

J. M. Shealy
FEC RR
9-6-35

STATEMENT OF J. M. SHEALY, CHIEF CLERK TO P. L. GADDIS, DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT, FEC RY.; MIAMI, FLORIDA IN CONNECTION WITH INVESTIGATION OF EVACUATION OF VETERAN'S CAMP, MATECUMBE, FLORIDA SEPTEMBER 2, 1935.

J. M. SHEALY APPEARED IN THE OFFICE OF STATE ATTORNEY G.A.A. WORLEY ON SEPTEMBER 6, 1935 AND AFTER BEING DULY SWORN, MADE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT IN THE PRESENCE OF THE STATE ATTORNEY, FRED W. PINE, COUNTY SOLICITOR AND RUTH ELWELL, STENOGRAPHER:

BY MR. WORLEY:

Q. Mr. Shealy, what is your position with the Railroad Company?

A. Chief Clerk to the District Superintendent.

Q. Did you get a request from anybody last Monday to furnish a train to take these veterans off of the Keys?

(1) A. No I didn't get any request. I had a telephone call about 2:00 o'clock, possibly 5 minutes of 2:00 from Mr. Sheldon. He was at Islamorada. He said that he had ordered a train through his Jacksonville office. In other words, his Jacksonville office placed his order with our St. Augustine office for the train.

BY MR. PINE:

Q. Did he say when he ordered the train?

A. He said his office was ordering the train, that he had asked them to.

Q. He didn't tell you how long before?

A. He didn't say. As he was talking, Mr. Gaddis happened to be in Key West, and my other phone buzzed and I anticipated that it was Mr. Gaddis calling me over our phone and I asked Mr. Sheldon to wait just a minute - I thought that it was Mr. Gaddis and it was and I explained to Mr. Gaddis that Mr. Sheldon had called us and told us about having the train ordered and he was waiting for me to say what the purpose of Mr. Sheldon's call - and he said to

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(1) Sheldon calls around 2 p.m. Monday, says train will be ordered.
(2) Getting it out in 1 1/2 - 2 hrs. was quick work.

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just let us know so that we could be expecting the order. I told Mr. Gaddis what he said and Mr. Gaddis called Mr. Pooser in - on the dispatcher's phone - our phone - and told him. He said that just as soon as we got the order from our St. Augustine office why we would operate the train.

Q. BY MR. WORLEY:

That was the first knowledge that you had that a train would be expected - about 2:00 o'clock Monday afternoon?

A. Yes sir.

Q. When did you get the order for the train?

A. I didn't get the order myself. Mr. Branch happened to be in the office a few minutes later and I told him about this call and to stay around the office as I expected to get the order for the train here so we could get it out and while I was on another phone, the dispatcher called from New Smyrna and Mr. Branch answered the phone and that is all the handling I had.

Q. What time was that?

A. I think it was about 30 minutes later.

Q. About thirty minutes later?

A. Somewhere around 2:35 - yes sir.

Q. Then I understand the train was made up and did leave at 4:00 o'clock?

A. I think it was a little after 4:00 o'clock.

Q. Now is that an abnormal length of time required to get the train together?

A. No, I think that is pretty good operation.

Q. Especially being a holiday?

A. Yes sir, I thought that was pretty good, getting the train ready to move in an hour and a half.

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END

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On this 19th day of September, 1935, at Ft. McPherson, Fulton County, State of Georgia, before me, O. E. Hawk, a Field Examiner of the Veterans' Administration, personally appeared Robert A. Sharp, who having been first duly sworn according to law, deposed and says:

Q. State your full name and address.
A. Robert A. Sharp, I have no home address.

Q. Where does your nearest relative live?
A. Dallas, Texas.

Q. Name your nearest relative?
A. Grover C. Sharp, my brother.

Q. Are you a veteran?
A. Yes.

Q. What is your age?
A. Forty-five next month.

Q. Were you employed at the Camps in the Keys?
A. Yes, At Camp Three.

Q. Were you at camp during the hurricane?
A. Yes.

Q. Were you injured?
A. No, sir.

Q. When were you rescued?

A. The first sign of any outside people coming in was Wednesday morning, when Mrs. Bradford came down in a private aeroplane to find her husband. They owned a restaurant and beer joint at the ferry slip.

Q. Did they take out anybody with them in the plane?
A. They took a fellow by the name of Fillman back to Miami. He was injured in about his stomach and groin where a piece of timber hit him. He was in a pretty bad fix.

Q. Did any one prohibit you from leaving camp or discourage you from leaving before the storm?
A. We were told to stand around and wait and the train would come in.

Q.
A.

When were you told that?
They said a train would be in around 5:30.

Q.
A.

When were you told that the train would be in?
Around 3:00 o'clock. They told us to get everything packed up and ready to get on the train.

Q.

Was that the first official notice you had to prepare to leave camp?

A.

That was the first notice we had to pack up. Sunday morning all the tugboat men came down early Sunday morning and took all barges, dredges and sand suckers up into the channel. There was a storm warning given out then. They came down and got all of the barges into that bay for protection. There were several barges and a sand-sucker called the Sarasota, together with another sand-sucker at the camp. These properties were removed from the bay and moved into the new channel on Sunday morning after the first storm warnings has been received.

Q.
A.

Did you attempt to leave camp on a truck?
No, sir. I didn't think I could. I couldn't have went any way. I was connected with the infirmary and the ambulance driver said someone made the remark that we could take the trucks and leave. He told me we couldn't leave if we wanted to because King had all the keys. They used to put the keys on a nail in the garage at night but all the keys were removed from that nail and taken out of camp.

Q.
A.

Do you know who collected the keys?
As far as I can gather, a fellow by the name of King,

Q.
A.

Is he the man who was in charge of transportation?
He was in charge of the trucks. I suppose he was a civilian, I don't know.

Q.
A.

Who was your commanding officer?
Burt Davis.

Q.
A.

Was he at camp during the storm?
Yes, he was in Miami for the ball game and he came down to the camp at 5:00 o'clock Monday in his car and he sent the

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A. car back to Miami to pick up Mrs. King somewhere on the road and take her back to Miami. He was somewhat distressed about whether she got in safe or not and he was somewhat worried about his car. He came down there to be with us, to oversee that all the boys got out of camp. He came down like a man and stuck it out like a man. The storekeeper at Craig told me that he overheard a telephone conversation between Colonel Sheram and headquarters early Monday morning. Colonel Sheram told headquarters he would like to have a train right away. Headquarters replied, "Don't worry. We can tend to this end. We can get you out of there within three hours time. Let us tend to this end of it."

Q. Do you know the name of any veteran who left camp before the storm and didn't come back to the camp?

A. I know one from Five. They called him Buck, the top sergeant at Number Five. Mr. Roberson, who was superintendent of Camp Five, told Buck to take his wife and family and get out of there late Monday afternoon or Monday evening before the big blow came. Buck took the pick-up truck from camp Number Five and left with his family for safety through the orders of Mr. Roberson, who is now dead. Mr. Buck asked Mr. Roberson to come go with him. Roberson says, "No, I am going to stay with the men and I will make that train when it goes out, if it gets here." Mr. Roberson, from what I can gather, was the first man killed in Camp Five.

Q. Is there any other statement that you would like to make, Mr. Sharp?

A. Yes. I can't understand why Mr. Chent wasn't on the Keys in time to have the men removed from the camps. The whole job down there from start to finish was nothing more or less than greed and graft, in my estimation. It was just a matter of \$300.00 that could have saved the lives of many people that was killed on the Keys. The job itself seemed like it was closing down. All the civilian employees, with the exception of thirteen, had been discharged before the storm. It seems to me as if that \$300.00 wasn't spent for the simple reason that they would get that much more out of the funds, which would make their jobs last that much longer.

Through my own eyesight, I seen things down there that didn't need to be down there. They were never used and didn't look

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A.

like they would ever be used. For instance, that sand sucker named Sarasota. It was never used and from the looks of things, it never would be used. It was just there drawing money. It was a wood burner and, therefore, it was almost impossible to run it anyway unless they cut down all the woods in the Keys to keep it going. It looked to me as if every dollar that was paid to the veterans had ninety cents taken out of it to put it over every dollar. Any friend or friends' friend they put in there. They had enough civilians down there to handle 50,000 men, let alone 200. They had time keepers all over, running around taking time. The staff in headquarters was big enough to handle 50,000 men, let alone the few down there, with their runners, messengers, etc.

It took 90 cents to put out every dollar.

The buildings were put up down there with lumber that was green and the way they put them together, not one but all of them. There was no workmanship about them whatsoever. Just a bunch of green veterans put them up, with no one to superintend them. They couldn't have withstood a gale of 75 miles an hour. The first blow was not much more than that and the roof started to come off of the buildings and they started to crumple.

We were told that at the first warning of the storm signals, a train would be made up and ready to stand by in Miami to be rushed down there at a moment's notice. Later it came out in the paper that they had to look all over town for the train crew, when the train was ready. They said Mr. Ghent called up at 2:00 o'clock and asked for a train and it took them two hours to get the crew together, owing to the holiday. When the train could and did get down there, the storm was already blowing.

I have read the above and my statements have been correctly recorded. I make these statements of my own free will.

Affiant

Subscribed and sworn to before me the 19th day of September, 1935,
and I certify that the contents were read by the affiant before signing.

O. E. HANK, Field Examiner,
Veterans' Administration,
Authority: V. A. Form 4505.

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*See index
to file 102
O. E. Hank*

Frederick Snyder (1900)
No date

to Margaret Hatch

Statement of Frederick F. Snyder, Camp No. 1 to Miss Margaret Hatch.

Miss Hatch: The thing we would like to have is a statement from you as to the facts which you know before the storm. Did you get weather reports or warnings?

A I was manager of the canteen at Camp No. 1, and by 4:00 on Sunday evening the Captain told me that I should not open the canteen, but keep it locked as we might be moved out Sunday night for two or three days. So I locked the canteen and went to my bunk-house. A little later two or three fellows were hollering about cigarettes, etc., they went to the Captain and complained, then came back to me and said he said to open. I walked up to headquarters at the hospital and he told me the storm had veered to the Southwest and it was all right to open. Then I went back and opened the canteen. Monday I opened as usual and worked until about 9:00, then closed the canteen and started walking the road. The Captain was there in his car - he asked me if I wanted to take a ride and I did. When we passed headquarters, he went in to find out about the storm and reported it was around Havana and no warning so far. He picked up the chief mechanic in Camp No. 3 and brought him back to do some work on the water pump in Camp No. 1. I reopened the canteen at 11:00 and worked until 1:30. I went down by the mess hall and saw the Captain and his wife and some children. I told him she needed air in one of her tires if she was going to drive far. He said "By the way, go into the canteen and get all the money counted as the man would be along from the office and

get it - then he said for me to get my clothes ready as we were going out - "the train is coming down, but we will be back here after the blow is over" I went back to the canteen and as I was getting my keys out, Mr. Hicks, in charge of the canteens, came along in his car and in a big hurry. We rushed in and got the money out, together with the laundry money and the laundry slips, etc. He marked it all up, but we forgot all about my money that was in the safety deposit drawer of the cash register. We nailed the windows shut and he kept the keys, because, he said, that if the wind started up, they would send in a truck and take the merchandise to Islamorada so it would not be destroyed. He started towards the office to put the money in the safe. After that I went to the barracks and got my things and came back to the supply house. A corner of the supply house was loose and I said to Sam Gatti, quartermaster, that I would get some spikes and try to nail it down. Another fellow and I got a ladder and fixed that and then helped him put things up on benches to keep them from getting wet. We heard that they were giving coffee and sandwiches in the mess hall and so went over there. The man in charge of the storeroom at the kitchen was there I helped him get some stuff packed in tin tubs to take on the train. By then it must have been 4:00. Captain Hardacre came in to ask for a volunteer to drive the "pick-up" through to Hollywood, where the train was supposed to stop. I volunteered but he said "No. I want you here. You are big and husky and I need you". A little later he came back and sent me with the pick-up. I went to the hospital and waited there until

the Deputy Sheriff came back with the pick-up, he had borrowed it. When he brought it back the Captain asked a little fellow if he wanted to go with me. - Captain said to be careful as the storm is to be bad. The little fellow said "sure" he wanted to go with me. We left camp about 8:30 and landed in Homestead. I went into the Hotel at Homestead and asked if there was any chance of getting through to Miami - about 14 miles below Homestead the road had been flooded. They said all but a short stretch was all right. One man suggested stopping there but I said I should go on through and if there was any chance I would. So I went on to Miami and stopped at the Station in Miami as I did not know what arrangements had been made in Hollywood. We were waiting at the station two or three hours. About 1:00 Tuesday morning Mr. Ghent and Mr. Cutler came along and started chewing the rag as to why we were stopping at the Station. We had already inquired about the train from a little man in the booth. He had said all communications between Homestead and Miami was cut off and he had no word. Mr. Ghent ordered us back to Homestead. Mr. Butler spoke up and said the storm was broken. I had a top sergeant, Mr. Knable, with us then. The storm was getting worse all along and I did not see what kept the car from blowing away.

Q Do you feel the camp had ample warning?

A Yes. It had ample warning. On Sunday at 4:00 they told me not to open the canteen.

Q Were there any radios or telephones which carried warnings?

A They had a radio but I didn't hear it and did not know what

was on it.

Q Did you receive orders not to leave camp?

A No. But I was with the Captain most of the time from 4:00 on.

Q Did you hear anyone suggest to the Captain that trucks be used to evacuate camp?

A No.

Q Do you know of any effort to secure any transportation other than the train?

A Of course a lot of fellows were running around there worrying, but all they knew was a train was coming down. The train was supposed to be coming so they did not think of anything else.

Q Do you feel that anyone was negligent?

A We were talking to a man in Miami, I believe it was last Saturday, the man that ran the Matumba Hotel said: Boys I saw something that I never want to see again - the barometer went right down against the peg and I threw it outside because I never wanted to see it again. Mr. Voyles, assistant recreational director of all camps, and I were running around together and were in the restaurant together when this man made that statement about the barometer.

Q Isn't there something else you should tell us?

A About the trip going back. We got to Homestead. Mr. Patterson, the chief engineer, also had a pick-up. When we reached Homestead, we started looking for the train, figuring it had come into Homestead and was on a siding, but we could not see it.

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We couldn't find Mr. Ghent either. We left the pick-up and went to the fire house on Main Street and inquired for Mr. Ghent. They said he had not been there. We stayed in the cars in front of the fire house with the lights out, not knowing what to do. After while someone came and told us the head man was at the Station. We couldn't find him at the station. Mr. Knable went into the Station to see if Mr. Ghent left any word. He found Mr. Ghent in his car, lying down, I do not know whether he was asleep or what. We were all awfully wet. I laid on the floor. Mr. Ghent, Mr. Cutler and Mr. Patterson and Mr. Knable came in and went into the office of the Station. I stretched out on the floor about dead for sleep. Tuesday morning, at day-break, they came by and we had coffee and then at about 4:30, started out for the keys. Ghent and Cutler in one car; Patterson and Knable in a pick-up; and the little fellow and I in the other pick-up. We reached Tavernia about 6:30 Tuesday. Mr. Ghent went on down to the bridge. A fellow came along and asked me to pull a truck to see if I could get it started so he could take a woman to the hospital. He told me to go back to Tavernia. After a little while we met a Charlie Albury who lived in Tavernia.

Q Ant then?

A He suggested we get some electric wire and put it in the truck, thinking we would put a wire across the railroad piers. We told Mr. Knable what we planned to do, but he said it would be suicide as the water was racing as no one could swim across there.

There did not seem to be anything else to do, so we went back to Tavernia and helped some people to get into Homestead.

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Q Did you personally identify any of the dead in camp?

A No. We didn't get back until Thursday.

Q When you left camp were there many men drunk?

A No. I wouldn't say that. I never mixed with the men much. Of course at that time the wind was getting high and everyone was starting to look out for themselves by then. On Monday the men were pretty well scattered out.

Q Is there anything else which you would like to state?

A No. Except that on Thursday some of the Legionnaires got across Snake Creek and laid a cable, then a couple of fellows waded Whale Harbor. I went straight back to the canteen to get my money out of the drawer, but by then the canteen was all torn apart and the register was wrecked, so I did not find it.

Miss Hatch: Thank you very much, Mr. Snyder.

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct transcript of the statement made by the above named Veteran.

Marguerite Scull.
Marguerite Scull, Stenographer.

6.C. Sain
Sept. 29, 1936
by Farmer

Q. C. SAIN made the following responses under oath to questions propounded by H. W. Farmer, Investigator, in the investigation entitled "Re Hurricane Florida."

1. Q. Please state your name?

A. Q. C. Sain

2. Q. What is your address?

A. 2369 N. W. Flagler Terrace, Miami, Florida.

3. Q. Are you a veteran?

A. No sir.

4. Q. Were you employed at FERA camp on the Keys prior to the recent storm?

A. I was employed by FERA at camp No. 3 on the Keys from February I think the 21st until the present.

5. Q. What was your occupation?

A. Timekeeper.

6. Q. Who had charge of the work down on the Keys, I mean the entire- who was superintendent of the entire project?

A. That is a pretty hard question because we were separated; we were divided. The overseas bridge project was under G.C.S. - Sheffren or as we call him, Colonel Sheffren. The camps were under Captains for each camp; an assistant director under a director.

7. Q. Who was the director?

A. Ghent.

8. Q. Who was assistant?

A. Sheldon. Sheldon had supervision of all the work down in that section, all the camps only. He didn't have supervision of Colonel Sheffren's work, as I understand it.

9. Q. What were the conditions in that section two or three days before the storm?

A. The weather reports were the only indication to me on Friday. We had no barometer in No. 3 but someone had a barometer

in an office out on the highway and I got to see that late Monday afternoon. Weather reports were all I was passing my opinion on.

10. Q. When were the first visible indications of a storm approaching?

A. I left the Keys Friday, I will say between 2:00 and 2:15 and did not witness the weather conditions on the Keys. I was in Miami.

11. Q. Where were you when the storm occurred?

A. At eleven o'clock Mr. King who was superintendent of transportation for the entire three veterans' camps, called me on the telephone at my home and asked me to get in touch with Capt. Davis in charge of camp 3. Capt. Davis was in town with his ball team for a game at Ojus. I asked King what was wanted and if weather conditions were bad. He said, well, things were not right, to get Mr. Davis and get here as quick as possible. I immediately hungup and located Davis at the hotel and in 30 minutes we were on our way back down there, reaching King's place I judge between 1:30 and 2:00. There Mr. Davis received a written communication from the Matecumbe office stating that a train was on the way and to reach camp as quickly as possible to prepare our men with bed rolls and provisions to entrain. We proceeded to camp 3 and the siren was sounded and all men notified to prepare bedrolls and the mess sergeant with his cooks and K.P.'s began preparing provisions for loading on the train, all in the belief the train would reach us before the storm. I busied myself as much as possible instructing the boys how to conduct themselves in case the train did not get in to us, informing all who were not familiar with tropical hurricanes that they worked in circles, and we would get a back lash or second storm, which would be equally hard, if not harder than the first and all would have to stay in - never venture out. I tried to keep the boys from becoming panicky up till the building we were occupying, which was the messhall, began to leave us. Then we were scattered like a flock of quail.

12. Q/ Were the men employed in your camp veterans?

A Yes.

13. Q. Where was Captain Sheeran during this time?

A. He was busy with his heavy equipment and what few men he had left on his machines. He came to me at the rear of the mess-hall in No. 3 as the wind was getting rather

strong and begged me to leave. I thanked him for his interest and told him my duties were with the veterans and I would remain till the train came and carried us out. I insisted that he take a car and leave immediately for Miami but he refused, saying he would stay with his equipment.

14. Q. He did not send any of his men out before that time?

A. Not that I know of. Only man I know who came back to his post was Col. Sherran's son, Lester. He came by my house early Sunday morning telling me his father had called him back to camp to bring in and tie up the heavy floating equipment.

15. Q. Was that at that time because the storm might hit that section?

A. Yes sir, protection of the property.

16. Q. Your camp was more favorably located than the others; wasn't it? That is, it was not as dangerous at your camp as at the others?

A. Not as bad as No. 5.

17. Q. How many of your men were lost?

A. I don't know the exact number but I have understood about 110 or 115. Out of 242.

18. Q. At what time did you receive a message that the train would come to take you away?

A. I judge a short time after 1:30; between 1:30 and 2:00

19. Q. Were you informed the train was at that time on the road?

A. We were told the train is on the road; prepare your men to entrain. Will be there by 5, not later than 5:30 Monday.

20. Q. Were you informed the train had already been ordered; that arrangements were being made to get out?

A. Informed the train is on the road.

21. Q. Who gave you that information?

A. I think the gentleman that handed that paper into the car door was Cutler.

22. Q. At what time did the wind become strong, what you would call a cyclone.

A. It was impossible to tell the exact time. The building began quivering pretty heavy about five. In fact I knew it was doomed if the train did not reach us in a very few minutes. What time would it have been necessary to have the train down to the lower camp in order to get the veterans out with safety?

23. A. Three o'clock.

24. Q. Not later than three o'clock?

A. I don't think so for the time it would take to stop at #5, stop at #1, pick those up and get past the danger mark.

25. Q. You think if the train arrived at 3 o'clock, everyone could have been taken out with safety?

A. Yes.

26. Q. When you are dealing with human life you don't wait till the last minute to insure safety; do you?

A. Should not.

27. Q. When were the warnings of such nature it would have been advisable to have completed arrangements to get these men out?

A. I don't know. I was not in conference with any of the officials at any time. Basing purely on weather conditions. Captain of the camp occupied the same bunk house and what information he got from headquarters and what information or instructions he got he usually passed to me when he came in. I had no conversations of any kind with any of the officials regarding the storm except Sharren, when I asked him to please come home.

28. Q. Are you familiar with weather reports that are issued? And what information was given out from August 30th up till the time of the storm?

A. I read those reports but to quote them now is something different.

29. Q. You are rather familiar with storm conditions in this section?

A. I have lived here and gone through storms since 1925.

30. Q. With all that in mind, had you been in charge of this work on the Keys, at what time would you have completed arrangements to take these men out?

A. Sunday morning.

31. Q. Do you think any delay after that was negligence?

A. Not necessarily.

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nor a matter of poor judgment. Our weather bureau continued to inform us there was no danger. Just gale force, of small intensity--hurricane force in the center. They broadcast that from time to time over the radio.

32. Q. Is this not true, that a hurricane might get worse any time?

A. Absolutely.

33. Q. So if you see a hurricane coming in the vicinity sufficient to destroy you, you may figure it would become sufficient to destroy you by the time it got to you?

A. I figured that myself. All those men in danger. When the government officials gave them a report, they did not think any immediate danger. He is not as familiar with these things as what we call the "Conks", the natives, the inhabitants of the lower keys. His men were fully justified in postponing it.

34. Q. Are there many natives down in that section?

A. A good many.

35. Q. What did they do? Did any of them leave?

A. Some left and others failed to get away. Lots of them did not have proper transportation I judge to get out and I guess they drowned with the others.

36. Q. When did you notice the natives start leaving?

A. I don't know. I paid no attention to anything except the veterans; I was supposed to help be in charge of them.

37. Q. No other way in which the veterans could have been taken from the keys other than by train?

A. Trucks.

38. Q. Were there sufficient trucks to have taken them away?

A. Not at one trip.

39. Q. Why were they not taken away by trucks when the train did not arrive?

A. I don't know, sir.

40. Q. Do you think there was any carelessness or negligence in not using trucks to get the men away from there?
- A. It is hard to say. I would hate to say I thought a man guilty of carelessness or negligence when I didn't know. #3 had one pick-up truck and one stake body truck. All other trucks in No. 3 that were kept around there belonged to the over-seas bridge project under Col. Sharren.
41. Q. You had only temporary buildings for your men?
- A. Yes sir.
42. Q. They are not built to withstand the storm or anything like that?
- A. No sir.
43. Q. How long would it have taken with motor transportation at your command to have brought the men to the main line of Florida?
- A. Three trips.
44. Q. How long would it have taken to make three trips?
- A. I think the governors on those trucks are out down to about 35 or 40, not positive of the mileage on those governors. To bring them to Homestead in the neighborhood of sixty miles, that would have been 120 a round trip; make three trips and could have brought them out easily.
45. Q. You would have had to start early Monday morning?
- A. Yes sir.
46. Q. You could not have gotten out by truck if you had waited till Monday afternoon?
- A. No sir. Not without piling on like cordwood.
47. Q. At what time did the storm subside sufficiently for people to get from the mainland to that section after the complete storm was over; for rescue work and things of that kind?
- A. I don't know because I did not see Snake Creek bridge. Could not state what condition it was in.
48. Q. Was that the only way to get to that section?
- A. Either that or boat or plane.

49. Q. Were there any places where planes could have landed?

A. I don't think a plane could have landed on that water Tuesday morning. Don't think a boat could land; too rough. An aviator would have been foolish to attempt to work in that water.

50. Q. You don't think boats could have landed there before Tuesday night? I mean with reasonable safety. I never think it advisable to kill other people to rescue people who are dead.

A. Correct. I don't think they could have reached us earlier with absolute safety.

51. Q. Do you think rescue started as promptly as it could have been started with safety?

A. Yes sir. With the elements in the condition they were in.

52. Q. Do you know anything else about this case that might be of value in determining whether there was carelessness and negligence in failure to get the men away from there or rendering aid after the storm?

A. No sir, I do not.

53. Q. Were the men permitted to go and come in these camps any time during the monthly period? Were there any restrictions relative to the men leaving the various camps?

A. Yes, there were restrictions. In other words, every man supposed to have his duties to perform. If he was either in the hospital, sick or in headquarters, however, all right but if he left the camp he was checked as absent without leave and docked for that day's work.

54. Q. If he decided to quit a leave, he could do so?

A. No law. He could walk off, get on a train or hitch hike; go to Washington, Philadelphia or anywhere and write back that his check be forwarded to him at any time.

55. Q. Nothing said about his staying there on Monday? They were not warned they must not attempt to leave?

A. Not at camp 3. That is the only one I will speak for.

56. Q. You have no reason to believe they were at other camps?

A. Never having visited the other camps would rather not state anything about them.

57. Q. Just describe very clearly what injury you received.

A. As the messhall was wrecked, I was blown through Cap. Davis' private dining room into the field office, they both being in the same building, and through the outer wall to the ground. As I hit the ground I got a good grip on the main sill of the messhall on the south side of the building. This afforded perfect protection from flying timbers and debris and messhall equipment such as stoves, ice boxes, tables, etc., until the water finally reached up to my mouth. Then the water continued to rise and raised the main floor of the house and let all the under-⁵pinning drop, which released the floor and I was enabled to get away from it in time, letting the main sill catch my right foot, pinning it between the main sill and some timbers already in the water on the ground. I finally succeeded in getting off my right shoe and by this time I was entirely under water. I held my knife between my teeth and secured a piece of 2x4 in my left hand and laid as near level with the timbers as possible under the water, braced the 2 x 4 parallel opposite my leg and foot till I got it entirely between the two, then I exerted my full strength and with the assistance of the waves was able to separate the timbers enough to get my leg out. The only injury received was a bruised knee, a mean cut half through the calf of my leg and badly sprained ankle. No fractures of the bone.

58. Q. After you and Captain Davis returned from Miami on Monday, were you with him continuously until the storm broke?

A. Yes, though I paid very little attention to Davis as my entire time was devoted to rounding up the boys and holding them.

59. Q. Did you hear any telephone conversation that had to do with moving the men out, preparing them to leave camp, that Davis had with any of the officials?

A. No sir, but I think Davis left while I was in the messhall and drove his own car past camp 5 to turn his car over to I think Mr. King's family to come out in expecting to come out in the train himself with me and the veterans.

60. Q. If any telephone conversation had been had, it would have happened at that time?

A. Yes.

61. Q. Did you hear any of the instructions at all that he got from anyone over him?

A. No sir.

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62. Q. Did you identify any of the dead bodies on the Keys?

A. At that time?

63. Q. Any time.

A. Yes, there were several that I knew.

64. Q. Tell me the names of those persons whom you actually saw and knew who are dead.

A. George Carr, G. B. McCoy, C. G. Cherry, Delamater - forge his initials. That is the extent of my identification because I was suffering and they took me and laid me on some rocks away from the gang.

65. Q. Any further statement you want to make? Anything we have not brought out that could be added?

A. Not as I know of, no sir.

66. Q. Have you been questioned by any other officials?

A. One man asked me a question the other day, a Mr. Johnson.

67. Q. You have not been cautioned or warned by anyone not to talk; have you?

A. No sir.

I, G. C. SAIN, 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.

G. C. Sain

SUBSCRIBED and SWORN TO before me, H. W. Farmer,
an Investigator for the Veterans' Administration this
20 day of September, 1935.

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

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Statement of R.F. Spottswood, resident of Key West since 1912, and of Dr. V.C. Galey, health officer of Key West and resident there since 1902, before Alan Johnstone, Jr. and John J. Abt, at Lower Maticumbe Key, September 9, 1935.

We have read the statement this day made by M.E. Gilfond, and confirm it with respect to the following:

Until 4:00 P.M. Monday, September 2 all indications were that the center of the hurricane would pass through the straits south of Key West, and that the Keys north of that point would not be affected. Even when reports came in at about nine o'clock Monday night that the hurricane had struck the upper Keys, it was hardly believable. The tidal wave was wholly unexpected, no such phenomenon having occurred within our memories. Our observations at the scene of the disaster confirm the statement that the tidal wave, rather than the high winds, was the principal cause of the loss of life.

We have no information with respect to the telephone conversations which occurred between Gilfond, Van Hynning and Sheldon, and are, therefore, unable to confirm this portion of the statement. In all other respects, Gilfond's statement is correct, to our own knowledge.

Witnesses:

(R.F. Spottswood)

(V.C. Galey)

(John J. Abt)

George J. Senison (#1)
Sept. 23, 1935
by Selvey

GEORGE JOSEPH SENISON made the following responses under oath to questions propounded by Wm. H. Selvey, field examiner of the Veterans Administration, on September 23, 1935

945, at the University Hospital, Miami, Florida in the investigation entitled "RE Hurricane Florida"

Q. State your name, age and home address.

A. George Joseph Senison, age 39 years. I do not have any home but I belong to the Veterans of Foreign Wars at Bridgeport, Conn. I do not have any relatives that I know of. I had one sister, Mrs. Sophie Raymond, but I have not seen her for several years and do not know whether she is alive. The last I knew of her she was in Pawtucket, R.I.

Q. Are you a veteran?

A. Yes. I was in three different organizations. The medical detachment of the 14th Engineers; reenlisted in Co E, 50th Infantry; and was in Co L, 31st Infantry.

Q. Do you have a claim with the Veterans' Bureau?

A. Yes. Claim No. 0-1269340. I get \$9 per month at the present time.

Q. Were you employed in the FERA camps on the Florida Keys?

A. I was in camp 1. I left Washington on April 22 or 23; was one month at Clearwater and one month at Leesburg and then transferred to the Keys.

Q. Were you at Camp 1 during the hurricane on September 2, 1935.

A. Yes. I had not been away from the camp since two days last July when on an excursion trip to Key West.

Q. What were your duties at Camp 1?

A. I was in charge of the ice. Every morning the ice came from Tavernier by truck. I received it and then distributed it around to the barrells from which the men drank.
Where

Q. Where you when the storm hit?

A. I was in the barracks. We had eaten about 5 p.m. and as soon as we ate I went to the barracks. I was going to go fishing and was monkeying around the shack getting things ready. I generally fished about two hours after supper most every night. On that evening it was raining and I was waiting for the rain to stop. It kept raining more and more and the wind was blowing. The wind kept blowing harder and harder and began shaking the

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shack and things like toilet articles and mirrors began falling. I got nervous. There were four of us in the shack and we all went out together. The four were Pete Coughlin, Wm Clark, Sam ----, and myself. I do not know Sam's first name. The shack started moving around and I looked out and saw the roof blow off of the mess shack and I saw boys running across the street. There was a train across the way and they were trying to get to that train or something. I do not know whether it was the train that had come down or just some cars there. I know I saw a couple of cars there and all the boys were headed that way. Our shack got to moving around too much and we went out. As soon as we stepped out the water was up to here (motions across just below ribs) and I do not know where it came from. We could not face the wind - it was too strong - we had to go around the shack. We were all together leaning against the shack and holding to each other. I heard William Clark hold that the roof was coming down. We all started away in the same direction and the roof came down on us. It must to have hit every one of us. After the roof fell all I could hear was the grunting and groaning of the boys. I never saw any of them after that. I remember that struggling under the roof and I could feel it dragging over my back - the wind was blowing so hard and I was under the water - and finally I got out. I got from under that wreck some way and I tried to get up and every time I go up something would hit me and push me down. Finally I got hold of a beam that was drifting around with the wreckage. I held on to that and another beam came around and I was caught between them. That is how I was hurt. I ducked under and got away from the beams and then got hold of a part of a roof and held on to that. I was floating around and could feel myself going up and down. That part of the roof washed up against some brush and trees along the shore and I stayed on it until morning. The next morning I called for help for about two hours and no one came around. I crawled to the road and lay there until noon before I saw any one. Some of the boys were coming around there from all over. They were making a fire across the track but I could not get to it. One fellow finally got me a wet blanket and I lay there until about 6 p.m. Then they brought me in a row boat. I guess I was one of the first brought out. I heard them say take the worse cases first. That was about 6 p.m. Tuesday, September 3, that they brought me out.

Q. Describe all injuries I received- you received.

A. I received a broken hip on ^{the left} both sides and a broken pelvic on both sides. I was so badly bruised that I could not pass water. Also I was scratched and bruised all over the body.

Q. How long before the hurricane hit you did you think there was danger in staying there in the camp?

A. I never even thought of a hurricane and had not heard any talk about one and I did not think there was any danger in staying

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there until our shack began to shake. We four were in our shack waiting for it-to-b the storm to blow over.

Q. Had you heard anything to the effect that there would be a train or means of transportation to take you off of the Keys in case of a hurricane or danger?

A. Never. No. I had not heard anything.

Q. If you had become uneasy and scared in time to make a safe get away would you have been permitted to leave the Keys?

A. Why yes there was no one to stop you. One could always bumb a ride out from there.

Q. Did you see any of the dead bodies of the veterans.

A. I did not see the body of any of them. I did not see a single one who was dead. I was unable to move. I understood that they were around there picking up the boys who were dead. I heard one fellow say "Lets pick up some of these boys and give their bodies half way decent treatment". It was one of our men who said that but I do not know who.

Q. Do you know of any one who left camp immediately before the story, that is who came out from the Keys before the storm?

A. None.

Q. Here is a list of missing from camp one. Do you know what happened to any of them?

A. My own name is on there. Otherwise I do not recognize any of the names.

Q. Here is a list reported living. Have you seen any one of them since the hurracine or know anything about any one?

A. No.

Q. I show you a list of the reported missing from all the camps?

A. While I was laying there along the road I heard some one say that "Blackie" was dead. I think "Blackie" was Savant. He was a tall slender fellow who used to work in the kitchen. I also heard some say that Conway the prize fighter was dead.

Q. You are requested to tell anything additional about the storm which occurred on the Florida Keys on September 2, 1935 which you have not already told and in making the statement the record is open for you to say anything that you wish to say.

- A. I feel that the men should have been given some warning of the approaching storm. They never told us a word. There was not even any talk about it. There were plenty of trucks and plenty of gas that if we had had two hour notice we might have gotten out. I do not know how many trucks there were there but I saw several. In addition to the injuries already described my ears are injured. They had water and sand in them. The left ear is now running and I can not hear with it.
- Q. Were you at camp 1 all day on September 2, 1935?
- A. Yes, all day.

GEORGE JOSEPH SENISON, DO SOLEMNLY SWEAR, that the foregoing statements made by me have been read by me and they are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

George Joseph Senison

Subscribed and sworn to before me, Wm. H. Selvey, a field examiner for the Veterans' Administration, this 23 day of September, 1935.

Wm. H. Selvey
 Wm. H. Selvey, Field Examiner,
 Veterans Administration, Form 4505.

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