

Wilbur E. Jones
Sept. 27, 1935

Kennamer & Farmer
Hank

Exchange Building
Jacksonville, Florida
September 27, 1935.

Wilbur E. Jones made the following responses under oath to questions propounded by D. W. Kennamer and H. W. Farmer, Investigators, in the investigation entitled "Re Hurricane, Florida".

1. Q. Please state your full name and address.

A. Wilbur E. Jones, St. Albans Hotel, Jacksonville.

2. Q. Are you an employee of the FERA?

A. Yes.

3. Q. What is your present position?

A. I have no present position; in other words when I left Miami I understood that I would be on the payroll until the first of October.

4. Q. Were you employed on the keys during the recent hurricane?

A. Yes sir.

5. Q. How long had you been employed there?

A. Approximately 4 or 5 months.

6. Q. What was your position there and what were your duties?

A. I was assistant to the auditor and previous to that, for the first month, I was helping the Trust Officer and Office Manager.

7. Q. You were not directly under the supervision of Mr. Sheldon?

A. No.

8. Q. Were you there continuously from Friday, August 30, through September 2?

A. No, I was not. I left Saturday ^{noon} ~~night~~ after work. We went to Miami for the week-end. However, I was called at approximately 10 o'clock Sunday morning by Mr. Cutler saying that he felt anxiety about an approaching hurricane and felt it best that I return to the keys, which I did and got back there in time for lunch on Sunday.

9. Q. How did you leave the keys and how did you return?

A. I left the keys with ^{RENNIE} ~~Hessley~~ and Ayer. I wasn't with them in Miami.

Left Keys to Ayer

10. Q. Were you associated with Mr. Malcolm in his work at the keys?

A. Yes.

11. Q. Did you work under his supervision?

A. Yes.

12. Q. Go ahead and tell what happened after you got back, what you found, etc.

*Cutler
concerned*

A. When I got back Mr. Cutler was quite concerned about the approaching hurricanes; at least we thought ~~the~~ approaching hurricane. When Mr. Cutler called that morning, I waited for a radio report which came about 10 minutes after his 'phone call. The report was that the hurricane was 100 or 200 miles southeast of the keys and would probably hit the Florida strait. I forget the time. I immediately called up the other fellows and we went back to the keys.

13. Q. Did that report alarm you in any way?

A. It did.

14. Q. How did you return to the keys, by train?

A. No, by one of the cars.

15. Q. Who else did you find at headquarters when you got back besides Mr. Cutler?

A. Mr. Malcolm. If I name anybody else, I will have to name all of them.

16. Q. Well, name some of the others.

A. Mr. Woodham, the sheriff, Mr. Maloney, Mr. Goods, Mr. Patterson and some others.

17. Q. Were any of these people apprehensive about the situation?

A. Not as much as Mr. Cutler. They didn't feel the apprehension that Mr. Cutler or myself or one or two of ^{the others} us did.

18. Q. Did they feel that something definite should be done to get the men out in case of an emergency?

A. Mr. Cutler called me up to his office and told me the situation; that is, how he felt about the matter and asked me my advice. I had been pretty close to Mr. Cutler. I asked if he made any arrangements about the train, and he said he had called the Passenger Agent at Miami for the railroad, but he hadn't heard anything definite from the passenger agent, and the Passenger Agent was supposed to call him back. My suggestion was that he call Miami immediately and not wait for the call from the Assistant Passenger Agent, and that if he couldn't get a defi-

nite answer, to call St. Augustine where I knew the train would probably be dispatched from. Mr. Cutler had been trying to get Mr. Ghent that morning on the 'phone, and he felt that inasmuch as he hadn't been able to get Mr. Ghent, he should go ahead and try to make some arrangement. If I am not mistaken, I believe that Mr. Ghent called him and told him that he had talked to Mr. Sheldon that morning in Key West and that Mr. Sheldon knew what to do, how to handle the situation, and I think that Mr. Cutler said that he would do it if Mr. Ghent wanted him to, that he would take charge. However, Mr. Ghent said that Mr. Sheldon would be in and would handle the situation.

19. Q. Do you recall that Mr. Cutler said anything to Mr. Ghent that he might be delayed on the ferry or not get back?

A. I don't believe he said anything about that. Mr. Goode, ~~Mr. Goode~~ ^{Mr. Goode} was present as soon as the receiver was put down and asked Mr. Cutler what we would do in the event Mr. Sheldon didn't get back. I don't think there was any answer to the question. I think Mr. Goode felt the seriousness of the situation. Mr. Cutler, Mr. Goode and myself all felt that the situation was such that definite steps should be taken to get the men out on a few minutes notice.

*We wanted
to get
them out*

20. Q. At what time did Mr. Sheldon return?

A. I think the boat was late. I couldn't say the exact time. The boat was a little late.

21. Q. Were there any visible indications of a storm Sunday?

*He says
indications
Sunday*

A. ~~There were no indications.~~ I had come through the '28 hurricane in Miami. The clouds were moving very fast, and I think that is the a good sign of a storm. Low with squally weather somewhat different from ordinary storming weather. ^{at night} This is not my own feeling. Were any of the old veterans or settlers about your headquarters that afternoon?



*Sherran
predicted
drought*

A. Yes. Captain Sherran. He felt that the situation was serious and that we might look for some very, very nasty weather.

23. Q. Was Mr. Parker around that afternoon?

A. Yes, he was.

24. Q. What did he have to say?

A. I don't remember.

25. Q. Did you see the barometer that afternoon?

A. Yes, the barometer was on the desk with all of us around.

26. Q. What did it show?

A. A little below normal. I do not believe myself that a barometer at that stage would tell a whole lot.

27. Q. What did the barometer do from the time you left until you got back Sunday?

A. To the best of my recollection I think the barometer showed 29-30 or 30 or around there. It would go down and come back up just a little bit.

28. Q. Did you watch it rather closely from Sunday afternoon on?

A. Yes.

29. Q. Did it continue to go up and down after 4 o'clock?

A. Yes.

30. Q. What did Mr. Sheldon do when he came back?

A. I believe Mr. Sheldon did nothing Sunday other than look at the barometer.

31. Q. Did he ask the advice of opinion of any of you people there?

A. No. *not to my knowledge*

32. Q. Did anyone tell him what you people thought and what had been done in his absence?

A. No sir. *Not to my knowledge*

33. Q. Why didn't they?

A. *Sheldon's attitude*
My honest opinion is that I thought Mr. Sheldon was the type that wouldn't listen to anybody else, and would do what he wanted to, and what I could say would have no effect, and therefore, I would probably be better off if I just kept my opinion to myself.

34. Q. Was Mr. Sheldon a hard person to approach?

A. No.

35. Q. Was he arrogant, dictatorial?

A. Somewhat, I should say.

36. Q. Is that the reason people would hesitate to speak freely to him?

A. That was my reason.

37. Q. Do you know if he made any telephone calls Sunday afternoon?

A. Not to my knowledge.

38. Q. Did you remain around headquarters Sunday afternoon?

A. Yes.

39. Q. Did you sleep at headquarters?

A. Yes.

40. Q. Tell what took place as well as you can.

A. Not much took place. Mr. Cutler wanted somebody near the phone to take any report, and I believe Woodham stayed until bed-time and Mr. Ayer slept by the telephone and radio Sunday night.

41. Q. Do you know if Mr. Patterson went up to the railroad station to make inquiry about a train?

A. No.

42. Q. Was anything said about arrangements having been made for a train by Mr. Sheldon or anyone else Sunday evening?

A. I didn't hear anything mentioned about that.

43. Q. Tell what happened Monday morning.

*Monday
a.m.
overcast*
A. We got up and it was overcast more than ever, and little flurries of wind, nothing to cause any excitement, but I do know that the general feeling in the camp was that they were scared. About noon the wind started. It blew and by lunch time it was blowing strong.

44. Q. Did Mr. Sheldon make any telephone calls to Mr. Ghent or the railroad Monday morning?

A. I heard a conversation between Mr. Sheldon and Mr. Ghent and he was leaving Jacksonville.

45. Q. That was in the afternoon?

A. That was in the afternoon.

46. Q. Did Mr. Sheldon talk to Mr. Gilford Monday morning?

A. Not to my knowledge. I don't know.

47. Q. At the time Mr. Ghent talked to Mr. Sheldon that was at the time the train was ordered?

A. That was right.

48. Q. You don't know of any conversation before that time?

A. Yes, I do. Whether it was before or slightly after I don't remember. Mr. Sheldon called Ft. Lauderdale and Hollywood telling them that they were going to order a train or had ordered a train, and told them we were going to be on the siding and would they take us.

49. Q. Were the calls made before he talked to Mr. Ghent or afterwards?

A. I don't remember. To my knowledge it was before.

50. Q. What were they doing around headquarters Monday morning?

A. Nothing of any consequence.

51. Q. Nobody was preparing for the storm in any way?

*Sheldon
not enthusiastic
about prep.*

A. I think that Gooder said something to Mr. Sheldon about making preparations for the storm. I am not sure that the response was too enthusiastic.

52. Q. Did any of the fellows play poker Monday morning?

A. Yes, they did.

53. Q. Did Mr. Sheldon take part in the game?

*Poker
game*

A. It was just a penny ante poker game and there was nothing doing, and they were playing poker.

THE

54. Q. There wasn't anything to do? It seemed to be plenty to do. Isn't that right?

A. I don't know. What do you mean. I didn't like to voice an opinion whether there was plenty to do or not.

55. Q. If you thought conditions were alarming, there was quite a bit to do?

A. Yes, quite a lot.

56. Q. Did you remain there in the afternoon?

A. Yes.

57. Q. Were you there in the night?

A. Yes.

58. Q. What time did conditions become pretty bad?

A. 3 or 3:30. I had offered my services to stay that night and come up on the train. I knew a lot were away for the week-end, and I told Mr. Malcolm that I would go and see the camp superintendents and make arrangements for them to have their time books on the train. ~~We~~ went around to the camps and got the time books. At camp #1 I broke in and got the book myself. It was pretty bad going down there with the wind. It wasn't so bad coming back. Patterson got another car and came back by himself. Then we went back to headquarters. From then on there was just nothing much done, just waiting.

59. Q. The weather was getting very bad?

A. Yes.

60. Q. Did you have any motor transportation at your camps?

A. Yes sir.

61. Q. How much?

A. I don't know.

62. Q. Well, just a rough idea. How many people could you have taken out?

A. This is a guess. With every available vehicle, we could have perhaps handled between 3 and 4 hundred.

63. Q. Did you have any drivers?

A. Yes.

64. Q. There were enough administrative employees to drive, wasn't there?

A. *Yes. No, but perhaps enough other drivers.*

65. Q. Was anything said about this motor transportation?

A. Not a word. Except that two veterans asked King, who was the transportation Head, if they couldn't get a car and take one of the veteran's families out, and he couldn't give him orders to do that. ~~The men were pretty much upset.~~

66. Q. Did King say anything about having all the keys?

A. I don't know about that.

67. Q. Do you know anything about the keys being taken up so that the motor transportation couldn't be used?

A. I don't know about that.

Wind
done

68. Q. Was anything said by Sheldon about taking the motor transportation out to safeguard it? Don't you think some of that time he used playing poker might have been used thinking of these things?

A. I don't know. I think a little too much stress is put on that poker game.

69. Q. At what time did you people leave the headquarters?

A. To go to the station?

70. Q. What time did all of you leave?

A. That was about 5:30.

71. Q. Was it bad at that time?

A. Yes, it was.

72. Q. After you got to the station what did you do?

A. We waited and found out that the train hadn't left Homestead until 5:30.

73. Q. You knew then that the situation might be critical?

A. Yes.

74. Q. Did Mr. Sheldon make any suggestions about what might be done for the fellows in the camps?

A. No. ^{Q.} At that time it was ^{it's} a case of each man for himself.

75. Q. Don't you think that somebody should have been dispatched to the various camps to tell the men they had better get up to the railroad station and be waiting for the train?

A. ^{No} Yes, I ^{don't} think so. The wind ^{was pretty bad} had been increasing all the time. It was getting worse.

76. Q. And at that time you had reason to believe that it would be several minutes before the train arrived?

A. Yes sir--1 1/2 or 2 hours. We waited in the station and Mr. Sheldon was asking the operator if he was in connection with Key West. ^{Shy was} The south-
^{of train} west wall of the station began to shake and we decided to make it to
^{station} the box cars on the tracks. The wheels were blocked with wood. We
^{shaking} left the station and I couldn't hardly walk. Everybody got into the box cars

77. Q. Did Mr. Sheldon get in the box car also?

A. Yes. You could see the wind increasing all the time. The door was open on the leeward side and we were in there. Somebody looked out and saw the light of the train coming down the track. None of us dared jump out. We could feel the track sort of give. Water poured over the door. My idea was to stay in the box car. Four of the fellows got out. That left 7 in the car. We thought that they were gone. My idea was to get in the corner of the car. I was the first one back in the corner and the sheriff was back of me. The water was then up to the floor in the box car. Then we perched up on there and could see the water over the top. We were in there for 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ or 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

*Box car open
door open
on leeward
Tough time*

78. Q. The train arrived while all of you were in the box car?

A. Yes.

79. Q. Was there any discussion of the storm?

A. Nothing much, everybody was frightened.

80. Q. Did Mr. Sheldon say anything?

A. No, not much. There wasn't anything important much discussed.

81. Q. He didn't go from one to the other and say he had done all he could?

*...I did
all I
could*

A. He might have done that.

82. Q. What was the conduct of the men around the camps?

A. I thought it was very good.

83. Q. The veterans?

A. Yes.

84. Q. Didn't they usually drink quite a bit?

A. Yes, but no more than would be expected.

85. Q. Were many of them under the influence of some intoxicant Sunday and Monday?

*Vets
drunk*

A. Yes, the majority of them.

86. Q. Did Mr. Cutler do anything to prevent the sale of beer or ale at the canteen while Mr. Sheldon was away?

A. Yes, he closed the canteens and Mr. Sheldon opened them up on Monday.

87. Q. What did Mr. Sheldon say about closing the canteens?

A. I didn't hear the conversation.

88. Q. Do you think the management in there and in Jacksonville has used prudence and good judgment?

A. I think Jacksonville handled things pretty well. Mr. Chent had learned on Mr. Sheldon a little more and wanted Mr. Sheldon on this and not Mr. Cutler. He would take his judgment a little better than the other one. Therefore, Mr. Chent wanted Mr. Sheldon there. I think Mr. Cutler would have come through and probably gotten the men out. I think Mr. Sheldon didn't look at it that way. He seemed to want something a little more definite before he moved the men. I can't say so much for Mr. Sheldon's attitude.

*Sheldon's
attitude*

89. Q. Are there any other facts about this matter which you have not related?

A. Nothing more than the above.

90. Q. When did you first learn that a hurricane was forming in the Atlantic?

A. I believe it was Saturday night. I didn't pay much attention to it.

91. Q. Are there any more facts you want to add to your statements?

A. No.

I, Wilbur E. Jones, DO SOLEMNLY SWEAR that the statements made herein in response to questions propounded by D. W. KENNAMER AND H. W. FARMER 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, *W. E. Jones* an Investigator for the Veteran's Administration this 18th day of September, 1935.

O. E. Hawk
INVESTIGATOR