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There follows a narrative of my experiences on the night of August 20, 1910, when a holocaust of fire swept over North Idaho and Western Montana, causing irreparable damage through the loss of forest resources and human life.

Perhaps as a prelude it might be well to mention briefly the history of the season as I recollect it. The winter of 1910 was not deficient in snow, at least at high elevations. On April 4, 1910, I left Missoula with a timber reconnaissance party of which F. C. Spaulding, then Deputy Supervisor of the Lolo Forest, was in charge. We worked all during April and the first half of May on the head waters of the St. Regis River and the snow was four to six feet deep at the beginning of job and packed so solid that we were able to work without snowshoes practically through the entire period.

After May 15 there was very little rain in that region and about June 1 a fire occurred on the N. P. Railroad near Lookout Pass. This occurrence was the official opening of the fire season and from that time on fires occurred regularly.

I was assigned for the summer to the territory between Lookout Pass and Saltese, Montana, my principal duty being to patrol the railroad track between these two points daily on foot, which was a man-sized job. Later in the season I was furnished a railroad velocipede and I could then cover my patrol so easily that I remember making three round trips one day. Occasionally I would relieve the monotony of the patrol by making trips out on the Montana, Idaho State line and around to St. Paul Pass and down on the Milwaukee Railway

to Saltese. This was a hard day's trip but gave me an opportunity to get an excellent view of my territory and to locate any fires that might be burning back away from the railroad.

Fires occurred every day or so on either the N. P. or C. M. & St. P. Railway right-of-ways and during the season I handled thirty-five or thirty-six fires individually and succeeded in keeping them all under Class C size, or under ten acres. I was fortunate in being able to organize the railroad section crews into efficient firefighting units and to this one thing can attribute my success in handling the situation. On the Milwaukee Railroad steam shovel fires were particularly bad and I would call out tank cars and extra gangs from all over the division when conditions warranted.

Early in July one or two light electrical storms occurred unaccompanied by rain and these storms set widely scattered fires over the region. One of these fires smouldered three weeks on Hilda Creek before showing up and then burst out into a severe crown fire that covered about seventy-five acres before being controlled. Hovey Polleys, son of E. H. Polleys of Missoula, was struck by a falling tree on this fire and almost instantly killed.

Another fire started from lightning near the Bullion Mine on what then was the Coeur d'Alene Forest and burned perhaps ten days before men were placed on it. I kept reporting this fire to the Supervisor's office at Wallace but apparently all available men

were on fire so I finally ordered a twenty-five man crew from Missoula and work was started on the fire under the direction of John S. Baird then Lumberman for District One. The fire finally gained such proportions that I was taken off patrol and given a fire crew on the north and east sides of the fire. The Coeur d'Alene Forest had by that time also organized a crew on the Idaho side at the Bullion Mine.

On August 20 I had completed a fire line to the state line and my crew had been reduced to a patrol basis. Baird had a crew on the south side of the fire and was having some trouble in holding his line. S. M. Taylor, foreman for the Bullion Crew, and now County Commissioner of Shoshone County, had all but about a mile or mile and a half of the west side of the fire trenched. I had been around the fire a day or two previously and it was apparently in good shape and not a great deal of line was being lost. The fire had of course been projected by this time and J. E. Brøen, Ranger, stationed at Taft was is charge.

The day of August 20 differed very little from preceding days, there was little wind noticeable and there was no premonition of the calamity about to occur. My crew had a hard job holding a section of line under the fire on a precipitous slope and it took us until dark to get everything in good shape to leave for the night. Even in those days we had discovered the futility of leaving out night patrolmen except in extreme instances and I took all my crew into camp that night, which proved to be a very fortunate circumstance. As we had no lanterns or other means of a light, I recollect

that it was so dark that we could only follow the fire line with difficulty, one man getting lost in the brush and it was some job to get him back on the line.

About nine-thirty, while we were on our way into camp, we were startled by a burning brand apparently a couple of feet long that hurtled down out of the sky a hundred yards from the camp. I sent two men from the camp to locate this phenomenon and hastily got something to eat and went to bed, dog tired.

At midnight, or shortly after, the night cook woke me up probably alarmed by the noise that the relief train from Wallace was making on its way east--the engineer was blowing the whistle intermittently to warn people to be ready to leave. However, the train did not wait for us, although there were in the neighborhood of 150 men in camp. By this time, the flames were beginning to show on the horizon and the roar of the fire was becoming audible. I speedily awakened several men I knew were dependable and went over to the point on the railroad where our supplies were unloaded to take care of some provisions unloaded late the previous afternoon. We accomplished our object and were returning to the camp with four or five water barrels that the railroad company had sent out for use on bridges when we met the entire crew badly demoralized, and apparently leaving the country. The fire by this time was an awe-inspiring spectacle, the whole horizon to the west was aflame and the noise caused by the falling timber was terrific. In addition, our fire was out of control and raging across the lines below us to the south east and our only avenue of escape effectually cut off.

The entire fire crew led by one of the foremen, had conceived the idea of getting into a railroad tunnell at Borax as they thought it was the safest place to escape the fire. Knowing from experience gained traveling through this tunnell on patrol that there was always a strong air cuttent through it, I succeeded in turning back all of the crew but the foreman and one other man and, finding that they were alone, they soon followed us back to the camp ground. On the way, we met Lieut. Titus who had arrived in camp the previous afternoon with a detachment of regular soldiers for the purpose of patrolling the fire lines. He and his men were following up the firefighters as they had no intention of remaining in camp alone. The Lieutenant was agreeable to the plan I suggested of remaining where we were so we returned to camp and speedily constructed a fire line around it and immediately set a backfire which spread rapidly outward drawn by the suction of the main fire.

By this time, the roar of the oncoming fire was so great that it was only with difficulty that conversation could be carried on with a person standing at your side. The vanguard of the fire was sweeping over us and the hills all around us were catching fire and soon were a raging mass of flames. Our backfire had burned out perhaps one or two hundred yards before the main front of the fire struck and when they came together the heated air current filled with cinders swirled down upon us and for a short space of time, that seemed an eternity, we gasped and choked for air and were blinded by smoke. Finally the air cleared and we found that nearly everything inside our fire line was burning that had not been wet down; fortunately the ground was fairly clear of refuse and the build-

ings and tents had all been soaked with water and did not catch fire.

Outside of a few men who were temporarily blinded by smoke, the crew were all in fairly good shape. One man who thought he had gone blind was thwarted in an attempt to take his life. We were also fortunate in having a week's supply of provisions ahead. Every one was too nearly exhausted and weak from the effects of the smoke to be much concerned about anything the first day, and although an attempt was made to get through to the other crews, the ground was still too hot to do so. However, a timekeeper with the Bullion Crew managed to get through with the news that eight of the men in that crew had perished in the Bullion tunnell. I attempted to get through to Saltese with this message and met J. E. Bröen coming up on a speeder so returned to camp and Bröen went back to Saltese to report. The fire was still burning briskly along the railroad and the chance for suffocation was considerable as it was impossible to tell what one was running into as in places the flames were shooting across the rails and the smoke was blinding. However, I succeeded in getting back to camp and the following day Lieut. Titus, John Baird, and I went into the Bullion Mine, identified the bodies there, wrapped them in blankets and interred them in a long shallow trench, side by side. Several days later Baird and I disinterred three of the bodies, lashed them on horses and took them over to Potsville where we turned them over to a troop of soldiers to take into Wallace. These men were Larry Rison, a Wallace miner, and two young men, Leslie Zellers and Val Nicholson from Kellogg. The remaining bodies were disinterred a week or ten days

later, when the railroad resumed operations.

The story of the experience of the men in the Bullion Tunnell is worth recounting. Their first knowledge of the fire came when a section of a limb of a tree as big as a man's forearm fell out of the air, striking a sleeping man on the leg, causing a serious bruise. On awakening, this man perceived the fire coming up Bullion Creek and the crew barely had time to reach the Bullion Tunnell after he awakened them although it was only a short distance from the camp. One member of the crew carried his blankets into the tunnell and it was only through this circumstance that any of the crew were saved. These blankets were stretched across the face of a little drift running off from the main tunnell and all but eight men went into this drift. The other eight men apparently dropped in their tracks and from all appearances, died instantly without any agony or suffering. Of the men in the ~~tunnell~~ drift, several were suffering from the effects of smoke and bad air, but there were no casualties.

The spectacle of this fire was awe-inspiring almost beyond belief and was sufficient to strike terror to the strongest heart; it seemed a hopeless task to attempt anything that would divert the path of so ruthless a monster; many grown men in the crew were absolutely helpless and there were several who could only weep or moan, believing they were doomed. The fact that we were situated on a small knoll fairly clear and sufficiently elevated to alleviate the danger of suffocation, and the fact that our backfire spread so rapidly accounts, I believe, for our pulling through. The water in the stream below us became almost boiling hot and was I judge too hot to be borne had it been necessary to take the water. A dense stand of timber a short

ways from our camp was laid flat to the ground and in places large trees were lifted bodily out of the ground and deposited some little distance from where they originally stood.

Our backfire was responsible for breaking the fury of the main front of the fire and a considerable area back of our camp and in line with the direction of the fire was merely spotted with fire. In this area at daybreak we discovered that there were eight or ten head of deer that showed no signs of fear on approach. They remained around the camp until the ashes had cooled.

On the next day following the fire we took steps to save a railroad bridge and tunnell which were temporarily saved by our back-fire but which would undoubtedly have burned had we not put out the fires that still burned near them.

The devastation that followed the fire was appalling and almost beyond description. Where a majestic forest was standing apparently tranquil and secure the evening before the morning sun dawned upon a scene of utter desolation. Smoking, blackened mountain slopes and tangled masses of windthrown trees dotted the landscape. Trees three feet and over in diameter were in some cases torn bodily out of the ground and thrown some little distance uphill from where they originally stood. Entire drainages covering square miles of country were left without the vestige of a green leaf or twig or the trace of a living thing. The entire topographic aspect of the country was changed, and it was only with extreme difficulty that the burned areas could be traversed without getting lost.