

Junius T. Wigginton
 Sept. 23, 1935
 by Farmer

McAllister Hotel,
 Miami, Florida,
 Sept. 23rd, 1935.

JUNIUS TALBUTT WIGGINTON 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, age and address?
 A. Junius Talbutt Wigginton - 60 yrs. old - Supt. Road Construction for Veterans' Works Program - No. 744 N.W. 78th Street, Miami, Florida. *J.T. W.*
2. Q. Where have you been occupied recently?
 A. With the Veterans' Camps at Islamorada.
3. Q. Under whose supervision?
 A. Under supervision of Mr. F. B. Ghent.
4. Q. In what capacity?
 A. I was Clothing Supply Officer for the Veterans.
5. Q. During what period did you occupy that position?
 A. From March 18th, 1935 until Sept. 2nd, 1935.
6. Q. Where were your headquarters in respect to the three Veterans' Camps?
 A. I was about three miles north of Camp #5 - nine miles north of Camp #3 - and five miles south of Camp #1.
7. Q. Were you at that point during the hurricane of Sept. 2nd, 1935.
 A. I was in Miami on a week-end vacation and learn- of the approach of a hurricane in the vicinity of the Keys I left Sunday morning, Sept. 1st, for Islamorada. I arrived at Headquarters about noon. I remained there until I was ordered to take my car and drive to Miami taking anyone who wished to go. All private cars and F.E.R.A.

J.T. WIGGINTON con't'd

cars had been ordered out by Assistant Director Ray Sheldon at 2:00 P.M. Sept. 2nd. I got away about 3:00 P.M. and the hurricane was blowing then.

8. Q. Who left the Camp with you?

A. Mr. Fred Poock. He was Trust Officer of Veterans.

9. Q. Do you know the names of any others who left Camp? I mean after Mr. Sheldon gave that order?

A. Only by hearsay. I heard Mr. Sheldon tell Bobby Ayers to take his car with his wife and anyone else who cared to go and come on into town. At the same time Mr. Sheldon instructed me to get in touch with his wife at the Alcazar Hotel that evening and she would inform me the exact point that the relief train would go to.

10. Q. Did you know of any tentative arrangement for the evacuation of Veterans in case of a hurricane that might have been made before the hurricane of Sept. 2nd?

A. No Sir, I do not know of any actual arrangements or any having been talked about.

11. Q. What knowledge did you have of preparations made to evacuate Veterans just prior to the hurricane of Sept. 2nd?

A. About 10:00 A.M. Monday morning I locked into the office and saw Mr. Cutler sitting at the phone;-- someone whose name I do not remember told me that Mr. Cutler had just called Mr. Ghent in Jackson-ville and pleaded with him to send the train im-mediately.

12. Q. Why would have Mr. Cutler called Mr. Ghent when Mr. Sheldon was present and in charge?

A. Mr. Sheldon had gone up the road on some business when Mr. Cutler, who had evidently been advised by some of the residents on the Keys to get the train, called Mr. Ghent, but I understand that Mr. Ghent assured him that he would take care of that. Mr. Cutler was evidently very nervous re-garding the situation and called Mr. Ghent with-out waiting for Mr. Sheldon to return. Mr. Cutler

*Poock
Wigginton
left 3 p.m.*

*Cutler calls
Ghent Monday?*

J.T. WIGGINTO con't'd

had on many occasions acted as Assistant Director in the absence of the Director.

I was sitting by Mr. Sheldon at 2:00 P.M. in the office when he called Mr. Ghent and gave him our barometer reading, advising that the train be ordered immediately. Mr. Ghent evidently consented and Mr. Sheldon called Supt. Gaddis of the Florida East Coast requesting that the train be sent to Islamorada as quickly as possible. Mr. Sheldon then called Mr. Ghent at Jacksonville the second time and told him that the order for the train would have to come through Headquarters Office of the Florida East Coast at St. Augustine.

At about 2:15 P.M. Mr. O. B. King, Director of Transportation for the V.W.P. came into the office and Mr. Sheldon instructed him to get all his trucks and drivers ready to evacuate the Camps as soon as the train arrived, telling him that the train had been ordered. Immediately after that Mr. Sheldon ordered myself and other civilians who had cars to take our cars and proceed to Miami, taking with us anyone who wanted to go. I stopped at Islamorada to see if anyone cared to come to Miami. They all refused to come.

13. Q.

Do you know the names of some of the ones who refused to come with you?

A.

That was John Good and other men at his warehouse. I stopped also at the Quarry and Garage, but none was there as it was a Holiday-Labor Day--.

14. Q.

Did you ask any Veterans to come in with you?

A.

Yes, there were one or two at Good's place that refused.

15. Q.

Where the Veterans free to come and go as they pleased?

A.

I believe the rule was that when a Veteran left Camp he had to check out with either the Camp Captain or First Sergeant.

16. Q.

Do you know of any Veterans leaving Camp with any official motor vehicle before the hurricane?

A.

I heard Sunday that some of the Veterans had taken the transportation bus Saturday night and they had

*Sheldon
tells King
to get ready*

J.T. WIGGINTON con't'd

not been heard of since. I do not know how many, or whom, or from what Camp they were from.

17. Q. How was Mr. Sheldon occupied other than you have already indicated prior to the time you left Camp on Monday, Sept. 2nd?

A. He only left Headquarters Office once during the time I was there from 8:30 A.M. until after 2:30 P.M. Mr. Sheldon was phoning the Weather Bureau at Miami every hour or so asking for information regarding the approaching hurricane. Then he would call Mr. Ghent at Jacksonville giving him the weather report as received and our barometer reading - this he did at least once or twice. I know he did at 2:00 P.M. as the barometer reading was 29.52 and had fallen from reading of 29.72 at 8:00 A.M.

18. Q. Was there a card game in progress at Headquarters on Monday morning?

A. On Monday morning we were in Headquarters Office, watching the barometer and listening to the broadcasts over the radio, when some of the boys suggested we play a little penny ante to pass the time away; which we did until we adjourned for dinner.

*Poker game
Monday*

19. Q. Over what period of time did the penny ante game extend?

A. About three-quarters of an hour - between 11:00 and 12:00 o'clock.

20. Q. Who was engaged in the game?

A. I wouldn't be sure. There was about four or five of us. I played, and Bobby Ayers. I can't remember the others.

21. Q. Did Mr. Sheldon play?

A. I do not remember that he did.

22. Q. Was the game for money?

A. Yes, penny ante.

23. Q. Are you positive that Mr. Sheldon was not in the game?

A. No Sir, I am not. I just don't remember. Mr.

J.T. WIGGINTON (con't'd)

Poock may have played but I do not remember.

24. Q. Where did Mr. Sheldon eat with relation to his office?

A. His office was in the southwest corner of the building on the second floor and he ate in the dining room on the first floor of the Matecumbe Hotel.

*Sheldon's
office 2nd floor*

25. Q. Did you eat the noon meal with him on Monday, September 2nd?

A. Yes Sir.

26. Q. How long did that meal last?

A. Not longer than twenty minutes.

27. Q. Who was present?

A. It is hard to tell.

28. Q. Who of the Headquarters staff was present?

A. Mr. Sheldon, Mr. Cutler, Mr. Poock, Bobby Ayers, Mr. Melsome, Mr. Jones and a fellow that we called "Woody" who worked in the Purchasing Department.

29. Q. Did you all leave the dining room together?

A. No Sir. Everyone got up as they got through and went back up-stairs. I believe Bobby Ayers stayed in the office by the phone while we ate our lunch.

30. Q. Were any weather reports brought to Mr. Sheldon while he was eating lunch?

A. No Sir, but that is what we were looking for.

31. Q. Do you know that the card game was or was not resumed after lunch?

A. I do not know that it was. I had brought up some work with me and I went on down to the warehouse to put my work away.

32. Q. Do you know, or have you formed an opinion as to who or what was responsible for the failure to evacuate the Camps before the hurricane?

J. T. WIGGINTON (con't'd)

32. A. Failure to order the relief train when the approach of the hurricane was first learned, was the cause of the disaster. This is only my opinion.
33. Q. Who was responsible for that failure?
- A. Mr. E. B. Ghent was our Director and had all information given him regarding the approach of the storm and was directly responsible for the safety of the Veterans and personnel in the Veterans' Camps.
34. Q. But you have no definite first-hand knowledge that he was informed of the situation before Mr. Sheldon called him about 2:00 P.M., do you?
- A. Mr. Sheldon was calling him every hour; every time we got weather reports Mr. Sheldon reported them to Mr. Ghent.
35. Q. Did Mr. Sheldon ask for a train, or indicated that he wanted Mr. Ghent to order train, before his call about 2:00 P. M. Monday?
- A. I do not remember. I remember distinctly before dinner that Mr. Sheldon told Mr. Ghent that it looked bad. Mr. Ghent asked for a special weather report from Miami;-- Mr. Sheldon then called the Weather Bureau at Miami, received report that there was no immediate danger to the Florida Keys. He then called Mr. Ghent again and transmitted this report to him. That was just before we went to lunch.
36. Q. Is it your opinion that Mr. Sheldon took all precautions he should have that the circumstances warranted?
- A. That is a hard question to answer Mr. Farmer. I believe that Mr. Ghent wished to handle the situation entirely and Mr. Sheldon was giving him all information at hand.
- In 1926 the Weather Bureau sent the citizens of Miami to bed at 9:00 P.M. assured that there was no immediate danger. At 3:00 A.M. the wind was blowing eighty miles an hour, and between 4:00 and 5:00 A.M. it went to one hundred and twenty miles. And that was from a Weather Bureau immediately in the path of the hurricane. The Miami Weather Bureau, during the recent hurricane, was outside the hurricane area.

*Sheldon tells
Ghent before lunch
TT says looks bad*

J. T. WIGGINTON (con't'd)

In 1932 in Palm Beach County I had charge of a Road Camp, constructed on very low ground, west of Boynton, Florida. We had word of an approach of a storm. At 3:00 P. M. I called the Weather Bureau at West Palm Beach from Boynton and was told that the storm was approaching West Palm Beach. I immediately returned to Camp and moved the entire personnel to a safe concrete building previously arranged for. This hurricane changed it's course and struck the east end of Greater Abaco and from there took a northeastern direction to the Bermudas.

37. Q. Did you return to the hurricane area after Sept. 2nd?

A. Only to Tavenier to take down some cooks from Homestead that were badly needed.

38. Q. Did you see any of the dead?

A. No Sir.

39. Q. Have you given any other Government official a statement on this subject?

A. Yes.

40. Q. Who?

A. State Attorney G. A. Worley and I think a Mr. Williams of Washington. They only asked me a few questions as I was not present in Camp during or after the hurricane.

41. Q. Has anyone suggested that you be guarded in your statements?

A. No Sir.

42. Q. What can you say of moral conditions in the Camps? I have special reference to drinking but you can make any statement or fact that you care to.

A. During the last six or eight weeks the men have been doing wonderful work on the bridge project. This improvement began after Mr. Ghent had ordered the discontinuance of giving the men one dollar every other day. Many of these men were fine men as long as they did not get hold of alcohol. A great many others did not touch alcohol, but when they did receive this \$1.00 in cash every other day the drinking conditions

*Work improved
after Baby Bonds
SP Paid*

J. T. WIGGINTON (con't(d))

in the Camps were almost intolerable, causing many good Veterans to check out and leave.

43. Q. Was there any drinking among the Officials?

A. No Sir, absolutely prohibited, it meant a man's job.

44. Q. Was there any appreciable drunkenness on the day of the hurricane, or the previous day?

A. I saw no Veterans that were drinking on my way through Camp #1 to Headquarters. The weather was bad and there were not many Veterans about.

45. Q. Is there any further statement you wish to make?

A. No, there is nothing further.

J.T. WIGGINTON, (Con't'd)

I, JUNIUS TALBUTT WIGGINTON, 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.

Junius Talbutt Wigginton
 JUNIUS TALBUTT WIGGINTON

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN to before me,

H. W. Farmer, an

Investigator of the VETERANS' ADMINI-

STRATION, this 24 day

of September, 1935.

H. W. Farmer
 H. W. FARMER
 INVESTIGATOR

Mc Allister Hotel
Miami, Florida
September 22nd, 1935.

Mr. J. T. Wigginton made the following statement to Mr. H. W. Farmer, but he did not wish this to be included in his deposition under oath:

EUGENE LOWKIS, Veteran No. 271, Camp #1, told me that he and another Veteran found the body of Veteran Sherman and they identified him by his Masonic ring. As he was a very heavy man the two of them could not move him and they went back to the ferry slip to get help to remove the body which was a long way from the slip. While they were at the slip they saw several National Guardsmen around Sherman's body. They finally got two men to go with them to bring Sherman's body in and when they arrived they saw that the body had been turned over and the ring was missing from his finger and his pockets turned wrong side out. These men carried the body to the boat and requested the boatman to take them around to the next opening as they wanted to cut off these National Guardsmen; which they did.

When Lowkis talked to the Officer in charge of the Guardsmen, telling him what had happened and asked that the men be searched for the ring, the Officer told Lowkis and the other three Veterans that he had all ready searched the men.

Guards still ring?

STATEMENT OF: CAPT. J. T. WIGGINTON.

J. T. WIGGINTON was called as a witness, and being first duly sworn by the State's Attorney, testified as follows:

EXAMINATION BY MR. WORLEY:

Q Captain, what is your name?

A J. T. Wigginton.

Q Captain, what is your occupation?

A Clothing Supply Officer.

Q With what?

A With the Veterans Work Program.

Q Were you down on the Keys during the storm?

A I left there between 2:30 and 3:00 o'clock Monday

evening to bring some folks up and to come back to Miami.

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20535

J. T. Wigginton
Sept. 29, 1935
by Johnston, Mr. Worley

Q What was the condition of the weather when you left there?

A It was blowing a preliminary hurricane gust as I passed Snake Creek and Tavernier Creek.

Q What were your wind directions at that time?

A I took it to be northeast. It was blowing my car towards the left rail; I had to hold it off of it.

Q Had you been getting any weather reports during the day?

A I had been with Mr. Sheldon. We got the weather reports every hour or so, I should say. Now, Gentlemen, of course I couldn't tell exactly the hours and the minutes of these transactions; I just remember the principal things that happened there in the office. I was sitting by Mr. Sheldon when most of those came in.

Q Were you there when he ordered the train out?

A Yes, sir.

Q What time was that, Captain?

A As near as I can say, it was two o'clock, or just before two o'clock when the train was ordered. He was talking to Mr. Ghent, and then he called Mr. Gaddis, I think.

MR. WORLEY: All right.

BY MR. JOHNSTONE:

Q Captain, when did you all first think this hurricane was going to hit these keys?

A At eight o'clock, Captain Parker came to my house

Note: Wigginton's testimony begins on last page of R.W. Craig's testimony

Note: Wigginton left home 2:30 & 3pm Monday
to bring some folks up & come back to Miami.
(Parker went with him; see p. 33)
He was clothing supply officer.

and borrowed a hammer.

Q Eight o'clock?

A Yes; Captain Ed Parker --

Q Captain Ed Parker what?

A Monday morning he came to my office in the warehouse and asked me if I would loan him a hammer, and he said "My barometer is falling, and I am going to board up my house", and he said, "Captain, I don't know about that weather bureau in Miami," he said, "they say there is no danger, but my barometer is falling, and I am not going to take any chance". That was around eight o'clock and, well, I opened up, and I found I couldn't keep my back door open, and it was too dark to work in there, and I gathered my work up and took it up to Mr. Sheldon's office, and then I began to get nervous, and I sat down at a desk right in the next room to Mr. Sheldon, and I worked on the books until I finished up that Camp work for one of the camps, and went over then and sat down and was talking to Mr. Sheldon, and we got to playing cards there --- anything to pass the time; we were all just waiting on these damn weather reports.

Q Did you see the weather reports as they came through?

A I didn't see them. Mr. Sheldon would tell us; in fact, I think he reported it over the phone to Mr. Chent, what the report was from the weather bureau in Miami, and so far as I could remember, each report read "there is no immediate danger on the keys".

BY MR. APT:

Q Captain, what kind of a car did you drive?

-32-

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A Chevrolet.

Q A truck?

A No; my own personal car.

Q Your own personal car?

A Yes, sir.

Q And who did you take up in it?

A Mr. Pooke. I went all through the hotel and tried to get some of the others to go, and begged Miss Treichman to come with me, and she said, "No, I'll come on up". She was supposed to come in your car, Sheldon; and I stopped at Islamorada and asked the boys if anybody wanted to go ;and I stopped at the hospital, but it was blowing and raining hard, and I didn't get to see anybody.

Q You didn't get to see anybody and ask them to go?

A No; but I knew they had the ambulance; and I went up to the rock quarry expecting to see Mr. King up there, and the garage and the filling stations were all closed; and when you ordered him to get his equipment ready and get his drivers, he said when he went out, he said a Mr. King said -- he said "I have no gas, but if you will come by the quarry I will give you some", but when I got to the quarry he had not reached there. He had stopped at Camp 1.

Q Was there any discussion, Captain, about bringing the men up in trucks?

A No, sir. I left ahead of them. You see, there naturally would not be; we were depending on the train, and hadn't

the slightest idea - I didn't - that the train wouldn't be there by five o'clock by the latest, and they said they would get there as quick as they could, but in case of unforeseen delays, they asked for three hours. Wasn't that it, Mr. Sheldon? I think that's it. I think that's what we understood that they asked, for three hours to get the train down there after we called them, and we of course thought the train would be there by five, or sooner.

MR. JOHNSTONE: When did you think the storm would hit there?

A Well, I couldn't possibly tell. I knew that all the barometers were going down, and that's all we did know. And God knows, I have been in south Florida for thirty-four (34) years, and I have seen a lot of hurricanes, and I know just how the barometers do, and that's what they were doing -- they were falling.

MR. JOHNSTONE: And when did they start this falling?

A Well, they had fallen some from the previous night, when we got up the next morning, but not very perceptibly, and I think Mr. Sheldon was taking a barometer reading every hour or half hour. He was watching it close. And as near as I can remember, he was phoning these readings periodically to Mr. E. B. Ghent in Jacksonville, and conferring with him.

MR. APT: Captain, did you have any discussion on Sunday with Mr. Cutler, before Mr. Sheldon came down, about the storm?

A On Sunday?

2 MR. APT: Sunday morning, or Sunday afternoon?

A I was not there Sunday morning. I was off for the week end, but when I saw in the paper there was a hurricane in the Florida straits, I went down there, and got down there in time for dinner Sunday. I don't remember any discussion. There might have been a discussion in regard to how many hurricanes I had seen, and this, that and the other, but I don't remember any discussion of this particular situation down there except -- and I didn't know anything except what I had read in the paper; therefore I don't think there was any discussion with Mr. Cutler to amount to anything. I think that at one time -- I know Sunday afternoon I told him, when we were all packing up, I said "I think the thing is going to cross Cuba and go out through the Yucatan Channel, so many of them have done that", and Captain at that time had to go speak up and he said "No, it will never cross Cuba, I'll guarantee that; I have never known one to". That is when it was reported 200 miles -- it was between 200 and 260 miles east of Havana. And that location, I was under the impression that it was then getting close to the Florida straits.

MR. SHELDON: Captain, you were in the office at twelve o'clock, or before twelve, and a little after twelve you went down to lunch?

A Yes, sir.

MR. SHELDON: Did you hear me call anyone and repeat a conversation into the phone that I was getting?

A If I remember right, you called Mr. Ghent; yes, you

told him something that somebody had told you, if I remember right.

MR. SHELDON: No; this was a little earlier than that. You remember we were playing cards there, and it was about time to go to lunch, and I went to the telephone and called a Miami number, and asked them regarding the storm, and I repeated their story back to them on the phone. Do you remember what that was I said?

A If I remember right, they said that the storm was still - - I -- if I remember the report right, the storm was central near Santa Clara province, Cuba, about 160 or 200 miles -- now, I won't say which it was -- miles east of Havana, moving slowly, and in a westerly direction, and that their opinion was that there was no immediate danger to the Florida Keys. Now, as near as I can remember, I heard Mr. Sheldon repeat that message. Now, I don't know whether he was talking to Mr. Ghent, but at the time that he repeated it, I thought he was. I don't know.

MR. SHELDON: Well, could it have been the weather Bureau I was talking to?

A It could have been.

MR. SHELDON: Well, that's who it was. That's all.

MR. JOHNSTONE: All right; thank you, Mr. Wigginton.
(Witness excused).