

Karl Thompson
Sept. 23, 1935
by Farmer

McAllister Hotel,
Miami, Florida,
September 23, 1935

KARL O. THOMPSON 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, occupation and address.
A. Karl O. Thompson, Sheriff of Monroe County, Florida. My address is Key West, Florida
2. Q. How long have you been Sheriff of Monroe County?
A. Since January 3, 1933.
3. Q. Were you on duty at the Veterans' Camps on the Keys subsequent to the hurricane of September 2nd?
A. Yes
4. Q. At what period of time were you there?
A. I arrived there on Wednesday afternoon, stayed there until Saturday afternoon when I flew to Key West and came back Sunday afternoon, remaining there then until the Thursday following.
5. Q. What was the scope of your duties there?
A. To keep order and do rescue work.
6. Q. Were you personally acquainted with any number of veterans in those camps?
A. No, I was not
7. Q. What camps did you cover while you were on duty after the hurricane?
A. Camps 3 and 5.

8. Q. How many veterans' bodies were recovered while you were on duty there?

A. When I arrived there Wednesday afternoon there were 38 bodies that the veterans had recovered. They were all laid on the dock with sheets over them. The next day they recovered 8 or 9. Major Albury went to Camp No. 5 and I think he shipped 77 bodies out of there one day and I think some 20 the following day.

9. Q. Who had charge of the recovery and identification work in Camps 3 and 5?

A. Major Albury.

10. Q. Who had charge of the cremation?

A. Major Albury's outfit with the assistance of a fellow by the name of Tanner who was with the State Health Department.

11. Q. How many bodies were cremated to your knowledge?

A. I could not state as I do not know exactly. Sergeant Eugene H Pierce was the only person permitted to give the order for cremation in every instance.

12. Q. Did you identify any of the bodies?

A. Only those that the veterans themselves had recovered, which were on the dock, and they had already been identified

13. Q. Did you make a record of the names?

A. Yes, I had a list and the names were written on the side of a box. I got hold of a paper and pencil and a veteran called the names off to me, 38 or 39 of them, and I made a list. We tagged each of them viz: 1, 2, 3 etc. tying the tags around the toe, or if they had a shoe on we tied the tags to the shoe laces.

14. Q. To whom was this list given?

A. That list was given to a police officer from Miami who was on the Coast Guard boat that took the bodies to Snake Creek. I do not know his name

15. Q. Have you any records at all that would help to identify any of the missing?

A. I have some stuff in Key West that I took down. I also have a copy of the list of the 38 I spoke about previously. My object in coming up here this morning was to find out where I should send what I had and as you have advised me, I will turn it over to Commander Green of the F.E.R.A.

16. Q. What is the nature of the stuff you have in Key West?

A. Discharge papers, some wallets, letters etc.

17. Q. Were those items found on the bodies?

A. Yes, found on the bodies brought in and was handed over to me.

18. Q. None of this material was picked up elsewhere?

A. Yes, I believe so, some of it was found in turned over shacks at Camp No. 3.

19. Q. Is it segregated so that it may be told which was found on bodies and which picked up elsewhere?

A. No.

20. Q. Have you anything more to state relative to the identification of veterans?

A. In regard to the identification of the men, I sent several messages to those in charge at Snake Creek to send me down several Identification Men, but I received no help.

21. Q. Did you observe the effectiveness of measures taken to rescue survivors and recover bodies after you came to the Camps?

A. Yes

22. Q. What can you say of the effectiveness of these measures?

A. They proved to be very successful. Major Albury and his crowd, also some of the survivors connected with the building of the Overseas Highway went out on searching parties. As they would locate the bodies they would flag them and another crowd would go and try to get the bodies out.

23. Q. Was there any unnecessary delay in rescue work or in the recovery of the bodies?
- A. There was some delay as it was more or less isolated but no unnecessary delay. They went right to work and did all possible.
24. Q. Would it have been possible to have recovered and buried any of the bodies that were cremated?
- A. The only possible way to have buried those bodies would have taken a lot of dynamite to blast holes. The weather was hot, and some of the bodies, I am told, on being moved would tear apart, that is, tear off an arm or a leg. It then became necessary to burn the bodies where they were found.
25. Q. Having in mind that we would like for you to speak freely, expressing your opinion on any matter having any connection with this subject, is there any further statement you would care to make?
- A. We knew a storm was coming, we knew it was headed for the Florida Straights or the Florida Keys, and I think those men, rather those veterans, should have been taken out of those Camps Sunday, or Monday morning at the latest.
26. Q. You feel that the warnings were sufficient to have caused a prudent man to evacuate Sunday afternoon or Monday morning?
- A. Yes, sir. Captain Ed Sheeran who was with Mr Duncan in building the Overseas Highway, told me that he went up to Headquarters of Veterans on the Keys and suggested that they get those men out on Sunday. He also told me he went up there twice Monday and pleaded with them to leave.
27. Q. Did he say to whom he talked on those occasions?
- A. Yes, but I cannot think of the man's name, but I imagine it was someone in authority.
28. Q. Is there anything further you wish to say?
- A. No, I cannot think of anything

*Dynamite
for graves*

Ample warning

Sheeran

I, Karl O. Thompson,
DO SOLEMNLY SWEAR that the statements
made by me 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.

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN TO before me
_____ an Investigator
for the Veterans' Administration, this
_____ day of September 1935.

INVESTIGATOR