

Mr. Wirt

CCC
SAFETY
Fatalities
Camp S-132, Pennsylvania
8

November 3, 1938

Regional Forester, Region 7
U. S. Forest Service
Washington, D. C.

Attention: Mr. G. T. Backus

Dear Mr. Backus:

In accordance with the request of Mr. H. R. Kylie, Mr. George H. Wirt, Chief Forest Fire Warden of Pennsylvania, and R. Lynn Esrick, Acting State Forester and State Procurement Officer of the C.C.C., herewith submit the following statement and recommendations concerning the forest fire in Cameron County, Pennsylvania, on October 19, 1938, in which one squad foreman and six enrollees lost their lives. One additional enrollee died as the result of burns, at the Renovo Hospital, on the morning of November 3, 1938.

From the evidence and testimony submitted by Messrs. Kylie, Kurts, Mattison and Beard, and from personal investigations on the part of both of us, as well as an inspection of the area burned, it appears that Superintendent Earl F. Getz and Camp Forester William E. Haupt, acted in accordance with established State Department procedure in the extinction of this fire. The instructions given by Camp Forester Haupt to Foreman Mohney, that he was to go to the header of the fire and work down hill

with his line rather than up the hill, is in accordance with instructions which have been issued in forest fire publications of this Department, for the last twenty-five years.

The fact that Superintendent Getz was away from the camp on administrative CCC duties, at the time of the fire, should not be considered as a reflection upon Superintendent Getz. He very properly delegated Mr. Schooley, Camp Engineer to be in charge of camp activities during his absence.

The testimony indicates that Camp Superintendent Getz and Camp Forester Haupt may not have followed out in detail, every item of the safety regulations. Such laxity, if it may so be termed, had no direct bearing with respect to the death of the enrollees.

The fact that it took Foreman Mohney approximately one and a half hours to go less than one-half way up the mountain and according to the statements of Enrollee Mackey, it would appear that Foreman Mohney was either overcome by the heat and smoke of the fire or may have had some organic condition which prevented him from continuing up the mountain or to a place of safety. Some of the enrollees reached the top of the mountain and escaped which evidences that Camp Forester Haupt's instructions

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were reasonable. We do not see how any reflection can be credited to Superintendent Getz or Forester Haupt, as the result of the death of Mr. Mohnney or that of the enrollees.

Foreman Adolf Kamrath, according to his own testimony, did not follow out established regulations and procedure, in attacking this fire. He arrived on the scene before Foreman Mohnney, went down the road to look over the fire and started his fire line at the south instead of the north side of the fire. Foreman Kamrath had several year's experience as a fire crew member, a fire warden and a State forest fire inspector. He was familiar with the proper method of attacking fires and we believe he did not use the best judgment in attacking this fire. It is impossible to state whether this action on his part had any determining effect upon the death of the foreman and enrollees, but we believe not.

In view of these facts, we are of the opinion that neither Superintendent Getz nor Forester Haupt and as far as we can see, no one else connected with the CCC activities, can have attached to them, separately or collectively, any blame for the unfortunate trapping of the men on the fire line. It may appear however,

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that in the opinion of some, there was insufficient attention paid to certain CCC regulations with respect to the instruction of enrollees, foremen and others, concerning forest fires, and if there is any discipline to be meted out because of this dereliction, it should be on this basis. It must be remembered however, that the results of this particular fire may not have been prevented under any circumstances.

On the basis of this consideration and on the assumption that disciplinary measures cannot be avoided, it is recommended that Superintendent Getz, Forester Haupt and Foreman Kasmrath be suspended without pay for a maximum period not exceeding thirty days.

Respectfully submitted

Chief Forest Fire Warden

Acting State Forester

cc: C. W. Mattison
cc: George H. Wirt
cc: R. C. Beard