succession of numerous small jobs summed up in the total as hard work and long hours. I was commissary man, time-keeper, fire fighter receiver, hirer and dispatcher, freight ^{car} train unloader, freight wagon loader, pay master and telephone central. My first job was to check in a bunch of 75 or 100 fire fighters coming on the midnight train from Spokane, to provide them with team and wagon transportation to Coolin or the West Branch, I don't

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remember which, to see that the drunks were carefully weeded out and left behind or else if showing ^{a chance} evidence of early sobering, properly taken care of by one of their companions. I awoke the store keepers to provide some with shoes for those who lacked them and others with blankets, shirts, tobacco, etc. I can still visualize the ~~swampy, dirty~~ mob as each answered "here" as his name was checked off and he was assigned a place in one of the wagons and remember the dusty horses and wagons and the tired drivers who were routed out in the wee hours of the morning after a hard day's work the day before. Scarcely had I got these men off and reported to headquarters at Coolin, when I started to take down from Coolin a list of food supplies and equipment which was needed just as soon as possible and which in my bland enthusiasm I proceeded forthwith to obtain in so far as it was available in the town of Priest River, no matter whom or how many store keepers I had to awaken. It was with a sigh of much relief when practically the entire order was checked out on a couple wagons about breakfast time next morning, though I forgot all about breakfast. The next job was to unload a car load of food supplies. I remember getting my clothes all white when rustling sack after sack of flour. I arranged at this time to have a car side tracked for our use for storage, ^{without thinking} even though demurrage charges ^{that} might accrue. While talking with the agent about this, the telegrams began to arrive from east, from north, from south and from west, ^{from} frantic relatives of anyone and everyone who happened to be in that portion of Idaho, addressed to the "Forestry Service of the U. S. Forester," or the "Forest Ranger" or the "Government Fire Fighter" to ascertain the safety of someone who might be either

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working at one of the logging camps or ranching or in the town itself and not necessarily working on the fire line. At the same time I remember getting some very interesting and lengthy telegrams from Supervisor Miller at Coolin read to me over the telephone ~~and~~ ^{to be} filed with the freight agent at Priest River for transmission. Such terms as "30 large fires of unknown extent in unexplored country" and "send company of troops" to this place or that place "completely equipped with mule trains, cook, mess and fire fighting equipment" seem to stand out in my memory as frequent occurrences in these telegrams to the District Forester. It was either the first day or the second day also that the main artery of communication, the telephone line to Coolin, went out. I made one repair myself but found that it was broken in another place, but by luck happened to find Forest Assistant A. L. Benson who had just brought down as refugees Mrs. F. I. Rockwell and her sister from the West Branch and without awaiting to determine whether I had authority or not dispatched him to repair the line. For a number of days, one day was about like another. Various exciting stories came from the front. I did not know ^{about the} ~~whether~~ bigger fires to the south of us, the big fires on the Kaniksu kept me too busy to even read the daily papers. I snatched cat naps on a cot near the one telephone station in the town. With the physical resiliency of youth and under the excitement, I needed but little sleep.

The big fire on the Kaniksu came over from the west side of the Pend Oreille River north of Newport and taking a generally easterly direction cleaned the country to within a few miles of the West Branch River. The people of Newport had ready all their valuables

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for a quick getaway since they expected to be burned out but ~~Na~~ a change in the direction of the wind, and saved the town. A big fire started near Priest River and all those that could, partly under my inexperienced direction, made sure that it would keep away from the town by setting a back fire.

They were hectic days full of sweat, grease and hard work. It was about 10 days after the blow up, as I recollect it, that practically every man, woman and child in Priest River walked around the streets of Priest River bare headed, getting soaked by the showers that began to fall. The high tension for most of these people was broken. Never do I remember ^{having before} and never do I expect again to have a similar feeling of high exultation over the fresh smell of rain filled atmosphere. Even now, ^{sub-} self consciously the fresh smell of rain seems to be sort of soothing. Years of experience in the forest fire business since then no doubt have stimulated rather than flattened this pleasure.

The next big job on hand was the result of the reverse eddy of fire fighters. I had been authorized to make cash payments for the few stragglers and the truly incompetents that had been sent back before and now the horde of the fire fighters returning from a finished ^{on the West Branch} job were thrust upon me. On a little table near the cot and the telephone booth in the drug store where the druggist at one moment would be gossiping and arguing about the forest fire situation with some of his customers and at another time mixing pills, grinding powders or measuring out liquid chemicals and at another time jerking soda or dispensing booze of shady legitimacy, I verified and checked timeslips, filled out

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cash receipts, got them ^{signed} attached to, made out and signed checks and tried to keep the books currently in order on these transactions. My fund of \$3000.00 was very quickly exhausted but the cashier of the bank through communication with the District Forester and the Supervisor honored my overdraft to a ^{very} considerable amount more. I often think of the manner in which I handled Government funds at that time and how apparently everything checked out in a way sufficiently close at least so that there were no comebacks on me, and ^{the} very intensive precautions that have later been found necessary.

I really think the above stuff is all the bunk but as I say, I am giving it to you for all it may be worth.

I suggest as other sources of information concerning the fires of the Priest River Country that you get in touch with former Supervisor Miller, former Deputy E. R. Bruncke, ~~former~~ Supervisor Somers, former Rangers McEwan, Feary, Byars, McAbee, Forest Examiner Benson, former Forest Examiner Rockwell, former Ranger Swim. Some of the ranchers in the West Branch, i.e., the Hageman Brothers, and some of the ranchers who were burned out north of Newport could tell interesting stories.

On the Coeur d'Alene you will, of course, find much of interesting material in the files. I would not stop at the fire files alone but would also go through the fire claims files, Pulaski's personnel folder which likely contains material not in the District Office folder and O-Supervision folder as late as 1914, when I made an attempt to obtain the Carnegie medal for Pulaski in the course of which I obtained a number of affidavits from eye witnesses and companions of Pulaski on that memorable day.

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There must be still some people around Wallace who were either in the woods or in the town of Wallace on August 20, 1910. There used to be a few years ago settled in Coeur d'Alene a few of the Big Creek and Marble Creek (on the St. Joe) homesteaders who just got away in time to escape with their lives. One of these I remember particularly is Joe Brysinski who used to clerk in a cigar store opposite the American Trust Company on the corner of Fourth and Sherman. A number of the men on the forest force of the Coeur d'Alene can, of course, give you direct information or leads; Ashley Roche is one of these, George Hamilton is in a position to give you information. Mr. Haines can likely help out, Mr. Weigle you can likely get in touch with by correspondence.

[Handwritten signature]

(7/21/10, off)