

Washington, D. C.
September 23, 1935.

M E M O R A N D U M

RE:

Interview with Raleigh LeProux - Mail address
1460 Irving Street, N.W., Washington, D. C.,
who being sworn testified as follows:

1. Q. With reference to an article appearing in the Daily News, September 20, 1935, the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs would like to have you give additional details as to your experiences prior to, during and subsequent to the recent storm down on the Keys.

A. As I was telling you about the train, I do not know whose fault it was that the train didn't get there, but it was a holiday and I understand they could not get the men together. We got notice that the train would be there about 1 o'clock and Captain Hardecker was in charge and he told us to get ready that the train would be there in an hour but the train did not get there until about 6 o'clock. A large cable blew down and the train had to stop, so, of course, I do not know who was to blame for it. We had plenty of time before the wind started blowing; we had an awful time, and there was plenty of time for the men to have gotten off the Keys, because we could have gotten the trucks if we had known the train was not going to get there.

2. Q. How far would it have been necessary to carry the men in the trucks to get them to safety?

A. Tavernier was ten or twelve miles and Homestead is around about 35 or 40 miles still farther north, and we could have made 40 or 50 miles in a couple of hours very easily.

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3. Q. How many and what type of trucks did you have?

A. We had the state bodies and several dump bodies and some of these pick-up bodies, and of course, we had Chevrolet pleasure cars. We had around about 250 in our camp.

4. Q. Do you know just how many trucks you did have?

A. We had six state bodies and we had around eight dump trucks and a half dozen pick-up bodies. We could have piled all the men in these trucks.

5. Q. Was there any discussion as to moving the men in trucks that you know of?

A. No, none at all.

6. Q. Do you know whether the other two camps had a similar amount of truck equipment?

A. No, they did not. In our garage in Camp No. 1, we took care of the equipment for the other two camps.

7. Q. Where were the men during the interim waiting for the train?

A. We were in the Mess Hall. We could not cook anything - it was raining and we were in there drinking coffee and everybody was packed up in there and the Mess Hall started to twist a little bit around 1:30 in the afternoon, so I said we had better get out before the Mess Hall blows away. It came up so sudden - Captain Hardacker gave us notice - it was blowing quite a lot, but he was betting on the train to get there. I do not know where he got his information. We had telephone communication then, but all I can say, he said the train would be there in an hour's time.

8. Q. Do you mean the train would have gotten there around 2 o'clock?

A. Yes.

9. Q. Do you know what point the train had to come from?

A. It came from Miami.

10. Q. How did you come through the storm?

A. The only thing I could see to do - I was in the shacks and we could see these big wash tubs flying through the air, then my shack started to crack a little bit and I said, we had better get out of here, so we got out and leaned up against the shack and it started to lift up so I said the only thing to do is to crawl - lay real flat and then I guess the time was getting around 3 o'clock, so we started to crawling and just as soon as you started to crawl the wind would turn you over. I got to the flag pole and there was a cement foundation around it and I had the presence of mind to watch my head. I did not want my skull to be fractured because I would not get over it very easily. I hid my head behind the cement bottom of this flag pole and it started blowing real bad. Of course, the rest of my body was sticking right out in the open and large rocks were coming down the road and they hit me in the ribs. This flag pole began rocking and I said I had better get away from here and so I started out to make it across the roadway where the railroad tracks are. When I started to crawl over the roadway, the wind got me and finally I got over there and then a tidal wave caught me. The water was around three feet deep and they say it was seven feet deep in some places, and I got behind a big rock. It knocked me down once and I said I am just going - I can't make it. So I stayed back of this rock from then on until daybreak. I could hear the boys all around hollaring and screaming and I could hear the shacks crack. Of course, all the wires were down then and I was waiting for daylight and finally daylight came and there were a couple of buddies beside me. I walked around some and I didn't know everybody and so I walked around some more and the bodies were lying all over the

roadway and lumber piled on them and some of them had holes in their heads. The boys didn't have any identification and that is going to make it rather hard for the Government to identify them, but I hung around and all I could see was about sixty men. We stayed back of this water tank all day Tuesday, and made big fires to dry out and made some coffee, and around Tuesday, about 6 o'clock, I believe, we made two white flags and gave an S.O.S. to the Coast Guard out there, and the Coast Guard saw the bridge had blown down and they came over to us and said there would be help over here just as soon as they got back to Homestead. They got us all out and I got in Miami Wednesday morning, about 2 o'clock and laid around in the wet and rain, but the rest of the camp could not get up there until about Thursday. They moved us right out first. How a lot of these men got killed, they tried to walk and stand up. We had plenty of time to pick out a good spot for a hiding place but everybody was waiting for the train.

11. Q. How far away were the good hiding places you have reference to?

A. About a half a block. We had a lot of big machinery that we could have held on to.

12. Q. Did any men seek safety in those places?

A. Yes, they did. They finally crawled over there.

13. Q. During the early part of Monday, this being a holiday, was the whole organization around the Camp?

A. Yes, most all of them. They had been to Miami Friday and Saturday and got back there Sunday. Everybody was there except about 25 or 35 men.

14. Q. Did you notice any weather conditions during the morning of Monday?

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A. It was just blowing up a little bit, but it didn't bother me much.

15. Q. Had you had the noon mess before you got the notice about the train?

A. No, we did not. We were very anxious to get out and there wasn't any cooking going on.

16. Q. Was that during the early part of Monday?

A. Yes.

17. Q. Was there just a steady rain?

A. There was a little wind kind of blowing you around.

18. Q. What contacts did you have with the officers after you got the notice about the train?

A. I didn't have any. This Captain was running around excited and he stayed right with us. He got out on the arm but he stayed right with the boys all night. I do not know where he got his information but he must have gotten some information before noon because in the hospital there they had taken some patients to Homestead and he must have gotten some information before noontime.

19. Q. What time did they move the patients?

A. I do not know - I just heard them say the ambulance was taking some of the patients to Homestead for safety. I judge that was a couple of hours before noontime. Dr. Mains said he would wait for the train. He had a chance to go in the ambulance. They must have gotten this report in the morning.

20. Q. Nobody said anything about getting out on the trucks?

A. No, there wasn't a thing said about it. That was just among the men. A couple of them asked me about a truck and I said I did not have any orders to go and get any trucks out of the place, so by moving these patients out of the hospital in the morning, they must have gotten the information earlier.

21. Q. Do you know any of the officers' names except Captain Hardacker?

A. I know a fellow by the name of Davis. I never know him personally but he was in Camp No. 3.

22. Q. Was Captain Hardacker the only officer in Camp No. 1?

A. That is all I could see that day.

23. Q. Before the holiday, or before there was a storm, what was the official set-up?

A. He was in charge. He was around all the time. He had a yellow coat and a sea hat on. He gave us a couple of warnings to get ready. They did not think it was going to be as bad as it was, but some of the men did not get out of the shacks and the shacks broke up with them and killed them in the shacks. That was just a few of them. The rest of the men were waiting patiently and as I got it hoping the train would get there.

24. Q. Do you remember talking to Captain Hardacker after he gave you the notice about the train?

A. No, we did not have much to say Monday. I did not say anything to him at all. He was rushing back and forth and I did not have any conversation with him at all. I saw him come in the hospital and I asked him if he was shaken up right badly and he said he was.

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25. Q. Is it your opinion that if the trucks had been called out, everybody could have made it to safety?

A. Yes, in Camp No. 1.

26. Q. How far was it to Camp No. 5 and Camp No. 3?

A. Camp No. 5 was around about 10 or 12 miles farther toward the Keys, but No. 5 did not have a chance. They had water on each side of them with nothing to hold on to.

27. Q. If the Captain had corralled the men to the rock quarry instead of permitting them to wait for the train, what would have been the result?

A. We think we could have made it. I think we could have made it to the dugouts. They dug the dugouts about eight feet deep.

28. Q. What had the dugouts been prepared for?

A. They were cutting that rock for the bridge down there and some of them were 8 feet high and 6 feet wide. Of course, we had a little machinery, a big tractor and a big crane and it didn't touch the crane at all and the men could have gotten around there and gotten away from the flying timber. A lot of the fellows got broken necks and broken shoulders. The only thing about the train - as it was a holiday I heard there was a little trouble getting the crew together - that was the rumor, they could not quite get the crew together.

29. Q. How close did the train get to you Monday afternoon?

A. It just got past the Camp. In fact I could see the headlight during the night. He could not go any farther.

30. Q. It was your understanding that the train was going to the farthest point, Camp No. 5, and then back up?

A. He did not make any attempt to stop at Camp No. 1. He did not stop there at all. Some of the fellows jumped on and broke their legs. He had stopped in Homestead to back his engine around. He came down tender first. He had turned around in Homestead and it took a little time to do that, but as far as time, the men had plenty of time to save themselves.

31. Q. Do you know any other men in the city who have come back from down there?

A. I do not know of any. I might could locate another man, but he wasn't in my Camp. He was down in Camp No. 3. I might locate him around 17th Street.

STATEMENT BY WITNESS LEPREUX TO MRS. LARRY ROZEAR.

Q. First we would like your name and the camp you were in?

A. Raleigh LePreux camp number one.

Q. What we would like to get this afternoon is your statement of facts about what happened before the storm struck so we will be able to place the responsibility if there is any responsibility to be placed?

A. Well we had plenty of time I was right in the storm I was in the storm all night we had plenty of time to get out of the camp, loads of time three hours that the camp gave us notice to get out.

Q. Who gave you notice?

A. Captain Hardacre. I went up to the shack and hung around and I was ready for the train my baggage and we just stayed around and stayed around and finally I saw a roof blow off I saw the roof blow off the supply house and I said we better get out and just then the shack just started to crack and so we got out and leaned against the shack and it gave another crack and we dropped everything and started out from the shack and we went to the flag pole, the flag pole had a concrete base about one foot in diameter and about three of us got hold of it and tried to get our heads behind it to protect them and our feet were sticking out and the rocks hit us everywhere and we said we better go over to the rock quarry so I had a hat on and pulled it down as far as I could and we had a road like this one out front so we started out on the road on our stomachs crawling and two of my buddies left me and so that left me by myself

and the wind blew me over about three times and I got over the quarry and stayed there all night long but as far as the train I heard the whistle blow but it was blowing and raining so hard that I couldn't see very much but the train went by as far as time we had plenty of time.

Q. Did you hear any talk by the officials about the weather reports or plans of getting the men out on Sunday or Monday?

A. No I was lying on my bunk on Sunday morning and we were lying there just as quiet and went to sleep and Sunday night and it was Monday ~~evening~~ that the train we suppose to be in in a little while so that was around lunch time and we waited and waited for the train and the train came by when it was dark.

Q. Were you men told that you could not leave the camp over the week-end?

A. No indeed we had heard that a storm slways came down there in September but we were told the train would be ready to take us out.

Q. Do you feel that you could make any statement as to who was responsible for not getting you men out?

A. No not that, Captain Hardacre told us in plenty of time and we had heard it over in Miami. We had plenty of time to get out but the train just came by and gave a slight blow and the wind was blowing. If we had known the train was not coming we could have found dandy places to stay but when the shacks started to blow down we couldn't get out.

Q. After the storm was over did you personally identify any of the dead?

A. I knew lots by the faces but not by the names. We were up by day break and I said to my buddies lets get up and go over to the shack and rest up a bit and the shacks were blown down and of course we were all in a daze from lying around in the water. No the men in camp had plenty of time to get out of that camp they had trucks the Captain in charge was betting on the train and he was right by us and all the time it and it come and tried to turn around the engine but I couldn't see the train and if he had of got down to number three camp all he had for to do was to take the boys on but as far as time the boys had plenty of time we were all packed and ready to go.

Mr. LePreux had been drinking.

I herby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct transcript of the statement made by the above named Veteran.

Doris M. e. Donald
 stenographer.