

CALL MEMORANDUM

9693

Age 16

NAME OF DECEASED	R. B. FRYER
RESIDENCE	3RD & TIPPECANOE - SAN BERNARDINO
PLACE OF DEATH	GRANITE MOUNTAIN - SAN FELIPE 7/19/42 7:00 AM
PLACE OF ACCIDENT	DO
DATE AND TIME OF ACCIDENT	7/19/42 APPROX. 7:00 A.M.
DATE OF CALL	7/19/42 11:50 A.M.
CALL RECEIVED BY	BONE
INFORMANT	LT. KIRK - CALIF. STATE GUARD
BODY SENT TO ERICKSON	BY CORONER
TIME CALL MADE	7/19/42 1:40 P.M.
PROPERTY TAKEN BY	DID NOT HANDLE
	Lieutenant Fabun - Commanding Officer Co. F - 311th Infantry California State Guard

REMARKS:

The decedent, a private of Company "F", 311th Infantry, California State Guard, was burned to death while employed in fighting a brush fire on the north slope of Granite Mountain. Death was apparently instantaneous when he was overtaken by the wind-driven flames while running down hill toward the safety of a fire trail recently cut through the brush. The body was found by his superior officers and Forest Service employees lying face down with the head pointing down hill toward safety. The position of the body indicated that the deceased may have stumbled and fallen before being overcome by the flames.

The Coroner's office was notified by Lieutenant Kirk of the Calif. State Guard, on duty at the scene, and the body removed to the Erickson's Mortuary, La Mesa, California, by order of the undersigned Deputy Coroner.

Investigation disclosed that the decedent with other members of his Company, along with several other Companies of the same California State Guard Regiment, had been fighting a heavy brush fire which started from lightning on July 15th, at a point believed to have been near Box Canyon. The fire spread in a westwardly direction, covering the north slope of Granite Mountain, where the several Companies of the California State Guard Regiment under the direction of California State Forestry Rangers were aiding in combatting the flames.

The decedent, R. B. Fryer, and approximately 30 other members of his Company under Lieutenant Fabun, had been on the fire line all night and were worn out. They were called off the line and dropped back for what was considered a safe distance into the brush for a rest. It is

(Over)

R. B. FRYER - Continued:

believed that these weary men and their officer were asleep when a sudden shift of the wind, which observers declare to have been in the nature of a whirlwind, carried burning material several hundred feet above the ground surface and moved it rapidly in a circular motion finally dropping the flaming embers behind the sleeping group, igniting the brush around them.

These men, aroused from their sleep and dazed, were led safely by the Forest Rangers and associates to a nearby trail recently made for a fire break, except in the case of the decedent and George Nolte, age 16, also of Co. "F", 311th Infantry, California State Guard. The latter two men, confused, started running down the slope of the mountain paralleling the safety trail or fire break. In the confusion they could not be headed off and directed to safety by the few rangers and officers who were busy with about 28 of their companions. Lt. Fabun, in command of the Unit, states that he chased the two men who lost their lives, but was unable to overtake them or help. He apparently had a narrow escape personally.

As stated, the decedent, R. B. Fryer, was burned to death in the brush. George Nolte was severely burned and rushed to the County Hospital, San Diego, where he was admitted at 11:20 A.M., of the same date, July 19th, 1942. His death occurred at this hospital on the date following entry, 7/20/42, at 6:40 A.M. Death in each case was caused by 2nd degree burns.

In investigating the manner in which the fire fighting was conducted, we find that the usual precautions were taken and the usual method, a back firing, was employed as customary with experienced rangers. We find that the fire in question was unusually severe and that the terrain presented great difficulties. The fire had been fought for several days with limited help and all rangers and State Guard Officers had been continually on the fire line with practically no rest. In spite of weariness, the men in charge appear to have done everything humanly possible both to combat the fire and protect their men, a number of whom were inexperienced.

The direct cause of the accident was unexpected impetus given by a whirlwind which broke at the base of Granite Mountain, when two points of fire came together from an angle at this point. Such whirlwinds are very rare, but are known to have happened in this County previously. On such occasions, nothing can be done to prevent the immediate spread of the fire caused by descending embers. In this particular case it was unexpected and impossible to stop before the fire spread to the sleeping unit of guardsmen. Prompt action both by rangers and guard officers prevented further loss of life.

We find no criminal responsibility in the death of the two men in the accident, and no Inquest is considered necessary.

WITNESSES: Lt. Fabun - Co. "F" - 311th Infantry - State Guard.
Sgt. Maxwell - Same address.
Robert McNally - Calif. Forestry Service.
Manuel Ferris - Same address.
Sam Hedanus - Same Address.

Industrial accident - Burns.
Granite Mountain - San Felipe.

Cause - Caught by change in direction of fire. *J. S. Bone* Deputy