

MY EXPERIENCE AS A FOREST RANGER'S WIFE

When I was a girl I never heard of a forest ranger. But that was many years ago and the forest service is still young. I am now the wife of a real forest ranger. I am a lover of nature and as a rangers [sic] wife I have many opportunities of enjoying the beautiful green forest with their clear cool rivers, fed from the beautiful falls coming down the mountains.

The mountains have a great facination [sic] for me, in the summer when the wild flowers are blooming in all their gay colors and their sweet perfume mingles with the fragrant pines and firs.

The forest service men are all wonderful men at least my husband is, and all whom I have had the pleasure of meeting are. They give their best to the service and often their wives are a secondary consideration. If I had not been a forest ranger's wife I would not have been in Idaho and have had the wonderful experiences I have had during the 16 years that my husband has been in the service.

Mr. Pulaski and I were camping one summer on the banks of the beautiful St. Joe river, fishing and sometimes wandering through the forest with our dog. One day Mr. Pulaski took dog and gun and went out to hunt, while I washing my hair and let it hang down my back. Soon an Indian and his squaw came into the camp and asked me to row them across the river. I was so frightened I said I could not row, but take the boat if you wish, which they did and I was glad when they had gone. Just then a big Indian came along and stared at me and just to show him I was not afraid I said "Good morning", and he just grunted and went on. About five minutes after that an Indian on a white horse stopped and stared at me and I said "Good morning and he raised his hat and turned and went into the thicket. Just as I had begun to think that I was surrounded by Indians who were after my scalp Mrs. Pulaski and dog arrived on the scene and found me on the

verge of a nervous collapse. I never was so glad to see my husband as I was then. I related my experience to him and he had a good laugh and informed me that the whole tribe of Coeur d'Alene's [sic] were camped just below us and they are perfectly friendly. It was the first time I had seen Indians in the forest. I had seen a few in shows and had read the Jack Harkaway stories when I was a girl, so naturally my experience was rather exciting, but rather small to what I went through later.

Mr. Pulaski has had many thrilling adventures as a forest ranger which naturally effected [sic] me more or less. Many times during the winter he would go miles, on showshoes over the mountains and leave me and our little daughter alone for many days. One time he did not return when he said he would and I was beginning to think something dreadful had happened. One day he as brought home in a very weak condition. He said he went into the mountains, when a terrible storm started; he went into a deserted cabin and was there three days and two nights without food. He contracted a very bad cold which settled on his lungs, and he was very ill. A woman who had a small restaurant near the depot gave him dinner before he started for the mountains; he told her just when he would return, but as he did not come at the time he should have she thought he must be snowbound or ill so she went to this cabin thinking he might be there during the storm. She gave him hot soup and sent men to bring him home; he was very ill for a long time after his return.

There were many dangers experinced [sic] by Mr. Pulaski during his first few years in the forest service; as there were no trails over the mountains and it was very difficult going over them on snowshoes, but his knowledge of the mountains was in his favor, and was the means of overcoming many difficulties, which otherwise might have proved serious.

During the summer of 1910, it was hot, dry and windy and every mountain for miles around Wallace Idaho, was on fire, Mr Pulaski had over 300 men fighting fire in different localities, he was busy night and day. Mr. William Weigle was then supervisor at Wallace, Idaho he was certainly a busy man and it was a very trying time for all of the forest service men. I certainly had my share of night and day work as Mr. Pulaski was on the fire line directing his men.

August 19th 1910 Mr. Pulaski came to Wallace for supplies and men at that time he came home to give me instructions in case the fire came near our home. He said, Wallace will surely burn so be prepared to save yourselves.” While we were talking another bad fire broke out and Mr. Weigle said “Pulaski you will have to go there at once with more men and supplies”. My little daughter and I went with him as I had to take the horse back. We drove eight miles up Placer Creek where the road ended. Mr. Pulaski said good bye I may never see you again he went up the mountain and we started home. The fire was burning all around us and I was greatly worried about Mr. Pulaski going where he did. I was afraid driving home for the flames were jumping up over the mountains, smoke was thick in the air and our eyes just smarted. As we drove along the mountain trail a big bear crossed the road, frightened the horse and nearly turned us into the creek. The bear went up the mountain and I drove on. When we had gone a short distance Elsie said “Mamma that was a big black bear”. I told her it was a big black dog.

When we arrived home Elsie said “Mamma that was a bear not a dog” I said yes dear it was a bear but I did not want to frighten you so I called it a dog. She said “You looked scared mamma”. I said it is alright now dear God took care of us. The next day the fire spread over the very trail we had traveled destroying the most beautiful place in the forest I ever saw. Trees over two hundred years old shading with their great branches and green leaves creeks of purest water

and wild flowers of every hue, were burned and nothing but skeletons were left of the trees which but the day before had stood in their green foliage where the birds made their nests. During July and August 1910 the smoke was so dense around Wallace that the sun was like a big red ball and the atmosphere a dull yellow haze; the streets and houses were covered with ashes and burning twigs blown from the burning mountains. People were hoarse and their eyes were red from smoke.

Great pieces of burning bark eighteen inches long fell in our yard also branches and moss from the doomed trees. Our porch was covered with ashes every day. The grass and shrubs and in fact all kinds of vegetation were dried from the hot ashes and air. I was greatly worried; I was sure we had not seen the worst of the fire yet. Mr. Pulaski with his men were right in the midst of it.

My greatest fears materialized Saturday August 20th. The wind blew a hurricane. Our house shook and the windows seemed to be going to pieces. I expected any minute our house would be blown away; the air was filled with debris of all kinds. Our neighbors were panic stricken and we could do nothing but watch the smoke rolling in dense clouds toward us, and any minute expecting the flames to come upon us. At 8:30 p.m. I put Elsie to bed and lay down beside her as I had a sick headache from the terrible experience. Just then a neighbor came in and said "Mrs. Pulaski you must get ready and leave the house, the neighbors are going to the tailings dam with all their belongings". I looked out of the window and saw a train of vehicles, filled with furniture going by the house. I said I would not go until I saw the flames leap over the mountain. I had not long to wait. About 9 p.m. I saw the flames jumping it seemed hundreds of feet in the air, over the mountain, then they came down like great streaks of lightning, zig zagging up and down burning everything on the hill where many Wallace homes were situated leaving

nothing but ashes and smoke. The flames leaped from one mountain to another until it seemed as though the whole world was afire. One man tried to save his parrot and was burned to death. The people ran for their lives and were none too soon to board the train, that took them to safety from the doomed city of Wallace. In less time than it takes to tell it, Wallace was a mass of flames and we in the Burke Canyon were hemmed in on the tailings dam.

The flames leaped all through the mountains until it seemed as though hell had opened up with all its horrors. Mr. Pulaski was some where [*sic*] in those burning mountains and all though he knew every foot of the ground and could have saved himself, I knew he would not desert his men and would save them or die with them. I never the less wondered what was happening in the mountains. I told Elsie to ask God to save daddy and his men, which she did in her childish way. We stayed all night on the tailings dam watching one of the most realistic fire works display we ever saw in our lives and one I never wish to see again. Though beautiful, most terribly cruel. At 5 a.m. we started for our homes and found them where we had left them but not out of danger.

Some of the neighbors staid [*sic*] with me and I wondered why they looked so sad. I found out later that word had come during the night that Pulaski and his men were all killed. About 9 a.m. word came that some were alive but badly hurt and burned and Pulaski had his eyes burned out and probably would not live. About 10 a.m. I saw two men coming up the road. I found out it was Edward Pulaski being led by another man. Mr. Pulaski was staggering, his clothes coated with dry mud, his eyes bandaged he was blind and terribly burned, his hands and hair were burned and he was suffering from the fire gas. Oh, what an experience for us all. Mr. Pulaski had been to the hospital with the men he had saved and had received attention by one of the doctors.

They were all in a terrible condition. I got Mr. Pulaski back to the hospital where he staid about two months, suffering with burned eyes and hands and pneumonia from the fire gas. I thought he would always be blind, but one day the doctor told me he would see again and soon the bandages may be removed from his eyes. I surely felt [...] at this good news. I was glad when he was allowed to come home [...] take care of him. His eyes were slow in mending but gradually his eyes grew stronger but have never been real strong since. The experience cost him weak throat, lungs and eyes, but that is better than being blind always.

Mr. Pulaski gathered together fourty [*sic*] four of his men and guided them to a mining tunnel; one was killed before getting to the tunnel by falling tree, four killed by fire gas and the rest in the [...] suffering from complications.

[...] this is my experience as a wife of a forest ranger, thrilling [...] dangerous.

Mr. Pulaski served as a forest ranger for many years after 1910 until his retirement at 62 and died a few years later of a heart attack.

Mrs. E.C. Pulaski