

Mallie K. Pitman
Sept. 18, 1935
by Farmer

McAllister Hotel,
Miami, Florida,
September 18, 1935

MALLIE K. PITMAN, made the following responses under oath to questions propounded by H. W. Farmer, Investigator, in the investigation entitled "Re Hurricane, Florida"

1. Q. State your full name, age and home address.
A. Mallie K. Pitman, 39 years old, nearly 40, and my home address is Charlotte, N.C.
2. Q. What are the names and addresses of any of your near relatives?
My brother G. G. Pitman, Earl Langley Mill, Lexington, N.C.
3. Q. Have you parents, wife or children?
A. No, sir. I have been married but my wife is dead and my parents are dead.
4. Q. What is your occupation?
A. I always followed Cotton Mill work until the last five or six years.
5. Q. How are you employed now?
A. I am now working here in Miami at plumbing work, with The Fixit System.
6. Q. Where did you live before you lived in Charlotte?
A. In Franklin, N.C.
7. Q. Where were you born?
A. Haywood County, N.C.
8. Q. Are you a veteran?
A. Yes, sir
9. Q. Do you have a claim with the Veterans Administration for compensation?
A. No, sir
10. Q. Have you at any time been a member of one of the veterans camps on the Florida Keys?
A. Yes, sir, Camp No. 1. I went there in February and stayed there until the hurricane, 7 or 8 months.

11.

Q. Where were you during the hurricane?

A. When it first began I was in the camp. It started blowing the camp away and I got out of one of the barracks, crossed the road and walked down until I got to the railroad track. When I got there there was a cable blown across the train. The train had just come in and the cable had fallen over on it. The train had come to carry the veterans out and it was headed towards Camp No. 3. I helped them get the cable off. The wind was blowing very hard and it took about an hour to run from Camp No. 1 to Islamorada. After we got to Islamorada, which was as far as the train ever did get, the storm got so bad they had to stop. In 25 minutes the water was up so high they could not go any farther and in one-half hour the train had turned over.

Helped
remove
cable
from
train

12.

Q. Why did you get on the train going into the other camps and away from Miami?

A. I thought it was going back again and I knew it came down to take us back

13.

Q. Did any other veterans board the train with you as it went down?

A. No, sir, I was alone

14.

Q. Were you with the engine crew helping fix the cable?

A. Yes, sir. There was one more veteran and the whole train crew was working. The cable was on one of the cars and I climbed to the top and helped pull it off.

15.

Q. How long did it take to remove the cable?

A. I do not know how long they had been there when I got there, but it took twenty or twenty-five minutes after I got there.

16.

Q. How big was the cable?

A. Three quarter inch steel cable

3/4 inch
cable

17.

Q. Tell me how it was engaged in the train, what car etc.

A. As I remember I think they had a freight car attached to the train and I am pretty certain the cable was on top of the freight car, and I climbed the freight car and pulled the cable so it fell between the cars, then the train crew pulled it out, one veteran helping them.

18.

Q. Was it loose at either end?

A. Yes, sir, at one end, it must have been the end that goes into the ground.

19. Q. Was it tangled in the train?

A. Yes it was tangled pretty badly, it was wrapped around and everything. They kept pulling after I finished. Myself, the conductor and a veteran got on the opposite side and straightened it and the rest of them pulled it. It was a pretty bad mess.

Pretty
bad
mess

20. Q. How far was the freight car from the engine?

A. I am not certain but I think the freight car was back of the train, that is to the rear of the train, towards Miami

21. Q. Can you account for how the engine passed the cable and did not become entangled until it reached the last car?

A. He blowed, I do not know whether they heard him or not but I heard him blow the whistle. I cannot account for how the engine passed the cable and did not become entangled. At the time I heard the train blow the shack I was in was about to blow over so I made for the railroad track. I could not see the train but I went towards it. The train was at Islamorada when it turned over. I was then in one of the passenger cars, and when it began to turn over I crawled outside some way. On the outside I was in water to my waist, in the car the water was two feet deep. I stayed out there a little while and it was blowing so hard I crawled back inside the car. The water never did cover the entire car. I stayed in the water house and sat on the tank Monday night. The next morning I walked to the baggage car, stayed in the baggage car that day and the next night. The next morning, Wednesday, I got out and walked to the cafe of O D King who was head man of all transportation, the man I worked for. About 10 a.m. they got us out. I came to Miami with Mr King, his wife and his wife's sister.

Heard
Train
Whistle
a bit
shack

22. Q. Do you know what happened to the other veteran who was helping you?

A. I cannot tell you his name but I think he is alright.

23. Q. How many were on the train?

A. Something like thirty people.

24. Q. Were you injured in any way?

A. No, sir

Came to
Miami
E King

25. Q. While you were with the train crew when they were trying to disengage the cable, did you form an impression as to whether they were doing all they could to move the train as quickly as possible?
A. Yes, sir, they did all they could. They worked just as hard as anyone could work. They also asked us to help them, that was the first thing they asked me when I got there.
26. Q. Did they say anything about a delay between Miami and that point?
A. No, sir, I know they did not
27. Q. How long before the train arrived did you know that a train was coming in?
A. I did not know there was one coming. I was in Miami Monday morning. I caught the train at 7:30 a.m. and arrived in Camp No. 1 about 9:30 Monday morning.
28. Q. When you got back in camp at 9:30 did you find the members of the camp apprehensive about a storm?
A. No, sir. I did not hear anyone say anything about it. Of course I heard there was going to be one but no one was paying much attention to it. I did not hear much talk about it at all.
29. Q. Was there a general announcement sometime early in the afternoon that a train would be in?
A. There could have been but I did not sleep in the camp. I slept over at the Filling Station and Garage and I was over there most of the day after I got off of the train. I went to the Camp about an hour before the hurricane.
30. Q. Did you not eat your mid-day meal with the rest of the members of the camp?
A. No, sir
31. Q. When did you first get concerned about your safety?
A. When I saw the buildings going over all around me, that was just before dark. When I was in the cabin I could just barely see, but when I left I could not see anything. I was in a tent with two boys who I have never heard tell of since. I know they were killed but never have heard of them finding them. I do not know their first names but one was named Lawson and the other Barnes.

32. Q. When were you last in the tent with them?
A. Around 6 p m Monday. I left them in the tent. I asked them to lets go out and they said "No" They did not think there would be any danger in the tent. I had a blanket around me but it blew so bad that I went back and threw the blanket on the floor. I went around the power house and it blew me pretty bad. I think that both of those boys had been drinking some.
33. Q. Was drunkenness a usual thing in your camp?
A. No, sir. They drank quite a bit but it was not so bad, just like a crowd in town somewhere. It was a city of our own.
34. Q. Was there any method of law enforcement in the camps?
A. Yes, sir. Mr Lewis Maloney was a Deputy Sheriff and he had three or four deputies, one named Russell. They were regular County Officers. There was not any from the Camp.
35. Q. Do you feel that anything more could have been done to get the veterans out of there before the hurricane, than was done?
A. Well, sir, I do not know the conditions and I would rather not say.
36. Q. Do you feel that rescue work was carried out as quickly and efficiently as it could have been under the circumstances, or not?
A. Yes, sir, they did all they could.
37. Q. I want you to understand in answering all of these questions, and particularly the next question, that you can speak with entire freedom without any thought of what you say causing you any difficulty whatsoever. Do you have any criticism to offer of the effort that was made to get veterans out of the camp, of their rescue, their treatment before or after the hurricane?
A. No, sir, I do not. From the way it looked to me they did all they could. There was nothing there to get them out on. Of course I do not know how long the train had been ordered, I do not know anything about it.

38. Q. Did you identify any dead veterans yourself?
A. Yes, sir, one. He was lying in the middle of the road when I came by and I knew him. His name was Mulverhill but I do not know his first name. He weighed about 165 or 170 pounds, was 5 feet 10 inches tall, kind of sandy hair, no marks to identify him that I know of. He had on a brown shirt with Sergeant's stripes on it and a red-looking pair of pants.
39. Q. How close were you to him?
A. As I passed by they had a cloth over his face, he and two others and I saw the pants so raised the cloth and looked at him. Mr King and his wife and his wife's sister were with me but they did not stop, they kept on going.
40. Q. Could you tell how he had been killed?
A. No, sir, I could not. I passed by lots of them but they were in such bad shape I could not recognize them.
41. Q. Do you know the name of any other veteran who lost his life there?
A. No.
42. Q. I will give you at this time a list of the missing veterans, and will ask you to read it over carefully and tell me of the destiny of any veteran on there that you happen to know.
A. I know Brady and Butler on this list but I do not know what happened to them. I know Butler was in the Camp as I saw him just before the hurricane. I also know James H Mulverhill. He is the one I spoke of as seeing dead the one with the red pants. I called Mr King's attention to Mulverhill but he did not stop as he was completely worn out, also his wife and sister-in-law were all tired out. Here is the name of Alexander L Dempsey. If he is the Dempsey from Camp No. 1, I know he was not in Camp as I have seen him here in Miami. He drove for Polly Huan before and after the hurricane.

At this point Polly Huan was called in and he stated that he was sure Alexander Dempsey was living; that he brought \$55.00 to get him out of jail just before the hurricane, which was the reason that he (Huan) was not in the hurricane himself; and that he sent Dempsey to his father's home in West Virginia after the hurricane.

43. Q. You say you have seen Dempsey since the hurricane?
A. Yes, I saw him in front of the City Hall in Miami two or three days after the hurricane. I stayed out with Mr King from Wednesday until last Saturday, and I came down town two or three days after the storm and I saw Dempsey.
44. Q. Were you well acquainted with him and sure without any doubt you have seen him since the hurricane?
A. Yes, siree
45. Q. Is there any further statement that you want to make?
A. No, sir, not anything else.

I, MALLIE K. PITMAN, DO SOLEMNLY SWEAR,
that the statements made herein in response
to questions propounded by H. W. Farmer,
Investigator, have been read by me and they
are true and correct to the best of my
knowledge and belief, so help me GOD.

Mallie K. Pitman
Mallie K. Pitman

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN TO before me H. W. FARMER,
an Investigator of the Veterans' Administration
this 19 day of September 1935.

H. W. Farmer
H. W. FARMER, INVESTIGATOR