

STATEMENT OF MR. THOMAS F. LANNON

To Miss Sabiston:

FRANK SABISTON: Q Which Camp were you in?

A Number 3.

Q Do you mind telling us just exactly what happened? That is in order to place responsibility if we can.

A Well of course I don't know who is responsible.

Q But I mean, tell us what you know about what happened; maybe that will help us.

A You want to know when we first heard the storm was coming?

Q Yes. A Well I was working in the kitchen the day of the storm, and it was about eight o'clock in the morning I went over to Bradford's, the fellow that ran the store, to get a bottle of beer. While I was drinking the bottle of beer there was eight or ten in there, I don't know who they were, I didn't pay no attention; and there was a fisherman come in, and he says that the barometer is falling; he says "We are going to have a hurricane here some time today"; that is what he said.

Q That was on Sunday? A No, it was Monday morning at eight o'clock. And somebody else says "When is the storm going to land here?" Well he says "I don't know, but it will be some time tonight." So that is the first time I heard there was anything about a storm or a hurricane coming. So I went back to the kitchen, and we got dinner, and we give them

dinner, and they was all talking about the storm; but nobody was excited. Somebody says it was 24 hours before it would hit us, some says 10; and they had it all figured out. And I was under the impression, somebody said there was a train at Homestead to take us out; that is 40 miles from there.

Q Who said that? A I don't know who; everybody was talking; I don't know; that there was a train at Homestead to take us out. Well we started to get supper; they had dinner and went back to work, and we started to get supper. And about two o'clock somebody come over and says that there will be no supper, you better make sandwiches instead of giving them regular supper.

Q Who told you that?

A I think it was Davis or the top sergeant, Blackie; I don't know which. Blackie Pugh, he is the top sergeant. So I didn't get supper, we cut out the stove, and we started to make sandwiches. We made two sandwiches apiece, and a couple of pots of coffee. Then we waited until four o'clock; the train was supposed to be in there, all the time.

Q Who told you the train was coming?

A Blackie Pugh, the top sergeant.

Q What time? A He said it would be there surely by four o'clock, I think the train was supposed to be there. So we had all the sandwiches made, and we decided to feed them at four o'clock instead of waiting until five; the regular supper time is five o'clock. So we started feeding

then ; and at five -- give them two sandwiches apiece, and that's all they got for supper, and coffee. So we went in the commissary, and wanted to put stuff on the train so we would have it to eat; they claimed we was going to Hollywood,

Florida. We got all the stuff out; we put sardines and all canned tuff and put it in a pile; got our clothes and brought them over in the mess hall; and by that time I guess it was about four thirty, and the wind was blowing pretty hard then, and everybody started coming in the mess hall. And we was all kidding about the storm was going to land, and the train would be there sure by five; put the train back another hour; said the train would be there by five o'clock.

Q Who said that? A I don't know who said it; it was four or five; they would come in and give a report that the train was coming, be there by five. We stood around there and kidded; and the wind was blowing harder all the time; and we stayed there I guess until six o'clock; and the wind was sure blowing then. And I guess it was about six fifteen the top of the mess hall went; there was about seventy-five in the mess hall then. The top of the mess hall went off, and we all had to move, so everybody started to run; and I run over in back of the railroad track and I laid down over there; and Smithy the mess sergeant was with me, and a fellow named Diamond; they call him 'Legs' Diamond; and a fellow named Lyons; there was four of us. We all set over at the back of the railroad track. And the telephone pole started to

blow down; well, we thought that was charged with electricity, and we didn't want to get electrocuted, so we gets up out of there, went to stand up; and the shack started coming over, so we had to lay down again; it was either get your head knocked off by a little shack, or get electrocuted; so we said we would take a chance on getting electrocuted, but it happened to be there was no electricity in the wires. We stood there until that storm was over, that was the first one. After that we got up on the railroad track, and Blackie Pugh had a flash light, he was the only one had a light; it was dark then; and we got everybody together we could, and he said the best thing we can do is to find a higher spot here, the tide might come in. Well, there was a water tank up the railroad track about two hundred yards, or three hundred yards, I guess; well, he says that ought to be the high spot where that tank is. We got to the tank, I guess it must have been 75 at that time, we all got together, we got to this water tank, and somebody come up with a lantern and says, "We better look over the railroad track and see how ^{high} the water is".

Q You don't know who that was?

A No, it was dark. So he looks over the bank at the water, and the water was right at the edge of the railroad track. Well, he says, "Here we go, we either got to swim or do something, that water is coming up fast." And about five minutes after, the water did come over and everybody made a scramble for this tank. I guess there was seventy of us got in it, on just one

little water tank; it was loaded with water; and I don't know how many got washed off; there was about seventy of us got on anyhow, the first. And the railroad track alongside of it started over, and went up against this tank; it stood there, didn't move no farther than the tank, or didn't knock the tank off the track; we were still on the tank. And we stayed there until morning. It was about nine o'clock when we went on the tank. The tide kept coming over the top of this water tank.

Q At any time during that period, did anybody make an effort to keep you men on the Keys, tell you you couldn't leave?

A No; nobody said we couldn't leave. Everybody was for themselves.

BY MR. ABB: This was on Sunday and Monday?

A This was Monday, the day of the storm.

Q On Sunday did anybody try to keep you from leaving the Keys, or on Monday?

A I didn't have any warning, I didn't pay no attention. That is the first time I found out the storm was coming, was on Monday. There was nobody tried to keep me on there.

BY MISS SABISTON: Q Did you personally identify any of the dead?

A Yes, ma'am.

Q Can you give the names of those men?

A I can, yes. St. Clair.

Q What was St. Clair's other name?

A I just know them by their last names. I helped carry him

out of the woods; that was Wednesday.

Q Just give us the names.

A St. Clair, and Phillips; Carr; Elmer the truck driver, he had a stick through his body, we carried him over and put him with the bunch. And Dave, he belongs to the Veterans of Panama, I don't know his name; Dave Mc Allister, I think his name is. A little fellow worked in the store room of the kitchen - Delameter, or something like that. I know lots of them, but I can't think of their names; I identified them though.

Q You personally identified those men?

A Yes, I know they are dead. I can name some more, wait a minute. McCoy, he is a Spanish-American War veteran, he slept in the same shack with me. We pulled him out of the water; he was in the bay.

Q Just those that you remember.

A I remember more, I helped carry out thirty-eight, and I know all but one; one civilian, we couldn't identify him; he was some young boy -- a fisherman, I guess.

QX M.A. APT: Q Were you with Hagan at the time? Was he from your camp?

A He is from No. 3, yes; he is a plumber.

Q He has a list of all those thirty-eight people.

BY MISS SABISTON: Is there anything else you want to say, that should get in?

A The State militia didn't do very good when they come down

there. The first thing they done, twelve or fifteen volunteer-
ed to stay there to take out the bodies, and the first thing
they done when they got in there was to put them on a boat and
put guards on them, wouldn't let them off the boat.

Q Did they send you out, or made you stay on the boat?

A They didn't send me out; I went on the first boat out of
there; but I know they done that.

Q You weren't in the crowd they held?

A No, I had a bad finger, and they took me out on the first
boat; and the doctor come down there, the first airplane landed,
and all he had in his bag was a bottle of rubbing alcohol and a
lot of cotton; he didn't have a needle or nothing to sew any-
body up; and he had to go back --- he sent the plane back to
Snake Creek to get supplies. So he rigged up a temporary
hospital there, but he never did use it.