

OF Private William M. King.

CASE 1- Accidental deaths. Suspicious forest fire.
VICTIMS 1- Basil Bogush, John Borling, Andrew Stephanic, Howard Key,
Gilbert Monney, Stephen Jaconski, Ross Hollibaugh.

ACCUSED 1-
SUSPECTS 1-
PLACE 1- Grove township, Cameron County, Pennsylvania.
DATE 1- October 19, 1938.

Having been ordered by the Commanding Officer, Troop WDr, Squadron No. 2, Pennsylvania Motor Police, Captain C.J. McHae, to proceed to Sinnemahoning, Penna., for the purpose of continuing the investigation in the above case, I proceeded as ordered, via troop car O&A-3-127, leaving station at 8:00 A.M. this date.

Upon the arrival of Pvt. Albin L. Knudson, of Troop WDr, S-1 to assist in the investigation of this case, District Attorney Tompkins delegated certain responsibility in this investigation to each member of the Motor Police working on the case. Inasmuch as Pvt. Knudson's knowledge of the territory and the people from previous work in Cameron County, he was assigned to the investigation of the case from the incendiarism angle, while Pvt. King will devote his time to the investigation relating to the fixing of responsibility for the deaths of the C.C.C. boys.

Pictures of the entire scene of the fire were all ready at hand, but it was desired that certain measurements, indicating the distance of the bodies from safety, etc., be obtained. For this purpose then, investigator, together with a former forest ranger and a photographer, again proceeded to the scene of the fatal fire. Near the bodies, or the spot where the bodies were found, a large rock was measured. This rock was found to be eighteen feet high at its highest point, thirty-three yards in circumference, thirty feet wide and twenty-two feet deep, measuring from front to rear. This rock would have provided ample safety for the trapped boys and their bodies were found about forty yards from this rock. The rock was again photographed from all angles. The fire line, or lane, which is ordinarily cut from the woods for the purpose of blocking the fire, was located, but the fire was on each side of the line, indicating that the fire had crossed the line. The line extends from the road at the bottom of the hill up into the woods for a distance of approximately 100 yards. The fire line, coupled with other observations of the scene, enabled the investigators to form a theory as to what occurred on the day of the fire. The theory of the investigators is as follows:

The fire was burning slow, evidenced by the fact that the fire started at approximately 12:30 P.M. on the 19th of October, and was finally extinguished at approximately 7:00 P.M. by a fall of rain. The fire, during the interval of six and one-half hours, burned approximately two miles through the woods. When it is realized that forest fires can destroy thousands of acres of timberland in a few hours, a natural conclusion can be drawn, which conclusion will be borne out by the evidence remaining after the passage of the fire, and that is; the fire was nothing more than a leaf fire and was never, at any time, more than a few feet in height. According to records of the Camp, the boys arrived at the scene of this fire at approximately 2:30 P.M. October 19, 1938 and went immediately into the woods. At 3:30 P.M. witnesses heard the screams of the dying boys. Between the hours of 2:30 and 3:30 P.M. the boys evidently cut their fire line at the bottom of the hill a hundred yards up the mountain and then left in uncontrolled. The fire jumped the fire line and started to burn up the hill behind the boys.

During the time the fire was burning up the hill, the boys had evidently climbed to the spot where their bodies were later found and were fighting the fire at this point. The fire which crossed the fire line at the bottom of the hill burned past the boys position only lower down the mountain. After it passed the fire line the prevailing wind would carry the flames straight along the mountain. However, the wind shifted to the Northwest and started to burn up the mountain behind the boys fighting the fire. The boys evidently did not notice that the fire was coming from behind them until Gilbert Mowey, the squad foreman, shouted that he was hemmed in and to save themselves. If the boys had been experienced fire fighters and had climbed on the rock, or had simply walked through the flames ahead of them, they would have been burned, but they would not have been burned fatally. Another squad of fire-fighters on the other side of the same mountain walked through the flames twice. The boys apparently became panic stricken, breathed a quantity of smoke and started to run around in circles, collapsing one by one.

After securing the desired measurements and pictures of the fire scene, investigating officers returned to station.

Respectfully Submitted,

William M. King
Pvt 1 Troop 8th S-S, P.M.A.

RECEIVED
OCT 31 1938

U. S. A. 89

-SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT-

2-D-05-2

File No.
October 28, 1938.

OF	: Pvt. William M. King and Frank H. Bender.
CASH	: Accidental deaths. Suspicious forest fire.
VICTIMS	: Basil Bogush, John Berling, Andrew Stephanie, Howard May, Gilbert Mohney, Stephen Jacobske, Ross Hollibaugh.
ACCUSED	:
SUSPECTS	: Grove township, Cameron County, Pennsylvania.
PLACE	: October 19, 1938.
DATE	:

Having been ordered by the Commanding Officer, Troop "D" Squadron No. 2, Pennsylvania Motor Police, Captain C. J. McRae, to continue the investigation in the above case, I proceeded as ordered, via O. V., to points in Emporium, Penna.

At the request of District Attorney Tompkins, Investigating Officer proceeded to the Office of District Forester Charles E. Baer, and requested a list of the dates of all fires that were reported between October 19, 1938 and Oct. 22, 1938, the time reported, name of person reporting the fire, County, township, and location of the fire in townships. Investigating officer entered into a conversation with Mr. Charles E. Baer as to the cause of the fires, whether incendiary or accidental, as to the fact that he was the first person to call the detail into the case. It was the opinion of Mr. Charles E. Baer that the fires might have been incendiary and then he brought out that due to the positions of the fires they might have all been accidentally set.

For further information concerning activities of investigating officers refer to report of Pvt. A. L. Knudson, Troop "D", Squadron No. 1, Pennsylvania Motor Police, who has taken charge of the investigation, this date. Officer assisted Pvt. A. L. Knudson in the continuation of the investigation. Investigation will be continued.

Respectfully submitted,

James H. Baer
Private, Troop "D", S-2, P.M.P.

OCT 31 1938

-SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT-

File No P-D-06-2
October 27, 1938

OF
CASE
VICTIMS
ACCUSED
SUSPECTS
PLACE
DATE

-- Privates William W. King and Frank H. Bender.
-- Accidental deaths, Suspicious forest fire.
-- Basil Bogush, John Boring, Andrew Stephanic, Howard May,
 Gilbert Mohny, Stephen Jaconski, Ross Hollobaugh.
--
-- Grove township, Cameron County, Pennsylvania.
-- October 19, 1938.

Having been ordered by the Commanding Officer, Troop "D", Squadron No. 2, Pennsylvania Motor Police, Captain C.J. McRae, to continue the investigation in the above case, I proceeded as ordered, via troop car 084-5-127, in company with Pvt. Frank H. Bender.

At the request of District Attorney Tompkins, made in a telephone conversation this date, investigating officers proceeded to Cameron camp #132, C.C.C. and requested a copy of the camp roster. This request was complied with by the Officer in charge of the camp, Lieutenant Haynes. The roster of the camp is necessary for the future subpoenaing of witnesses for the inquest, to be held Monday, October 31, 1938. At the same time, the names and addresses of the mothers, fathers or guardians of the boys who were fatally burned in the fire were obtained, also at the request of Mr. Tompkins. The attitude of the C.C.C. has changed considerably since Mr. Tompkins' visit to Washington and the subsequent orders of Major General Craig to the C.C.C. to extend full co-operation to the District Attorney.

Investigators contacted various informants who have promised to notify the detail of the first information they might receive in connection with investigation. It is believed that some leads might come out of the Coroner's inquest.

Information was received this date which was vague, but might have some connection. The informant, whose name is not known, and who gave the information to one of the informant being used by this detail, stated that he had overheard a conversation between two members of the C.C.C. to the effect that one of the speakers had picked up a candle, almost totally burned and a can which smelled as if it had contained gasoline, at the scene of the fire. If this information is correct, further leads in this respect can no doubt be secured from the C.C.C. boys when they are allowed to talk by their superiors.

As soon as the photographs taken of the scene and the location of the bodies are developed copies will be submitted with reports.

RECEIVED
MUNICIPAL AUTHORITY
OCT 29 1938

Respectfully Submitted,

W. H. King
Private, Troop "D", S2, P.M.P.

OF Privates William M. King and Frank H. Bender.

CASE Accidental deaths, suspicious forest fire.

VICTIMS :- Basil Bogush, John Boring, Andrew Stepanic, Howard May,
Gilbert Mohney, Stephen Jaconski, Ross Hollough.

ACCUSED :-
SUSPECTS :-

PLACE :- Grove Township, Cameron County, Pennsylvania.

DATE :- October 19, 1938.

Having been ordered by the Commanding Officer, Troop nd, Squadron NO. 2, Pennsylvania Motor Police, Captain C.J. McRae, to continue the investigation in the above case, I proceeded as ordered, in civilian clothes, via troop car 024-3-127, in company with Pvt. Frank H. Bender, leaving Emporium at 9:00 A.M. this date.

Investigators proceeded to the area in which the seven members of camp #138, C.C.C. lost their lives on October 19, and interviewed residents of the vicinity.

Mr. William Miller, who resides on a farm directly across from the mountain on which the boys died, was interviewed. Mr. Miller stated that he was sitting on his cellar door at 12:30 P.M. October 19, 1938, and noticed an automobile upon the road. This automobile was parked a short distance down the road from the point where the fire started soon after. As he was watching this car, it started up and drove on up the road. Shortly after this car passed, he noticed smoke arising from the point on the mountain-side. From that time on, he observed the progress of the fire, and the arrivals and departures of the C.C.C. enrollees until about 3:30 P.M. where he heard screaming, yelling, and praying coming from the boys on the mountain. This, according to Mr. Miller, who is an aged man, was so harrowing that he has been unable to sleep at night since the accident. His wife and daughter-in-law were also home on that day and heard the same things. All of these people are emphatic in their condemnation of the persons responsible for sending green, untrained youths into the woods to fight the fire without proper leadership. Mr. Miller, who has been fighting fires for years, states that there was no excuse for such an accident, and that if the leaders had been on to their job, and had instructed the boys to go into the woods either beside the fire or back of it, there would have been no such accident. He, Mr. Miller, states that he saw the car enter the woods ahead of the fire and attempt to fight the fire against the strong wind that was blowing up the mountain and into the faces of the fire-fighters. Mr. Miller, his wife and daughter-in-law all claim that a race horse could not have fled ahead of the flames, fanned as they were by the strong wind that was blowing.

Upon being questioned as the probable owner of the car he saw driving up the road when the fire started, Mr. Miller would make no definite statement, but did say that he believed the car to be the property of one Soepf, a resident of the valley nearby.

These persons were checked to some extent (there are two boys in the family) and nothing could be learned that would indicate that these boys are the type who would set a fire. These boys will be thoroughly checked at a later date.

Mr. Jacob Smith, another resident, was interviewed relative to information received by the officers that Mrs. Smith, his wife, had seen a car near a spot where another fire broke out earlier in the day, on the day of the tragedy. Mrs. Smith, however, failed to remember any description of the car she had seen other than that it was a large car, probably a sedan. Mr. Smith, however, another old fire-fighter, did launch into quite a long story about the leadership, or lack of it, among the executive personnel of the C.C.C.

Further than this, Mr. Smith could furnish no information concerning the fire, nor could his wife. It is believed, however, that Mrs. Smith has some information that she is not willing to reveal, for some reason known to her. An effort will be made to have another investigator, who is known to her, approach her in an effort to get the information she is believed to have.

Mr. Gus Johnson, a resident of Sinnemahoning, was interviewed, and stated that he was returning from his work in Potter County by truck in company with three other men, when they were signalled to stop by an officer of the C.C.C. who informed them that some boys were dying up on the mountain and that they needed help to get the down to the hospital. Gus Johnson did not go up the mountain himself, due to his age, but the three men with him went up the mountain and helped to bring down the burned boys. As he was standing on the road waiting, a detachment of C.C.C. boys, in command of an officer, drove up to the scene and the officer ordered the boys to go into the woods at the next hollow and fight the fire. Gus Johnson remonstrated with the officer, stating that it would be suicide to send the boys in ahead of the fire again. Apparently then, the officer did not enforce his command.

Mr. Helga Anderson, another resident of Sinnemahoning, was interviewed. Mr. Anderson stated that he was stopped on the highway by an officer of the C.C.C. and asked to go up the mountain to assist the boys. He did so and found about six of the boys on the mountain. With strips torn from a tarpaulin, he and his companion, Moyer Erricson, carried one boy off the mountain. This boy was still alive. Mr. Anderson stated, however, that he saw about five dead boys on the mountain. One boy, according to Anderson, was crying, with his head against a rock pillowed in his arms. This boy died in that position.

Mr. Moyer Erricson verified the story of Mr. Anderson. Both men stated emphatically that the fire was deliberately set, although they could give no reason for the statement except that it could not have caught fire accidentally. Both men also stated that a good leader would have saved the lives of the men.
Investigation to be continued.

Respectfully Submitted,
[Signature]
Pvt. Troop, 1st Dr. Sup. Co., No. 2
Pennsylvania Motor Police

HEADQUARTERS TROOP

RECEIVED
OCT 26 1938
[Signature]

-SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT-

File No. 2-D-06-2
October 25, 1938

- OF Privates William M. King and Frank H. Bender.
- CASE -- Accidental deaths. Suspicious forest fire.
- VICTIMS -- Basil Bogush, John Borins, Andrew Stephanic, Howard May,
Gilbert Mohney, Stephen Jaconski, Ross Hollobaugh.
- ACCUSED --
- SUSPECTS --
- PLACE -- Grove township, Cameron County, Pennsylvania.
- DATE -- October 19, 1938.

Having been ordered by the Commanding Officer, Troop "D", Squadron NO. 2, Pennsylvania Motor Police, Captain C.J. Morae, to continue the investigation in the above case, I proceeded as ordered, via troop car 024-2-127, in company with Pvt. Frank H. Bender, leaving station at 9:00 A.M. this date.

Investigating officers proceeded to Cameron camp NO. 129 for the purpose of interviewing one Harry Mackey, an eye-witness to the entire tragedy. After seeing the officer in charge of the camp it was learned that Mackey was on an extended work party and would not be available for some time.

It appears that the members of the C.C.C. do not care to cooperate with the investigation of this case. Several instances when investigators attempted to interview members of the camp personnel for the purpose of learning the facts surrounding the tragedy, they met with refusals, and on one instance, when District Attorney Tompkins went to the camp he was met with direct refusals and, in fact, was almost mobbed by the C.C.C. boys. It has been since learned that the officers of the camp have issued orders to the effect that the boys are to make no statements to the State Investigators, including the Coroner, the District Attorney and members of the Motor Police. At the time of this writing, Mr. Tompkins, the District Attorney, is on his way to Washington, D.C. for the purpose of conferring with Major General Wain Craig, acting in the absence of the Secretary of War Woodring. It is thought that General Craig will extend the co-operation of the C.C.C. to Mr. Tompkins in the investigation of this case, which will make the investigation a great deal easier as under the present conditions, witnesses are not available, due to the fact that all of the actual eye witnesses are members of the C.C.C. Reports, rumours, etc., have been pouring into the District Attorney's office in increasing amounts, and all will be checked out when possible. The inability of the investigating officers to secure statements from witnesses is holding up the investigation but this condition will be relieved by Mr. Tompkins' return from Washington.

This investigation to be continued.

RECEIVED
NOV 3 1938

OCT 26 1938
RECEIVED

Respectfully Submitted,
W. H. King
Pvt. Troop "D" 82, Penna. Motor Police

-SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT-

File NO. 2-D-06-2
October 26, 1938

OF
 CASE
 VICTIMS
 ACCUSED
 SUSPECTS
 PLACE
 DATE

-- Privates William M. King and Frank H. Bender.
 -- Accidental deaths. Suspicious forest fire.
 -- Basil Bogush, John Boring, Andrew Stphanic, Howard May,
 Gilbert Mohney, Stephen Jaconski, Ross Hollibaugh.
 --
 --
 -- Grove township, Cameron County, Pennsylvania.
 -- October 19, 1938.

Having been ordered by the Commanding Officer, Troop "D", Squadron NO. 2, Pennsylvania Motor Police, Captain C.J. McRae, to proceed to continue the investigation in the above case, I proceeded as ordered, via troop car 024-3-127, in company with Pvt. Frank H. Bender, leaving station at 9:00 A.M. this date.

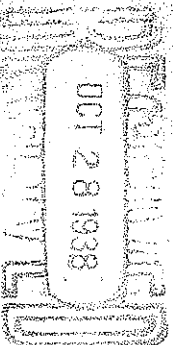
Investigating officers proceeded to Sinnemahoning, where Moyer Ericson, a member of the party that removed the bodies of the burned C.C.C. boys from the mountain. He was asked to accompany the party of officers to the spot where the bodies of the boys were found in order that photographs might be taken of the scene. He agreed to accompany the detail and did so. A local photographer, who accompanied the detail, photographed each spot indicated by Mr. Ericson as the spot where he had observed the body of an C.C.C. boy lying when he reached the top of the mountain on October 19, 1938.

While the photographs were being taken, a group of investigators from the C.C.C. camp were on the mountain. An effort was made to engage these men in conversation with regards to the fire, but this attempt was unsuccessful. The men would talk of anything except the fire. Nothing could be learned from the terrain, as it has been thoroughly combed since the fatal fire, investigating officers included.

After leaving the mountain, investigators talked to persons in the vicinity. A man named Dexter, who lives at the exact spot where a fire started about the same time of day as the fatal fire started, and about two miles distant and on the opposite or east side of Sinnemahoning creek. He flatly stated that all the fires were "hand made" but stated that he had no idea who might have set the fires. His wife could furnish no information.

Investigators then proceeded to Leonard Wykoff's "Willows" a beer garden on the outskirts of Sinnemahoning. Mr. Wykoff has been co-operating with the officers and has been listening carefully to the conversations of the patrons in his place. Up to date, however, Mr. Wykoff reports no definite information.

Investigators then contacted another person who has been giving information and he stated that he had learned that the driver of the automobile seen by Mr. Bill Miller at a point on the road near where the fire started was a man named Kamats, who is temporarily out of work and has been living with a family named Soesgh about four miles above the point where the fire started. A car seen by Mr. Miller was the car owned by the Soesgh family but was driven by Kamats (the name Soesgh is believed to be correct, but if the name is misspelled, it will be corrected in future reports) The man Kamats will be thoroughly checked at the earliest opportunity.



Respectfully submitted,

William M. King
 PVP, Troop "D" SR, P.M.P.

1st Lt. Harry B. Diebler, Dent-Res., Dentist,
Sub-District "B", CCC,
2d Lt. Victor F. Vrebel, Inf-Res., Adjutant,
CCC Camp S-132, Cameron, Penna.
1st Lt. Paul J. Gelgerich, Ch-Res., Chaplain,
Sub-District "B", CCC.
Alfred Kuleck, Senior Leader
1st Lt. Herman H. Levin, Med-Res., Camp Surgeon
Mr. William J. Schooley, Jr. Engineer
Mr. Adolph Kamrath, Foreman
Peter A. Dimoco, Enrollee
Miss Benson, Superintendent Renovo Hospital,
Renovo, Penna.

FINDINGS:

After careful consideration of all the evidence in the case, the board finds:

1. That, the deaths of former enrollees Basil Bogush, CCC-222752, Andrew Stephanic, CCC-229359, John F. Borling, CCC-229364 and Howard W. May, CCC-237868, CCC Company 1321, Camp S-132-Pa., Cameron, Pennsylvania, occurred between the hours of 3:30 P.M., and 4:30 P.M., Wednesday, October 19, 1938, on Lick Island area, on First Fork Road, 2.86 miles north of Sinnemahoning, Cameron county, Pennsylvania.
2. That, they perished by burns sustained by fire.
3. That, they were ascending a steep mountain, with forest fire to their left, in order to combat the fire from its topmost point, when the flames ignited the area below traversed by them and rapidly spread upward, below and to their right, completely trapping them.
4. That, death in each instance occurred in the performance of duty, and not as a result of own misconduct.
5. That, the enrollees were not under the influence of alcohol or narcotics at the time of death.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. None.

The board adjourned at 7:15 A.M., October 24, 1938, sine die.

ALTON C. MILLER,
Captain, Inf-Res.,
President

HERMAN H. LEVIN,
1st Lt., Med-Res.,
Member

LEE FOX
1st Lt., USMC,
Recorder

The Board re-convened at 10:30 A.M., October 25, 1938, and after careful reconsideration of all the evidence in the case, the Board finds:

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS:

1. Proximate causes of the deaths of the aforementioned enrollees,
 - a. Poor judgment on the part of squad foreman Gilbert Kohnen in attempting to ascend a 2400' 30 degree slope and leaving an uncontrolled and unguarded fire less than 200' to his left rear. This fire, under a shifting wind, swept across in rear of his party, then up the right flank, trapping the entire party.
 - b. The early exhaustion of squad foreman Gilbert Kohnen who was killed in the fire. He was among the first of his entire party to succumb from fatigue and his example caused his party to straggle and become disorganized.
2. Contributing causes of the deaths of the aforementioned enrollees.
 - a. Lack of organized forest fire fighting training.
 - b. Lack of an actively organized safety committee.
 - c. Failure of both the company commander and the camp superintendent to take proper measures to comply with paragraph C, page 2, and paragraphs 1, 2 and 3, page 142, Civilian Conservation Corps Safety Regulations.
3. Regulations fix the responsibility for all safety training for operations outside of camp with the camp superintendent. Regulations made the company commander the Chairman of the Safety Committee.
 - a. While the omission on the part of the company commander to take the initiative with reference to the training of the crews in forest fire fighting may be viewed on an administrative neglect, still it is the opinion of this Board that this failure made an contribution to the disaster. These regulations were also in the hands of the Technical Service and the evidence shows conclusively that the Technical Service did not exercise this function properly.
 - b. Regulations state specifically that enrollees and foremen must be trained in forest fire fighting before being permitted to fight forest fires. Since the compliance with this provision of the regulations rests with the camp superintendent, it is the opinion of this Board that the failure of the company commander to comply with them made no contribution to this disaster.

The Board adjourned at 1:45 P.M., October 25, 1938, sine die.

ALTON C. MILLER,
Captain, Inf-Res.,
President

HERMAN M. LEVY,
1st Lt., Med-Res.,
Member

LEROY FOX
1st Lt., USMC,
Recorder