

Loring Scott
No date
by Kennamer

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LORING SCOTT, who first being duly sworn by D. W. Kennamer, Central Office investigator, made the following responses to questions propounded by Mr. D. W. Kennamer, in the case under investigation relative to Florida Storm, September 2, 1935;

Q. What is your name ?

A. Loring Scott.

Q. What is your address, that is your home address ?

A. My home address ? Well, that is a hard question to answer, for I haven't any permanent address just now. I have some relatives in Indiana but Florida is as near my home as any place I know, although it is doubtful whether I will stay here. I tell you that I think I am going to do. I think I am going to Washington.

Q. Well, can you give us the address of your nearest relatives ?

A. I have a brother that lives in Indiana through whom any one can always reach me, but I do not want this construed as my home.

Q. What is your brother's name, and address ?

A. His name is J. R. Scott. He is at 215 East Seymour Street, Muncie, Indiana.

Q. You are a Veteran ?

A. Yes, of the World War.

Q. Were you employed at the Veterans' Camp on the Florida Keys prior to the storm ?

A. Yes.

Q. Were you there during the hurricane ?

A. No, I was in Miami at the time.

- Q. What Camp were you a member of ?
- A. Camp Number One.
- Q. What were your duties Mr. Scott, at the time of the storm ?
- A. Why I was a patient in the Hospital, technically. I had been in the Hospital since the first day of August and was carried on the roster as a patient in the Hospital. I was convalescent and had leave from Dr. Main to go to Miami.
- Q. What were your duties Mr. Scott, before you went to the Hospital ?
- A. You mean immediately prior to that ?
- Q. Yes, what were your duties prior to your going to the Hospital ?
- A. I was night watchman.
- Q. At what time did you leave the storm area ?
- A. On Monday. Monday was the 2nd; going back one week prior to that would be..... well, Sunday was the first, - just about a week prior.
- Q. Did you return to the storm area after the storm ?
- A. I did not.
- Q. You did not identify any of the dead ?
- A. No.
- Q. Did you know the names of any Veterans who left the storm area prior to the hurricane that may be reported as "missing" ?
- A. Well, of course there is a great deal of discussion going on here amongst the men -
- Q. I only want those you have knowledge of yourself.
- A. No, I cannot say that I do as an actual fact.
- Q. When did you come to Jacksonville ?
- A. I came to Jacksonville on the morning of the sixth of September.

Q. You have been employed here assisting in the receiving and evacuating of the men?

A. The day I came here I was placed in charge as First Sergeant of the men in this Camp; that is, as the ranking Veteran in charge of all Veterans. My title is First Sergeant of Veterans Rehabilitation Camps at Camp Foster.

Q. Is there anything else you would like to add to your statement?

A. Well, yes, there are some things I would like to say.

Our difficulties really began on or about the first of January. We were, all things considered, fairly well cared for. The whole scheme was adequately managed up until that time. I say "all things considered" because I am aware of the handicaps under which the Administration operated up to that time.

Then there was a revision of the plan whereby the Veterans were under the direct supervision of the State office, what we referred to as SB-591. We lost all of what we considered direct contact with Washington because the men who were at the head of the organization were State officials and were only indirectly responsible to Washington. We had no recourse to any complaints or anything of that sort. That carried on for about six weeks. Then a man by the name of Hinchman, or Hynchman, came down and outlined a plan, - seemed to be a new proposition. I don't know where he came from; I think he said something about Mr. Carrington Gill. I think he said something about being responsible to him. He posted a bulletin purporting to be the program as outlined by the F. E. R. A. at Washington, and as I remember it, there was a man named Colonel Pratt, with headquarters at Forsythe

Street, Atlanta, who was to be Regional Engineer. The responsibility of the Veterans' Camp in Florida was very indefinitely fixed in this bulletin that was posted; seemed to be a joint responsibility between Julius Stone, Federal Administrator in Florida, and Colonel Pratt, but that was not clearly outlined. We, or I, were unable to get any clear organization chart.

They caused to be set up a Headquarters on the Keys, and established a Directorship for Veterans' Camps in what was known as the Key West area. At this time we lost all contact with Mr. Duncan's organization, SB-591. We officially and technically became known as SB-590 insofar as our Camp and personnel was concerned. All of the work done on the bridge project, - that is when the men were on the job, working on the Quarries, was strictly creative bridge project, in those hours in which the men were actually engaged in that work they were under the supervision of SB-591.

In about two weeks after Mr. Hinchman came, without any official notification, a man appeared on the scene. He called himself "Fred Ghent". He told us that he had been made Director of all the ten camps in Florida, and that Mr. Hinchman would not be there any more, and that he realized that the many problems with which he was not familiar would make things difficult; that in the few days of cursory examination he sensed that something was desperately wrong. I think these were his exact words. Now he told us this, calling the various camps together, numbers one, three and five, in an assembled group. He asked us to bear with him for a reasonable length of time in order that he might familiarize himself with the conditions and our problems; that he would do his utmost to remedy any disadvantages or shortcomings, and that is the last

we heard of him, officially. He stayed there about three weeks and pulled out for Miami. At no time was anybody there officially notified of any change in directorship in an executive capacity. However he did leave men in charge who were signing such notes and bulletins as were necessary, usually they were signed with the title of "Acting Assistant Director".

I was the Chief Clerk in charge of the Camp's routine office from the time Mr. Ghent came until the 21st day of May, during which time I found it wellnigh impossible to get decisions where there had been no precedent established, and I quite this job and returned to Camp #1 as Night Watchman for that reason, -- well, you might say for the reason that considerable responsibility had been imposed upon my job without corresponding authority.

Q. Are there any further facts you could give us along this line ?

A. That is about all the facts that I want, or can, give without going into specific details, and that would take a lot of time. Of course I have a whole lot of opinions; very definite ones, but they are just my opinions.

Q. After Mr. Ghent was appointed Director of the Veterans' Camps who did he leave in charge of the Camps ?

A. So many that I could hardly keep up with them, right there in the office with them; I could not possibly remember them in their sequence.

Q. Well just name those you can.

A. Well, there was a man by the name of Cutler who was in charge from time to time; and a man by the name of Little, and there was an attorney there for a while. I think his title was "Counsel to the

Overseas Bridge Project". That is the way he signed his name once, I think. And sometimes he left Mr. Brower. It was very hard to find out what was going on down there because it was always almost impossible to get any one to write you a memorandum and sign their name to it; that is, to give you a definite statement. Seems as though it was a case of evasion and indefiniteness.

Q. Were the men left in charge, or acting in charge, qualified men for that job?

A. Well of course that would be nothing but an opinion, but in my opinion, - absolutely NO and definitely NO. They lacked any background of experience, either in the conduct of the Camps or the carrying on of the project, - that is, the operations.

Q. Does that apply to all the men you named, or to just some of them?

A. That applies to everybody down the line, - except the time we were with Mr. Duncan. I have a very high regard for Mr. Duncan, both as to his proficiency as an Engineer and as to his moral responsibility. He was highly qualified for the job.

Q. What about Colonel Sheeron?

A. He was a man who was connected with the Engineering of the bridge project and had very little direct contact with the men. His job was more or less of an advisory job; in other words he never gave any orders that affected us. He would create a situation and from that, subordinates would interpret orders to us. That is, from my observation. He spent most of his time at Number Three. He never had anything to do with us direct. He was a highly respected man. At least in my opinion he was smart enough to keep himself

out of the mess, and take charge of his own office.

Q. When did Captain Sheldon take charge of the Camp ?

A. About the tenth of August.

Q. He was actively the head from that time up until the hurricane ?

A. I believe so. You see I was in the Hospital up to that time and removed from all that went on. People mentioned, however, he came to the Hospital and visited every one there and his Cheffeur was with him and I knew him as a Veteran. He told me that this was the camps' Acting Director.

Q. Do you have any comment to make about him one way or the other ?

A. No, because I had no dealings with Captain Sheldon and I do not know anything about it. I was in the Hospital from the first day of August and ^{he} came out about the tenth, and it was a few days after he came there that he visited the men in the Hospital.

Q. Do you know if anything was done to prevent the men from leaving the Camp areas just before the storm ?

A. No. I don't think anything was done to prevent them from leaving. You see the storm occurred at a time of a general holiday, and it had been customary since the very first pay day (which was on the 6th of November, 1934) until, - well, up to now, to arrange the monthly pay-rolls so that pay day would come on Thursday or Friday and then give the men a holiday through pay day until the following Monday; or,

if Monday was a Holiday, like on this particular Monday it was Labor Day, to continue on through Tuesday. Now through custom I guess there was the usual notices posted to the effect that there would be a Holiday, and the men were relieved of all responsibility excepting those who had been carrying on the routine of the camps, such as

Sentry detail, sanitary detail, night watchman, and things like that, and I cannot see how anything could have been done to prevent them leaving had they wanted to go.

Q. Do you know of any employee or member of the Camp has been

warned or cautioned not to tell what he knows about the matter?

A. No sir, I do not.

Q. What were the conditions in the Camps? Was there any discipline; any orders, rules or regulations of any kind?

A. Well of course there were a lot of rules and regulations. The discipline varied with the Captains in charge of the Camps. You understand the men in these Camps are ordinarily allowed to do pretty much as they please. Of course they got started off that way, but most of them have had respect for the Captains of the Camps whom they liked; the ones they liked were fit for the job. Marshall, for instance.

We had for this whole time (I am speaking now of Camp One) two Captains who were as good - well as you could find any where for the job. Captain Sam Marshall of Camp One, and Captain Hardaker. Both Captains for Camp One. Now the men didn't pay much attention to rules. As a matter of fact there were not many rules - they did about as they pleased in general deportment. Of course there were some rules they didn't question. If a man didn't work, he didn't get paid, and he was reasonable enough to understand that. It seemed to be the inclination of the Captains to be very lenient as to the conduct of the camps. A sort of sensitive spirit among the men. They didn't obey rules.

Q. Were there any local precautions taken to protect the men in case of storms?

A. Oh, there was nothing of that sort taken into consideration. There was some either oral agreement or written correspondence between Mr. Ghent and the Florida East Coast Railroad along some time in May concerning the Railroad's ability to quickly provide transportation to evacuate all of the Veterans on the keys in case of an emergency.

Q. Do you know anything about the nature of the agreement?

A. I saw a letter, and I am not quite sure, - I would hesitate to describe the contents of that letter, but as I remember it, Mr. Ghent and the Railroad reached an agreement; now, this is what I remember. As I remember it, the Railroad agreed to furnish enough transportation to evacuate to the Mainland all Veterans up to One Thousand men, in five (5) hours time. Three hours notice was to be given to the General Passenger Agent at St. Augustine between six A.M. and six P.M. any day for six months. Now that may be away off, but that was my interpretation as I remember it. I am sure of this, that there was a letter similar to that. I doubt if that was a complete file and I am inclined to believe that there were certain conversations between this Agent and Mr. Ghent.

Q. You are not certain about the time element in the letter, - as to whether it would take three hours or eight hours, or what?

A. No.

Q. Is it your opinion that the great loss of life among the Veterans was due to carelessness, or negligence, or incompetence of any of the officials?

A. Yes. I definitely think it was due to incompetence. Mr. Ghent was I think, one of those peculiar men who could not make up his mind,

...he was not a vicious man, but just could not make up his mind to anything. I think he was a poor executive to head a job of any kind - the poorest that I have ever seen in forty-three years of experience, and I have seen quite a few.

I believe, in justice to Mr. Ghent, that he felt and probably does feel now, that this thing lays upon him tremendously, but that was just part of his make-up. He could not even make up his mind whether he wanted to pay a man \$45 per month or \$36 per month. He just couldn't make up his mind to anything.

I believe that the scheme of Veterans Rehabilitation Camps, as originally planned and conceived, is a very good thing. It occupies a field that no other agency has ever provided for in the scheme of Veterans' welfare. I saw the original draft of this plan and it was not only a good plan but it was a practical one. It would not have worked out as it was on paper 100% but it would have been a start in the right direction. The whole trouble was that the people who interpreted these plans were not qualified to carry them out. Naturally, Captain Hardaker and Captain Sam Marshall were only Camp Captains. They didn't occupy any positions where they would make decisions as to policies, and things of that sort.

Q. Don't you think there should be some definite plan of discipline in any camp ?

A. Absolutely yes. I think some one should be in charge of the Camps who would have the courage to do the right thing even though he might offend one or two or a dozen. Certainly there was no question about that.

Q. Was there a tendency to keep the Veterans there - to keep them satisfied ?

A. When Colonel Pratt was in Islamorada, (that was our headquarters in May) he told Mr. Cutler and Mr. Ghent, when they were talking about plans for new buildings, not to plan too far ahead because he believed the Veterans' Camps on the Keys would have to be practically abandoned from June to October, and that he would recommend it because of the terrible scourge of mosquitoes and that because of his observation these men would leave voluntarily if they were not transferred once they had a taste of real tropic weather and the pests attendant thereto. That was his words.

We knew that Colonel Pratt told Mr. Ghent that, so about the middle of June the mosquitoes was so bad that it was almost impossible to stay there. You had to stay in the house, or shack or tent, or hut, from the time it began to get dark until bright daylight. You just could not stay out there on those Keys. That didn't happen every night, but we didn't have any light - half of those shacks were not lighted during June and July, and some nights you could not go outside of the shacks - without the mosquitoes swarming all over you.

Q. Were any of the men quartered in tents when the storm came?

A. Yes, sure. There were about 187, average - about 6 men to a tent; that was at Camp five; that is where the greatest loss of life was.

About this mosquito business, I will say this. We asked for a talk with Mr. Ghent. I said that there was a committee in Camp No. One. We were told that Mr. Ghent was not in Camp and didn't know when he would be. That was about the middle of June; then decided to talk to Mr. Cutler, and we asked him if it was not possible to transfer us to some other camps in Florida or South or North Carolina, or some place in this region. He stated "NO". We told him that if he did not transfer us that we were all going to quit.

He stated he could not help that. We asked him how long it would take him to pay off 157 men. He stated he could not answer that, so we went to the telegraph office and sent a telegram to Mr. Ghent. We indicated on that telegram that copies of that telegram were going to Julius Stone at Jacksonville, to Colonel Pratt, and to Corrington Gill in Mr. Hopkins' office. The substance of this telegram was that "Conditions having become intolerable for the Veterans of Camp Number One, to asked to be transferred to another Camp in North Florida or the Carolinas," saying, in the last analysis, "Would it not be better for all concerned to follow this suggestion than to have these men leaving, drifting aimlessly through the South in unorganized bands".

Colonel Pratt recommended to both Julius Stone and Mr. Ghent our immediate and complete removal from the Keys. That is the last we ever heard of it.

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

Mary J. Durham
Stenographer.