

Eugene Pattison
21 Sept. 21, 1935
by Kennamer

EUGENE A PATTISON
3149 SW, 16 TERRACE
MIAMI, FLORIDA

WHO BEING FIRST DULY SWORN
MADE THE FOLLOWING RESPONSES TO
QUESTIONS PROPOUNDED BY

D. W. KENNAMER
CENTRAL OFFICE INVESTIGATOR
IN THE CASE ENTITLED
"FLORIDA HURRICANE"

Q. State your full name and home address?

A. Eugene A. Pattison, 2149 SW, 16 Terrace, Miami, Florida.

Q. Were you employed by the WERA prior to and during the hurricane that visited the Florida Keys September 2, 1926?

A. I was.

Q. In what capacity were you employed?

A. As Field Engineer.

Q. Under whose supervision did you work?

A. Under Mr. Ghent and Mr. Ray Sheldon.

Q. State briefly your duties.

A. In charge of laying out the camp sites and supervising constructions.

Q. When did you first learn there was a storm in the Atlantic moving westward?

A. Ten o'clock Sunday morning at my home in Miami.

Q. You had not learned there was a storm in the Atlantic prior to that time?

A. I had not. I went home for the week end on Saturday.

Q. At what time did you leave the camp prior to the storm?

A. Prior to the storm I left Saturday afternoon at one o'clock. They sent for me to go back Sunday morning.

Q. Who sent for you Sunday?

A. Mr. Cutler sent for me to return to camp immediately.

Q. Did he telephone you?

A. No, sent one of the boys after me, a Mr. Jones.

Q. At what time did Mr. Jones get to your home?

A. At ten o'clock.

Cutler sent driver for him

Q. And you returned to the camp?

A. Got back there at twelve o'clock. Left in a government car.

Q. Had you heard anything about the storm prior to the boy's coming?

A. Just when Jones told me that he heard something of the storm during the telephone conversation of Mr. Cutler.

Q. Just relate what took place after you returned to the camp.

A. Got there about twelve o'clock and went upstairs to the office. We have a chart on the wall of all the keys and surrounding territory. On that chart we have small blue buttons to plot any storm course that comes over from the weather bureau. At that time, the storm showed 275 miles east of Havana moving west southwestwardly. At different times during the day we got different warnings from the weather bureau, storm warnings with gale forces in the center moving west southwestwardly. **At 2:30 Monday morning I sleep by the telephone on a cot.** The office at 2:30 gave us another location of the storm area at 265 miles east of Havana moving west southwestwardly. Between nine and nine thirty o'clock we got another report 260 miles east of Havana moving west southwestwardly. During the morning we had plotted all these different weather bureau warnings on this chart, which showed that the storm was moving over Cuba. At 1:20 we got a warning that the storm was 200 miles east of Havana moving west southwestwardly and at ten after two got a direct warning that the storm had turned and was headed toward us. **Mr. Sheran immediately got on the telephone and called Miami, the Florida East Coast Railroad in Miami, asking them to send a train, which had been ordered to wait there Sunday at four o'clock.**

*2:10 pm
Storm
headed
to land
from*

Q. Now let me ask you a few questions. When you returned to the camp did you see Col. Sheran?

A. I did not.

Q. Was he at the camp Sunday?

A. I went to meet the four o'clock ferry and Col. Sheran was there putting his equipment in a safe place.

Met ferry at 4 p.m.

Q. Did you talk to him at that time?

A. I did. Mr. Cutler was with him.

Q. What did he say?

A. He said it looked very bad, very bad. This was the worse that he had seen it and he had spent a number of years on the keys. I myself have spent about fourteen years there.

*Sheran's worst
key?
he's seen
and*

Q. Did he say anything about getting the soldiers out of there?

A. No, not to my knowledge, he did not. Mr. Cutler asked him, "Col. Sheran, if you were in temporary charge down there, would you order that train?" Col. Sheran said that he could say that it did look bad, but I can't remember the exact statement.

Q. Had Mr. Cutler been alarmed about the matter before you returned?

A. He had been alarmed all day. Very much alarmed and was in favor of moving out some.

Q. What was the barometer reading at the time you returned there; also, the condition of the weather?

A. Very cloudy. The barometer reading was 2974. The barometer was not very low at that time. It went down, of course the following day. During the night it went to 2984.



Q. Before it got night, what was it?

A. 2972. As low as it went Sunday. It fell from 3080 to 2972. 2972 is not storm warning.

Q. Did Mr. Cutler have the weather report sheets available?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you read those?

A. I did not. I had no reason to read them.

Q. Did you get anything from the weather report, which indicated the storm might hit the keys before Monday?

A. Not one thing. Even until ten after two there was no immediate danger.

Q. If the danger was immediate it would be too late to do anything, would it not be?

A. That is right.

Q. I will ask you to examine this report, which the weather bureau issued at 2:56 AM September 1, 1935, and state if there is anything in that warning that the keys might be in danger at that time?

A. (Examinee report) That would take over thirty hours to get to us.

Q. Is there anything to indicate that the keys might be in danger?

A. Not a thing.

Q. Is not that warning the entire section from Miami to Key West and up to Ft. Myers?

A. Yes.

Q. I will ask if you saw the bulletin issued at 3:30 AM September 2, 1935?

A. (Examinee report) That is not the one we got at that time. The one we got was 260 miles east of Havana moving west southwestwardly.

Q. Regardless of the position of the storm, did the warning state that it would probably pass through Florida Straight Monday and did it advise against high tides on the keys?

A. No.

Q. Did you get any warning or weather report about 3:30 AM?

A. No. About 2:30.

Q. Had any arrangements been made to receive all weather reports?

A. Yes two of us were on.

Q. ^{you} Did you know that ^{you} he did not receive that warning?

A. I did not.

Q. You admit that that warning suggests danger?

A. We did not receive that warning.

Q. Was there any visible ^{Sight} sight of a storm other than your weather bureau warning?

A. Just dark clouds and the barometer was up to 2972.

Q. Were there any high winds?

A. No, not that morning. Not until two o'clock that day.

Q. Why did Mr. Cutler become alarmed if there were no indications of a storm?

A. Every once in a while a rain squall would come up, which is typical of that section.

Q. Why did Mr. Sheran think there was danger?

A. I do not know.

Q. He is an old ^{times} director in that section?

A. Yes.

Q. At what time did you become alarmed?

A. Just after I got that warning.

Q. Which warning?

A. At ten after two.

Q. Was that the first indication?

A. That was the first indication that a storm was coming near us.

Q. Why had you ordered the train before that time?

A. I did not order the train.

Q. You knew that Mr. ^{Sheran} Sheran had ordered the train?

A. That train was in standing order. We had a standing order with the FEC at all times and to give them twelve hours notice at all times.

Q. Had they been given the twelve-hour notice?

A. Yes. Sunday afternoon at four.

Q. Who gave the call?

A. Mr. Cutler.

*Says Cutler
gave
12-hour
notice*

Q. The FEC had required twelve hours' notice when you would want a train and you are under the impression that they had been given notice that you would want a train?

A. Yes.

Q. -- that you would want it, but not right then?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you hear the conversation between Mr. *Sheldon* Sheran and Mr. Ghent?

A. No.

Q. Why is it that Mr. Sheran does not contend that at any time he ordered a train?

A. At ten after two the train was ordered Sunday. *Sheldon*

Q. You knew that Mr. Sheran did not have authority to order the train?

A. He was in charge.

Q. Did he tell you that he had authority to order the train?

A. He was the Director. Mr. Ghent was never there. *Sheldon*

Q. Then, if Mr. Sheran did not have authority to order a train, and Mr. Ghent had to order the train and Mr. *Sheldon* never told the railroad company at that time that he would want a train, but merely asked how long it would take to get a train, you have been misinformed about the whole matter?

A. I must have been misinformed.

Q. You do know that Mr. *Sheldon* Sheran talked to Mr. Gaddin Sunday afternoon?

A. I do. *Sheldon to Gaddin's Sunday*

Ernest Patterson
Sept. 21, 1935
by Kennamer

Q. About what time?

A. About a quarter to five.

Q. Mr. ^{Sheldon} Sheran got back about four?

A. The ferry was three hours late. He was due back at one.

Q. After he returned you went to headquarters, did you?

A. Yes, went back to headquarters and showed them the chart on the wall.

Q. You had a conference did you?

A. Yes.

Q. All of the people were present?

A. Yes.

Q. The matter of moving the men was discussed?

A. Certainly.

Q. Among you, how many of you thought it was advisable to take definite steps to move them out at that time?

A. I don't believe any of us, except Mr. Cutler.

Q. How about Mr. ^{Mulvihill} Marshall?

A. He was in favor of saying for some reason. He had the opportunity of leaving.

Q. I am not talking about leaving. All of you were favorable of making arrangements to get out?

A. Yes, although no arrangements were made to get out that afternoon.

Q. You lead us to believe that such an arrangement had been completed.

A. Mr. ^{Sheldon} Cutler said that he had been in touch with the FEC and Mr. ^{Sheldon} told him to go down to the station and get in touch with Miami, as the train was being made up there and would leave at any time we asked for it, and it would be down in less than three hours.

→ (3 hour misconception?)

Q. Who did you receive that information from?

A. From the agent at Islamorada.

Q. What did you do after you received that information?

A. Went back to Mr. *Sheldon* Sheran.

Q. Is that what caused the information to get out--the information that the train was standing by?

A. I don't imagine so. Mr. Cutler had been in touch with the officials. Don't see why it did. *Sheldon*

Q. Did Mr. Cutler or Mr. Sheran either one lead you to believe that they had authority to complete arrangements for a train?

A. Mr. Cutler did not have authority. He was assistant director who took orders from Mr. *Sheldon* Sheran. *Sheldon*

Q. Did you understand that Mr. Sheran had authority to make arrangements?

A. Why certainly. He was the approving official on everything.

Q. If he did not have authority, you did not understand clearly. He mislead you.

A. I don't see where he did. I understood he was in charge and naturally it was up to him for any orders.

Q. Now you stated a while ago that you did not become alarmed until about 2:10. *Sheldon*

A. I did not. That is when Mr. Sheran answered the telephone.

Q. That is when you got the bulletin about the latitude and longitude? *bulletin 2:10 PM*

A. Yes. *2:10 PM*

Q. Was it immediately after that that Mr. *Sheldon* Sheran ordered the train?

A. Right.

Q. I am talking about ordering the train to come down?

A. Right.

Q. How did Mr. *Sheldon* order the train?

A. Called the REC in Miami.

Q. Did you know that he had to call Mr. Ghent in Miami and Mr. Ghent was to place the order for that train?

Jacksonville

A. That is something new to me. *Sheldon* That really is something new.

Q. What time do you recall Mr. *Sheldon* placing the call for Mr. Ghent?

Sheldon to Ghent 11:46 AM.

11:46. Just before we went down to lunch.

Q. You did not understand that he called Mr. Ghent to request him to order the train?

A. There was no reason at 11:46 to order the train. At 1:30 the storm was 200 miles east of Miami moving down.

Q. What was he calling Mr. Ghent for?

A. He called him at different times to get in touch with the weather bureau.

Q. You did not know that he called him at 1:37?

A. No.

Q. You did not know that was the time that he told Mr. Ghent to order the train?

A. No.

Q. Now, after Mr. *Sheldon* put in a call for Mr. Ghent at 11:46 and did not get him and at 1:37 when he did talk to him placed his order for the train, then he put in that call to order the train?

A. He must have, but it was after that last warning that we got.

after
Q. The first definite warning, that it was headed toward ~~there~~ he spoke to Mr. Ghent?

A. Of course I did not listen carefully to the conversation.

Q. That was when Mr. Ghent called him and told him he had ordered the train from St. Augustine. Then one hour and fifty-one minutes was lost in getting Mr. Ghent to order the train. That delay was because Mr. Ghent did not keep himself available?

Who pays for train?
A. That is what it was. When we got in touch with Miami, after we had spoken about the train, they wanted to know who would pay for it. Then we had to get in touch with Jacksonville and St. Augustine.

Q. According to your statement no definite arrangements had been completed for the railroad to furnish a train until this emergency arose?

A. Quite definitely.

Q. Did you see Col. Sheran at headquarters Monday afternoon?

A. No. I may have been around the hotel or dining room if he came in.

Q. You don't know about him coming there and telling you people you had better get the men out?

A. Not to my knowledge.

Q. How much motor transportation did you have at the camp?

A. Eight or ten pick-up trucks and about ten or twelve state body trucks; also, dump trucks.

Q. How many people could have been taken out with the use of the motor transportation?

A. A ll of them.

Q. At one time?

A. Yes. We have carried at least thirty-five to a ball game in one truck and fifty could get in them.

Q. Was anything said at any time about using the motor transportation?

A. Not to my knowledge.

Q. Was anything said about taking the motor transportation out to a safe place?

A. Yes, some of them. Mr. Cutler left a little after three in his car.

Q. Why some of it?

A. I don't know, orders came from Mr. *Sheldon* Sheridan.

Q. You could have put them all in the trucks if conditions would have warranted.

A. *Vets* We had 470 odd men down there and about 450 were drunk.

Q. Drunk or drinking?

A. Drunk. It was two days after pay day and they usually raise cane.

Q. Did you sell intoxicating liquors at the camp?

A. Sold beer.

Q. Did you sell ale?

A. No, no ale at the canteen. A place located near the camp sold it, but we kept that out of the camp. To my knowledge there was no ale in the canteen.

Q. At what time did you close the canteen before the storm?

A. Mr. Hooks runs it. Mr. Cutler closed it down Sunday, but said there was no sense in closing it when beer was sold near the camp.

Wash.? Q. In other words, if they were not drunk give them an opportunity to get drunk so that they would be more trouble in case that an emergency arose?

A. No.

Q. At what time did you leave the storm area?

A. Five fifteen.

Sheldon ordered him to leave at 5:15 p.m. Took 5 men 2 him.

Q. How did you leave?

A. In my pick-up truck.

Q. Why did you leave?

A. Mr. *Shelan* ordered me to.

Q. Did you take anyone with you?

A. Five men from Camp #1--all I could carry. There was one pick-up truck ahead of me.

Q. What was the condition of the weather at that time?

A. Bad.

Q. It was becoming alarming at that time?

A. Yes. I usually go to Miami in two hours and it took me four.

Q. At that time it looked dangerous to stay there longer?

A. Certainly. If the train had got there at 5:30, as promised, they would have gotten out.

Q. As the train did not come at all you would not have thought of getting out otherwise?

A. Not if you were positive that the train would get there. I am positive the train left Miami at 4:20 to go 76 miles.

Q. As a matter of fact, you know that it would be dangerous for a train to run 76 miles in one hour and fifteen minutes.

A. I used to work for the FKO--worked for ten years--and they guaranteed one hour ^{mile} per minute.

Q. The camp where you had contact was eight miles and Camp #3 was four miles away, making 84 miles and you expected the train to leave at 4:20 and be there at 5:30. That is 84 miles in one hour and ten minutes.

A. Quite right. They definitely promised Mr. *Shelan* on Sunday that they would be there at 5:30. First they would go to Camp #3, back to Camp #5 and to Camp #1 and they would positively be there at 5:30.

Promised Sunday to be there at 5:30?

Sheldon
Q. You and Mr. Sheran understood that the train would be there at 5:30 if they had no trouble.

A. Yes.

Sheldon
Q. You and Mr. Sheran know that trouble may develop at any time. If you were able to leave there at 5:30 ~~you~~ get to a safe place all the other men could have done the same thing *you did*.

A. That is right.

Q. Had any plans been made to get the men out in case the train did not arrive?

A. No. *No Contingency Plans*

Q. Don't you think that a prudent man would have made some arrangements?

A. You could have walked them out if they had been sober. I had instructions to feed the men and get them ready by 4:00 to leave there at 5:30.

Q. At what time would you have completed orders for a train to get those men out of there?

A. I would have had the train there before 5:30. There is no doubt about that.

Q. Did you know that if the train was delayed, for the purpose of getting the men out, they could spend the night on the train and be carried back early the next morning?

A. They could have been taken to Hollywood and placed on a siding and water and food arrangements made.

Q. If you got them there before dark you could not keep them on the train?

A. They were to be taken care of at the Military Academy was my understanding.

Deliberate delay again

Q. Did you at any time advise ordering delay of the train or did he ask your opinion or advice?

A. No.

Tim
in
charge.

Q. As a matter of fact, when Mr. Sheran returned and after your conference at headquarters, he told all of you that he was in charge and he would handle the situation?

A. Quite right. He was brought down from Jackson County, and we were to take orders from him. He was the approving officer.

Q. In a case of that kind a prudent man would ask the advice of others?

A. Quite right.

Q. Mr. Sheran did not ask for advice or opinion?

A. No.

Q. Don't you think he assumed quite a bit of responsibility?

A. With his job.

Q. Do you think he was justified under the circumstances in what he did?

A. I certainly do.

Defends Sheldon

He had nothing before 2:00 or 2:10 to justify any action. If I had been Mr. Sheran I would not have taken any steps other than he did.

Even though you knew that you did not have authority to get in touch with Mr. Ghent and that the day was a national holiday you might be delayed in all these matters, you would not have done anything other than what Mr. Sheran did?

A. No, I would not have.

Q. Supposing you could not get hold of Mr. Ghent, would you have waited until the last minute?

A. Naturally, if the train was waiting.

Mr. Sheldon to delay ordering

Q. The train was never waiting. The train was not ordered to wait and Mr. ~~Sheran~~ knew that it was not waiting.

*I thought
train
waiting
in
Miami*

A. It was my understanding all along that the train was waiting in Miami to leave at a moment's notice.

Q. What was the name of the agent that said the train was

*Sheran's agent
FEC
had him*

A. I don't know. He was the agent at Islamorada.

Q. You are positive that he told you the train was waiting?

A. I am positive.

Q. You do know that there was more than two hours' delay after the order was placed?

A. They had to round up the crew because of Labor Day.

Q. Mr. Pattison don't you know if Mr. Ghent and Mr. ~~Sheran~~ had any agreement with the railroad to have a train waiting there they would have set that up as a defense and that would have been their defense from the beginning to the end.

*Ref.
Ghent
Sheldon
defense*

A. It has always been my understanding that they would have steel coaches.

Q. I am talking about the understanding between Mr. Ghent, Mr. ~~Sheran~~ and the FEC.

Did Captain Inghrian occupy the same position that Mr. ~~Sheran~~ occupies?

A. No, same position as Mr. Ghent.

Q. You knew what the arrangements were?

A. We would give them a twelve-hour notice was the arrangement.

Q. Does the company have correspondence to the effect that the railroad wanted five hours to get the train down there with three hours notice.

A. No. We never had any correspondence to that effect.

Q. If the agreement you understood to exist between the railroad and the officials was twelve hours' notice and the railroad had not been notified to get a train ready, then the officials are guilty of negligence?

A. Certainly, if the train had not been ordered.

Q. You do not know of the hour that the railroad was notified to get a train ready?

A. Only through conversation and the ticket agent. He got in touch with Miami and the train ordered was standing by to move at a moment's notice.

Sunday sends Sheldon to

Q. Did Mr. Sheridan tell you to go up and get a train ready?

A. No, only to get what information I could about the train.

Patterson to station on check train

Q. What time did he send you to the station?

A. Around five o'clock Sunday.

Q. What instructions did he give you?

A. Told me to go down and ask the station agent to get in touch with Miami and find out if the train was standing. He got in touch with Miami and they said the train would leave at a moment's notice.

Q. After the storm did you go back to the area?

A. I did.

Q. What time?

A. About twelve o'clock Wednesday noon.

Q. Did you identify any of the dead?

A. No I did not.

Q. Do you know the names of any veterans who left the camp before the storm that may be reported missing?

A. There are quite a few around Miami. Sergeant Nobles from Camp #1.

Q. Were you acquainted with Captain Robinson and Mr. Buck?

A. Yes, personally.

Q. Did you visit the camp Monday morning?

A. No.

Q. You did not go there with Mr. Cutler?

A. No I went Sunday afternoon.

Q. Has there anything said about when the train would be there to take them out Sunday?

A. No.

Q. Where was Captain *Sheldon* Monday from about ten to eleven o'clock?

A. To the best of my knowledge at the office. "e were on.

Q. Why was it Mr. Van Hyning could not get him on the telephone?

A. I don't know unless it is because it is a party line. There are about fifteen parties on the line. We have Metacumbe 1 and Metacumbe 2, etc.

Telephone was party line

Q. Were any of them around headquarters drinking Sunday or Monday morning?

A. No.

Q. Have any of the officials advised you what to say or not to say?

A. What officials?

Q. PERA.

A. No they did not.

Q. No one cautioned you of what you should say?

A. No reason to caution, I am not telling anything but the truth.

Q. Do you know any other facts that you have not related?

A. No I do not.

Q. Is there anything else you would like to add to your statements?

A. No I do not.

I, EUGENE A. PATTISON, DO HEREBY SWEAR that the answers made herein to questions propounded by D.W. Kennamer and John J. Abt, are true and correct, with such initialed corrections as may appear therein, to the best of my knowledge and belief, so help me God.

Eugene A. Pattison
EUGENE A. PATTISON

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN TO this 21 day of September, 1935,
before D.W. Kennamer, Central Office Investigator, Veterans' Administration, under "Authority", Veterans' Administration, Form 4505a.

D.W. Kennamer
D.W. Kennamer, Investigator