

McAllister Hotel
Miami, Florida
September 11, 1935

THOMAS J. NASH, made the following responses under oath to questions propounded by H. W. Farmer, Investigator, in the investigation entitled "Re Hurricane, Florida."

1. Q. What is your name, age and occupation?
A. Thomas J. Nash, 35 years old, Chauffeur at Camp #3, Lower Matecumbe. Serial #109741 - 373.
2. Q. Were you a member of the camp?
A. Yes
3. Q. Have you a claim with the Veterans Administration?
A. Yes. No. 105137
4. Q. Were you in the camp at the time of the hurricane?
A. At the time of the hurricane on the keys some friends of mine were there and wanted to go fishing. They asked me if I was going down and I said, "No, I have been fishing these so long I don't feel like going." So I went out there and was playing miniature golf with a friend of mine. When we heard of the storm we started for the Keys knowing that my friends were down there and we wanted to get them out. We were stopped by the National Guard at Tavernier who refused to let us go through. I went to a hospital and met the Supervisor of F.F.R.A. (a woman), who gave me a pass telling me to go through and get those bodies, knowing that I knew the Keys and also knowing that I worked at headquarters. Myself and two others went to the Keys. We were again stopped by the National Guard at Tavernier. I then talked with a Sheriff who worked on the job with me for the Florida Highway Commission, and he got us through. I took two others with me on this rescue party as I knew it would be a tough job. I went to the Commandant of the Coast Guard, asking the customs officers to let me through. I could see nothing there but the law hanging around. There were 39 bodies came in on the boat, 37 civilians and 37 ex-service men from Lower Matecumbe to Snake Creek, and three of us were unloading them. We made a statement at the time the boat was unloaded. There was hired help to unload the boat and the rescue workers were willing to give a hand to help them out. There were 25 or 30 FERA people there.

5.

- Q. Did you know any of them by name?
- A. No, sir, I knew them by sight but not by name. Myself and my rescue party boarded the boat with two other fellows. I spoke to the Captain and showed him my pass. He asked me if I knew those Keys so I took his log and showed him where Indian Key was and where the bodies were. We started out and were only out a short while. We went around the Keys several times. The number of the boat was 9-141 or 9-244. All I had on was a pair of overalls. We docked at lower Matecumbe and found three bodies on the ferry. I knew Mr Albury from the Key West detachment so I asked him about removing those bodies. He said they were going to burn them and I asked him why. His answer was because they were too rotten to remove. He thought I was a sailor and asked me if there was a radio on the boat. I told him there was and he said he was going to get in touch with the Veterans Bureau in Washington, which he did. An answer came back later in the evening but Mr Albury was not on the Keys or any of this officers with the exception of a Too Sergeant. I asked the Too Sergeant if he would not do something about getting the bodies of the boys off of the road. A worker was sent there and got the bodies, after I had identified them. When night came on we asked for something to eat and was refused by the Key West detachment. We were told "When our boys are fed, you will get something to eat." After they had all eaten we were told that we could have a can of five cent Frankfurters and that there was coffee in the back. We relished this food as we had not eaten all day or night. There being no place to sleep, we slept in the sand, tearing a piece of mattress ticking to lay on. I had no clothing except dungarees. Things got so bad that at about 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning we got up and built a fire. We sat by the fire until about 6:30 in the morning, then I went and asked if the bodies could be brought in. There was a litter there which I took, and a fellow with a bayonet chased me and told me I could not bring the bodies out. They were singing and acting as if they were on an excursion or something. When the boats came in I sent an undertaker for the bodies of the men I knew, and he said he would send the bodies.

5. A. (continued)
The FERA sent down to take all the Veterans off the Keys. Mr Voyles, Director of Athletics, took me and a fellow by the name of Lefty Lucas off the Keys and took us home. We wanted to clean up as we had no wearing apparel or no shoes or anything. Lefty was not hurt in any way but ill from taking that boat out on the other Key. All I had on was a pair of overalls I picked up after wading in the creeks so I was taken to the McAllister Hotel and given an outside shirt; pair of pants and socks. I was checked in there as "not missing." (Coming in to Miami I sat on the back of a truck.) I was sent to the Transient Bureau for a pair of shoes. I asked to be taken to friends of mine in North Miami, which was done and I have been living there since.
6. Q. Were you able yourself to identify any bodies of Veterans?
A. Yes
7. Q. Tell me the names of those you identified?
A. A decorated soldier by the name of Jones, Camp #3
A soldier named Sherry, Camp #3
Harry Rice, Boston, Mass.
Hazel Grassler, Cannonsburg, Pa.
Ackerman Ashby, Ambulance