

Attention: Mr. Wirt

INQUISITION Indented and taken at EMPORIUM, in the County of Cameron, State of Pennsylvania, beginning on the 31st day of October, A.D., 1938, before Dr. J.D. Johnston, Coroner of the County aforesaid, upon the VIEW OF THE BODIES OF Basil Bogush of Conemaugh, Pa., John Boring of Johnstown, Pa., Andrew Stephanic of Twin Rocks, Pa., Howard May of Erie, Pa., and Gilbert Mohney of Ridgway, Pa., then and there lying dead; upon the oaths of (1) Chas. A. Counsel, (2) J. Wright Mason, (3) Grover Nickler, (4) Charles H. Edwards, (5) L. C. Wykoff, (6) Charles J. Dodge, SIX good and lawful men of said County aforesaid, who being duly sworn and charged on the part of the Commonwealth to inquire when, where, how and after what manner the said Basil Bogush, John Boring, Andrew Stephanic, Howard May and Gilbert Mohney, came to his and each of his death.

DO UPON THEIR OATHS STATE:

- I. That the deaths of the above mentioned individuals occurred between the hours of 3.30 P.M. and 4.30 P.M., Wednesday, October 19, 1938 while engaged in fighting a forest fire on Pepperhill Run, Grove Township, Cameron County, Pa.
2. That they perished by burns sustained by fire.
3. That death in each instance occurred while engaged in the performance of duty.
4. That none of the above-named individuals were under the influence of alcohol or narcotics at the time of death.

Realizing the need for the continuation and betterment of a forestry conservation program and

Realizing the need for the future service of C.C.C. enrollees and members of the Technical Service of the U.S. Forestry Department under the supervision of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the conservation of our forests, we make the following finding and recommendations with reference to the death of the above designated individuals.

(1)...That the forest fire in which the above-named individuals lost their lives on October 19, 1938 was of incendiary origin from cause or causes unknown and was set by the hand or hands of some person or persons unknown.

(2)...That there is a dual responsibility between the U.S. Army in charge of C.C.C. enrollees and the Technical Service of the U.S. Forestry Department under the supervision of the U.S. Department of Agriculture

for the safety, training and protection of C.C.C. enrollees as it relates to forest fire fighting.

(3)...That although there was a Safety Council composed of the Camp Commander, the Project Supervisor and the Camp Physician, yet they did not properly organize or function as such Safety relates to forest fire fighting by the enrollees and as a result thereof, Lt. Rodman Haynes Camp Commander, Earl F. Getz, Project Superintendent and the Camp Physician, should be reprimanded and disciplined for their failure to properly organize and function.

(4)...That although regulations and instructions on forest fire fighting by enrollees of C.C.C. Camps was promulgated on April 20, 1938 but by ruling, such regulations do not become effective until they reach the hands of the Camp Commander, yet such regulations did not reach the hands of Lt. Rodman Haynes, Camp Commander of Camp S-I32, Cameron, Pa., in whose camp the fatalities occurred, until October 21, 1938, a period of two days after the tragedy; the Coroner's jury disapproves of such laxity on the part of the C.C.C. organization in transmitting such instructions and recommends that future orders relating to forest fire fighting be dispatched more promptly and with more definite orders to Camp Commanders as to the need, purpose, use and execution of such orders and regulations.

(5)...That copies of "Instructions to C.C.C. Camps regarding Forest Fire Extinction" was in the hands of the Technical Service at Camp S-I32 since May, 1937, yet the instructions contained therein as to the training of enrollees of the C.C.C. relating to forest fire fighting had not been carried out since July, 1938, after which time a number of new enrollees commonly called "rookies" had entered Camp S-I32 and received no instructions in forest fire fighting. Laxity in this respect is condemned and those responsible therefor should be reprimanded and disciplined.

(6)... That C.C.C. enrollees coming from far scattered sections of the State; unacquainted with local hills and mountains and unacquainted with forest fire fighting, should be given specific instruction with respect to local conditions, wind currents, grades and slopes of hills, the nature and re-action of different underbrush in a forest fire, the nature and purpose of equipment assigned to them for forest fire fighting and the manner in which to handle such equipment.

(7)... That there should be a closer co-operation between the Technical Service and the Army as to the training, experience, qualifications both physical and mental of C.C.C. enrollees for forest fire fighting.

(8)... Regulations provide that "Each Crew will be in charge of a Fire Warden Foreman". Gilbert Mohney was not a fire warden and by reason of that fact should not have been in charge of a crew of enrollees on forest fire fighting. This regulation, should be more rigidly enforced.

(9)... Adolph Kammrath in charge of a crew of enrollees and first in charge of the fire on Pepperhill Run on October 19, 1938 selected the easy side of said fire and directed Gilbert Mohney to take his crew into the more difficult side of the fire. Such action under the circumstances is unwarranted and Adolph Kammrath should be reprimanded therefor.

(10)... William Houpt, the Forester attached to the Technical Service, was dispatched to the scene of the fatal fire to take charge. He did not inspect the fire by going around it, but merely viewed it hastily from the road. He dispatched a man to summon additional help. He sent instructions to Adolph Kammrath to take his crew to the top of the hill and bring their fire line down the hill, which orders were dis-obeyed. He also directed Gilbert Mohney to take his crew to the top of the hill and bring his fire line down. Mohney left a fire line of about 200 feet in length and started his crew to the top of the hill about 2400 feet distant and up a slope varying from 15 to 85 degrees. The fire swept passed the head of his fire line, came in behind him and his crew and trapped the deceased. Although Houpt was correct in his theory in ordering the crews to the top of the hill where was located the point of the fire, yet his manner and method of execution was at fault; he did not inspect the fire as to its rate of speed, wind currents, slope of the mountain, but merely issued a blanket order to go to the top of the hill without stating what course to take, distance to remain away from the fire under the wind conditions, keeping of his crew together, smoke conditions or otherwise. More careful instruction should have been issued. William Houpt sensing the gravity of the situation by sending for more help when he arrived at the scene of the fire, should have remained at the scene of the fire instead of leaving about thirty minutes after his arrival even though he returned to his own crew, who were merely patrolling fire already under control. Having been dispatched to take charge of the fire, he should have done so and for this laxity, he should be reprimanded and disciplined.

(11)... That a crew foreman qualified to take charge of a work crew is not also qualified to take charge of a forest fire crew, unless such foreman is a Fire Warden.

(12)... That Gilbert Mohney's physical make-up disqualified him for forest fire fighting and he should not have been sent in charge of a crew on this fire.

(13)... That forest fire fighting crews should not be sponsored on the same make-up as work crews, but that said crews should be organized in conformity with their fitness and qualifications for that purpose derived from training and experience.

(14)... We condemn Lt. Rodman Haynes Camp Commander, and Project Supt., Earl F. Getz, having been absent from camp during forest fire season and recommend that such practices be stopped.

(15)... William Schooley an Engineer in command of the Technical Service on October 19, 1938 had no forest fire fighting training and knew nothing of the qualifications of enrollees to be dispatched to forest fires. Although he acted under orders of his superior William E. Getz in dispatching Gilbert Mohny's crew. We condemn his having done so without knowledge of the qualifications of Gilbert Mohny the foreman in charge of said crew, as well as the enrollees. We condemn the practice of an inexperienced and unqualified individual being left in charge of the Technical Service during forest fire fighting season and recommend that such practices be corrected.

(16)... It is the consensus of opinion of this jury that no one individual was more responsible for the death of the above-named deceased more than any other individual, but that William E. Houpt, Adolph Kammrath, Lt. Rodman Haynes, Earl F. Getz, William E. Schooley and the Camp Physician, in one form or another were lax and negligent in the performance of their duties and that such laxity and negligence contributed to the death of the above deceased, but without any intent on their part that the above deceased should lose their lives. It is further the consensus of this jury that there was a laxity on the part of the superior officers of the above designated local officials of Camp S-132, Cameron, Pa., by reason of their failure to have forest fire regulations in the hands of the local Camp Commander prior to the time of the tragedy and in not having made proper inspection and inquiry as to the training of enrollees in forest fire fighting. We believe some responsibility also rests upon the superior officers of both the U.S. Army and the Technical Service.

(17)... As to the deaths of Ross Hollobaugh and George Vogel, we make the same findings but inasmuch as these two enrollees died in the Renovo Hospital, jurisdiction in connection therewith, properly lays in the hands of the Coroner of Clinton County, Pa.

(18)... As to the death of Stephen Jacofsky, we make the same findings, but inasmuch as he died in the St. Marys Hospital, jurisdiction in connection therewith properly lays in the hands of the Coroner of Elk County, Pa.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, as well the aforesaid Coroner as the aforesaid Jurors, have to this Inquisition set their hands and seals at Emporium, Pa., this 12th day of November, A.D., 1938.

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(Coroner (Seal))

I. \_\_\_\_\_ (L.S.)      4. \_\_\_\_\_ (L.S.)  
2. \_\_\_\_\_ (L.S.)      5. \_\_\_\_\_ (L.S.)  
3. \_\_\_\_\_ (L.S.)      6. \_\_\_\_\_ (L.S.)

DISCONTINUED

DEPARTMENT OF  
FOREST & WATERS

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BENJAMIN  
HALLGREN

