

*Eugene Pattison
Sept. 7, 1935
by Williams*

EXAMINATION OF WITNESSES IN CONNECTION WITH
THE INVESTIGATION INTO THE HURRICANE DISASTER
ON THE FLORIDA KEYS, WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
SECOND DAY OF SEPTEMBER, A. D. 1935.

Investigation conducted in Room 929 of the
McAllister Hotel, at Miami, Florida, commencing at 3:30
P. M., on September 7th, 1935.

EXAMINATION OF:

EUGENE A. PATTISON.

BY MR. AUBREY WILLIAMS:

Q What is your name?

A Eugene A. Pattison; field engineer.

Q Now, Mr. Pattison, I understand you were on the keys
at the time, and prior to the hurricane?

A Right.

Q What was your work there?

A Field engineer.

Q You were employed by the F. E. R. A.?

A I was employed by the F. E. R. A., out of the Jack-
sonville office.

Q Under whose supervision?

A Mr. Ghent. Mr. Sheldon was my immediate boss.

Q Did you have anything to do with the trucks and auto-
mobiles?

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A No; I had nothing to do with the trucks or automobiles. I was field engineer for surveying and laying out the camps.

Q But you had no immediate connection with the automobiles or the trucks?

A I had one pick-up automobile of my own which I used myself for carrying surveying instruments.

Q Now, when this storm broke, or prior to its breaking was any attempt made to use any of the automobiles or any of the trucks to get the people out of there?

A No, sir.

Q In your estimation why weren't they?

A I brought five men out with me at a quarter after five Monday night.

Q Fifteen after five?

A Yes, sir.

Q Why, in your estimation, weren't those trucks used to bring those people out of there?

A There is really nothing I can say about that. They could have been used.

Q Why in your estimation weren't they used?

A No order was given. The train was supposed to be down there at 5:30 to take them all out of there.

Q I understand that; but were the trucks in shape to be used?

A The trucks were in shape, but I doubt if you could have found that many drivers to drive them.

Left
5:15 pm
Monday
25 men

No
other
drivers

Q You doubt if you could have found that many drivers to drive them?

A I doubt it seriously -- amongst the veterans.

Q Well, weren't people employed there to drive the trucks?

A All the trucks were drove by veterans.

Q All of them were driven by veterans?

A Yes, sir.

Q Well, hadn't the trucks been driven prior to this?

A By the veterans, yes.

Q Well, then, why would you have any difficulty at this time finding drivers?

A Because payday was last Friday.

Q What did that have to do with it?

A The men was drunk.

Q The men were drunk?

A They absolutely were.

Q In your estimation, that is the answer?

A That is my estimation. You couldn't have rounded up enough drivers of the trucks to do that; and I was down in camp four o'clock Sunday afternoon, and there wasn't two men in Camp Number 3 sober.

Q With regards to that particular condition, was any attempt -- so far as you know -- was any attempt made to regulate or control the use of liquors?

A We had a Deputy Sheriff force down there for that purpose.

Q What did they do?

A We had two deputies in practically each camp that kept the men under control and saw that they didn't - -

Q Who saw that they were just moderately drunk?

A Yes, sir; and that there wasn't anyone cutting each other up.

Q They assumed it was their right and prerogative to drink liquor if they wanted to?

A Of course. The veterans understood there was beer in the canteens.

Q Beer was sold in the canteens?

A We closed the canteens Sunday afternoon, but there was beer places right in front of the camps. There were places right in front of the canteens, so there was no use closing the canteens; we might as well have kept them right in the camp.

Q Why were the canteens re-opened?

A Well, for cigarettes and things like that for the men.

Q Why did they begin selling beer again after they stopped selling it on Saturday?

A I don't know. I had nothing to do with the canteens.

Q Did you observe on any of the trucks going out whether they were being used to help children and women?

A Yes, sir.

Q A considerable number of them?

A A considerable number of them, yes.

Q And how many would you estimate were aided that way,

*2-1-22
deputy
in camp*

if you had to just make a guess?

A Well, I picked up five of the veterans myself, and the truck ahead of me picked up some people at Key Largo and brought them up, all we could handle on a pick-up.

Q Why didn't you go back and get more?

A Because when I went across Long Bridge at six o'clock, the wind was blowing pretty bad, and my truck will show right now where the wind blew my truck into Long Bridge as I was coming out. My orders was to get that transportation out of there, and be in Hollywood to meet the train when they got there.

Q So far as you know was anyone detained on the keys, any of the keys, against their will?

A No. I wanted to stay down there myself, and Mr. Sheldon ordered me out.

Q Were there any guards used to prevent people from going?

A No. Not a bit; because I was in the office from one o'clock Sunday noon; in other words, this past week end I came home; I came home Saturday noon; my home is in Miami here, and ten o'clock Sunday morning I got word to go back down to the keys, and I got back down there at one o'clock, and from one o'clock until quarter past five I was in the office all that time.

Q Is it your opinion the best judgment was used in the handling of that situation?

A It certainly was, sir, to the best of our ability, considering what reports we had on the matter.

Q Wouldn't it have been better to have risked putting

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Wind blew
his truck
into bridge

Was to
meet train

some of those veterans in driving, and in charge of the trucks, and trying to save them, then to have left them there?

A I don't know if you have ever been down there, but have you ever tried to round up a bunch of drunken veterans?

Q Yes, sir.

A It is a proposition that you would have had to black-jack almost every one of them to get them on the trucks; you surely would. I have been down there ten months; I have laid out those camps down there.

Q Was that a common practice, to be drunk every payday?

A They looked forward to it for two days -- for two weeks before payday; they looked forward to it, to get drunk; they were drunk an hour after they were paid.

Q How often were they paid?

A Once a month. We used to give them a Dollar, Monday, Wednesday and Friday. We cut that out because they got drunk even; on that Dollar they got ten bottles of beer, so we cut that out and gave them \$2.00 canteen books every Friday, and they would go up and sell those for fifty cents so they could go up and buy a pint of liquor. I sat with Mr. Sheldon almost all that time, and I helped plat the course of the storm all the time, and I can remember the weather reports just as distinctly as if I was getting them right here.

BY MR. CHARLES B. FORBES: Do you know what time the first request was made for a train?

A Sunday afternoon. I personally gave the phone number

Wd've
had to
blackjack
vets into
trucks

1st
train
requested
Sunday

of Mr. Gaddis, because I used to work for the Florida East Coast Railroad as engineer, for about ten years.

MR. FORBES: Sunday afternoon about what time?

A About quarter after four.

Q That was in the form of a request, was it, or was it an inquiry as to how long it would take a train to get out there?

A An inquiry if the train was ready to leave at a moments notice, and we was notified in Miami Mr. Gaddis was not in Miami.

Q That was not an order for the train?

A No; that was not an order for the train.

MR. FORBES: Who made the phone call?

A Mr. Sheldon. Mr. Gaddis was in Key West at the time. They said the train was ready to leave in a moments notice; it was made up right then; it was ready to leave. In other words, if we called up at ten o'clock in the morning it should be on the way before twelve.

Q Who did he talk to?

A I think it was the trainmaster here in Miami; and also to Mr. Gaddis in Key West; he wasn't at his home.

MR. FORBES: He did talk to Gaddis?

A I am pretty sure he talked to Mr. Gaddis; because being Sunday you couldn't get Mr. Gaddis at the depot, and we called his home address, and they gave the information he was down in Key West.

The first really authentic warning we got was around ten after two, that it was really headed our way.

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Train ready to leave

1st authentic warning

Q On what day?

A Monday afternoon. At 1:30 that afternoon we got a report it was 200 miles east of Havana, going in a west-southwesterly direction.

MR. FORBES: Monday, at two?

A At 1:30; and at 2:10 they said it was headed our way and gave us - -

MR. FORBES: The weather bureau?

A Yes; and they gave us latitude and longitude; I have a chart down in my car now, and I can show you the whole thing.

Q What was done then after that information was received?

A They called Miami right away and told them to send that train down to us, and they promised that as soon as they could get it down there was 5:30, but it would positively be there at 5:30.

Q Why that large discrepancy in saying they could send it in five minutes notice, and now not until 5:30?

A That is something I have never been able to understand. There is no reason if that train left at 4:30 it could not have been there at six o'clock; the regular schedule is not more than 7:20 to 9:30. I have worked on that railroad; and they stop at Homestead; and it is only 80 miles; this mile post is 368.5 and that one is 440; there is no reason why they couldn't have made it; they surely could have made a little over 75 miles in that time, I should judge an hour and a half at least, which