A WORLD AFIRE

Heroes in the Burning of the Northwestern Forests

By

G. W. OGDEN

FOR twenty days several forest fires had been burning in the timber reserves of the Northwest—in Idaho and Montana. In the cañons and valleys of the timbered country where these isolated fires raged, a resinous, sooty smoke had hung for days, sometimes smothering the sun, turning midday into night. In the villages lamps were lighted at three o'clock in the afternoon. Conductors on trains carried lanterns all day to read the tickets of their passengers.

Nature appeared to be stifled under this curtain of smoke, with no energy left to lift it or clear it away. People panted for a breath of untainted air. Their lungs were burning, their eyes inflamed. Life in the mountains had become almost intolerable.

So fell the evening of August 20, 1910 Men knew only by their timepieces that night was drawing near; the visible margin between night and day was lost in the polar blackness which hung over the wooded mountain land. Yet these fires were not large nor destructive; and they were guarded by careful forest rangers and their hardy crews, who had hemmed them by trenches and confined them by circumvallate trails, over which forest fires had seldom been known to pass. That all was safe was the general belief. Upon that evening men were chafing only for a breath of wind to clear the smoke out of the skies, a shower of rain to put an end to the smoldering fires.

Yet at that very hour nature was vibrant with a message which fell unread. The air was oppressingly quiet, suffocatingly dead. The stillness of desolation rested above camps and towns, even where men by hundreds lived. There was no carrying power in the air; sounds were muffled as by a vacuum. Birds staggered through the smoky

chaos on bewildered wings, panting, lost. Horses strained at their halters, looking upon their masters with strange eyes, uncomforted by caresses, unassured by words. When a beast, by a terrified lunge, broke its restraining tether, it dashed away into the wilderness. Even dooryard fowls here and there deserted their coops, seeking a refuge at the margin of some stream. Dwellers in the woods and travelers on the dim trails saw forest creatures flying in one general direction, as if pursued by a foe that struck a deeper terror than man. The fear of man, indeed, seemed lost in them. Scarcely would bear, deer, mountain lions lift their heads at sight of a man, or move out of his path to let him pass.

A great tragedy was imminent in nature. The air was charged with a warning which men, their instincts paralyzed by ages of disuse, could not read nor understand.

There came at length a timid wind, sighing through the tree-walled cañons. It struck hot upon the forehead, it burned dry upon the lips, ruffling the smoke mantle for a moment, soon to die away. The dwellers in the great Coeur d'Alene forest reserve, in the neck of Idaho—which is seen on the map like the hock of a ham—felt it first, as it came threading ahead of the mighty tempest out of the northwest. Again it stirred, like the cautious step of a thief, and again, hotter, closer. It freshened steadily, rolling away the smoke, showing the sun red as iron under the smith's hammer, far down near the edge of the world.

That was all the warning the tempest of fire gave. It was as if it had indulged the oft-voiced desire of dying men to look once more upon the sun. Out of the northwest, over the mountains, it came. Bearing flaming brands, which it flung on all sides, it came. Howling, roaring, the fires, but a few minutes before miles away, were upon the hamlets and camps, upon the lone cabins of settlers, leaping up the green mountain sides, streaming across cañons their long banners of obliterating flames.

The hurricane had seized upon the small fires, fanning them furiously, scattering them abroad through miles of forest, each falling spark to kindle a raging fire-storm of its own. Since early in May no rain had fallen in the Bitter Root mountains. The Coeur d'Alene timber reserve, in the panhandle of Idaho; the Cabinet, Clearwater,

Photograph by W. D. McLellan, Spokane, Washington.

NIGHT PICTURE OF THE FOREST FIRE THAT SWEPT OVER WALLACE, IDAHO, TRAVELING EIGHT MILES IN TWENTY MINUTES.

Photograph by W. D. McLellan, Spokane, Washington.

MANY FIRE FIGHTERS, MINERS, AND SETTLERS ARE ALIVE TO-DAY THROUGH THE PROMPT ACTION OF RANGER R. M. DEBITT, WHO HAD CHARGE OF EIGHT HUNDRED MEN.

and Lolo reserves in western Montana, were like so many open magazines of powder. Resinous spines, steeped in the drippings of pitch and turp from the overhead branches, lay many inches deep around the boles of the trees and beneath cluttering trunks and fallen brushwood—the accumulation of years. Man never laid the foundation for a fire more completely or carefully than nature had done in the great national forests of the Northwest last August.

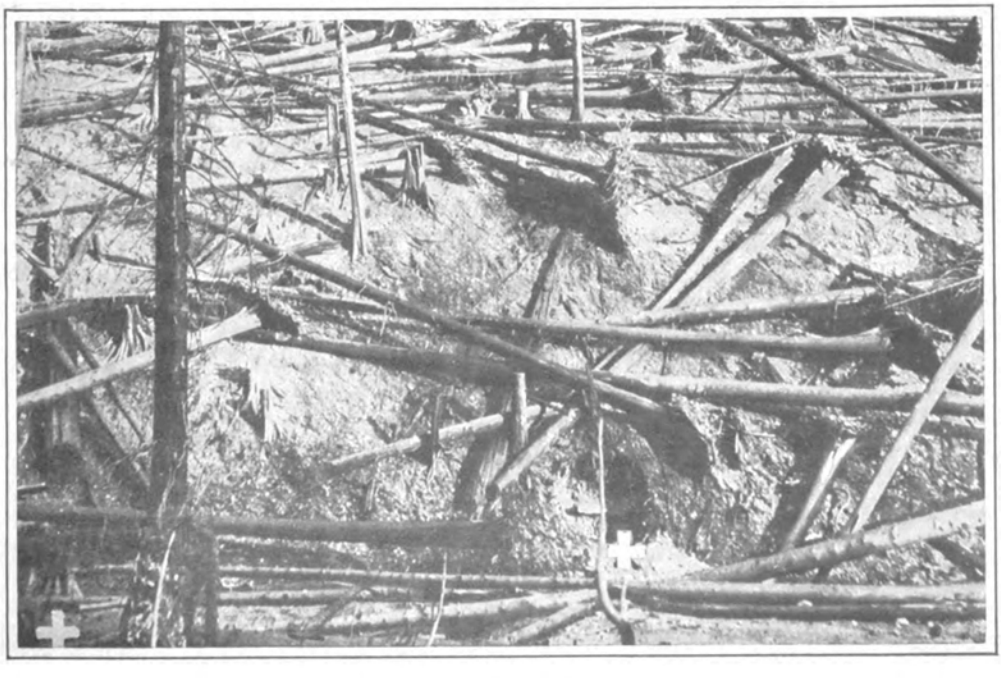
All was ready for the hurricane, all so nicely pitched, oiled, dried, that in six hours' time this tidal wave of fire spread over 2,000 square miles of splendid forest. When it finally burned out, it left—in charred, prone, and riven trunks of pine, fir, and cedar—billions of feet of timber, worth at the lowest estimate, a hundred million dollars—wasted, cruelly wasted. And strewn in shriveling heaps here and there along the black trail of this flood of fire huddled the remains of scores of brave men who had gone out to match their courage against its might.

There never was a forest fire like this since men have been keeping a chronicle of events. District Forester W. B. Greeley, in command of the first district—in which the burned region lies—says such a fire has not swept the forests of the Northwest in perhaps a thousand years. The history of forestry, he declares, contains no parallel. Its destructive force and the speed with which it traveled were marvelous. The ordinary forest fire travels slowly, at the most but a few miles a day. This one, according to an official of the Chicago, Milwaukee and Puget Sound Railway, who timed its advance over a known area, was traveling seventy miles an hour—a speed beyond anything known in wild fires, even upon the prairies. Imagine a prairie with grasses from 150 to 200 feet tall, and flames proportionately high beating over it at seventy miles an hour, and you will be able to conceive in some measure the magnitude of the August fire in the timber reserves of the Northwest.

It swept uphill and downhill with unabated speed, although a fire in a mountain country usually rushes up hillsides much faster than it burns down. When the vanguard of the fire reached a cañon, it merely leaped across, no matter how wide the chasm. In one known instance it leaped a mile. At Wallace, Idaho, where the timber on the

Courtesy of W. G. Weigle.

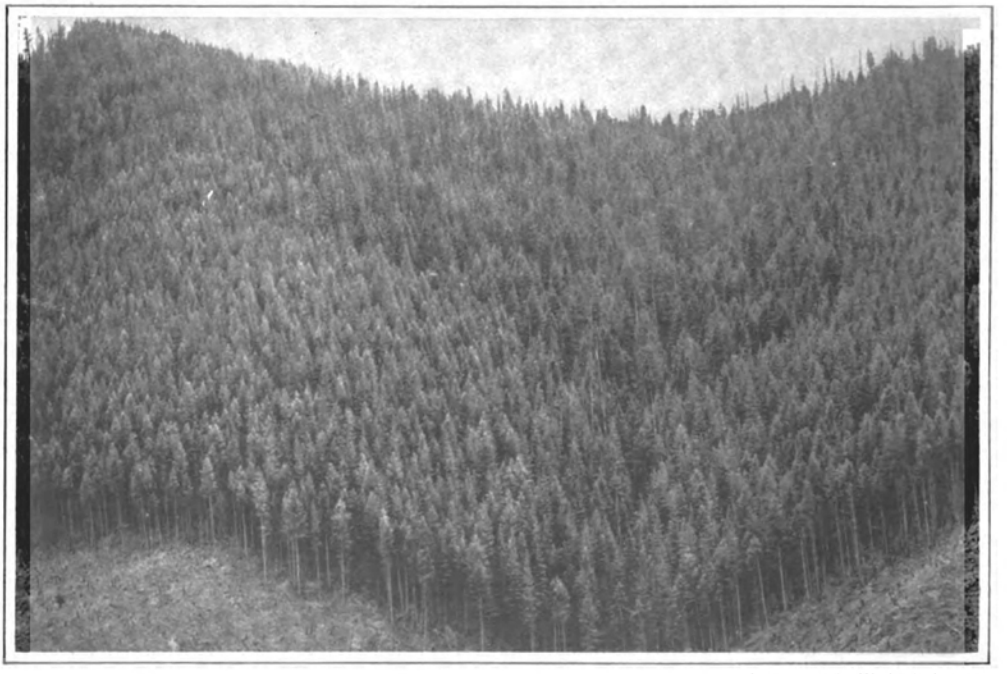
THESE PICTURES SHOW THE SAME SPOT BEFORE AND AFTER THE FIRE. ABOVE IS JOSEPH BEAUCHAMP'S HOMESTEAD WHERE RANGER BELL'S CREW TOOK THEIR STAND. THE WHITE PINE, MARKED WITH A CROSS, IN FALLING KILLED THREE MEN. BELOW, THE PICTURE SHOWS THE WOODED HILL BACK OF THE HOUSE, THE LOWER LEFT-HAND CROSS MARKING THE SPOT WHERE THE HOUSE STOOD. THE CROSS IN RIGHT CENTER INDICATES THE TRENCH WHERE SEVEN MEN PERISHED.



mountain sides was small, flaming limbs and masses of burning moss were carried from one mountain to another, above the town, a distance of more than half a mile. The flames caught the resinous foliage and long streamers of pendent moss with the hissing roar of great skyrockets. In a breath the proudest, oldest knights in this ancient guard of the mountains were stripped of verdure, their blackened trunks hurled contemptuously to the ground by the tempest which drove the wild ocean of fire before it.

Living man has not witnessed a more appalling sight. Days afterward, men who was not more terrible. Had there been as many people in its reach as in the zone of Pelée, the forest fire's toll might have been as great. It trailed its smoke for more than 1,200 miles. It shut out the sun completely at Billings, Montana, 500 miles distant, for days together; it obscured the sky at Denver, Colorado, more than 800 miles away; its taint was seen upon the sky at Kansas City, and noted by the weather observer there.

In six hours the damage was done, though for five days the slow, fierce after-fires burned among the fallen trunks, spreading to sheltered cañons and districts which had es-



Photograph by W. D. McLellan, Spokane, Washington.

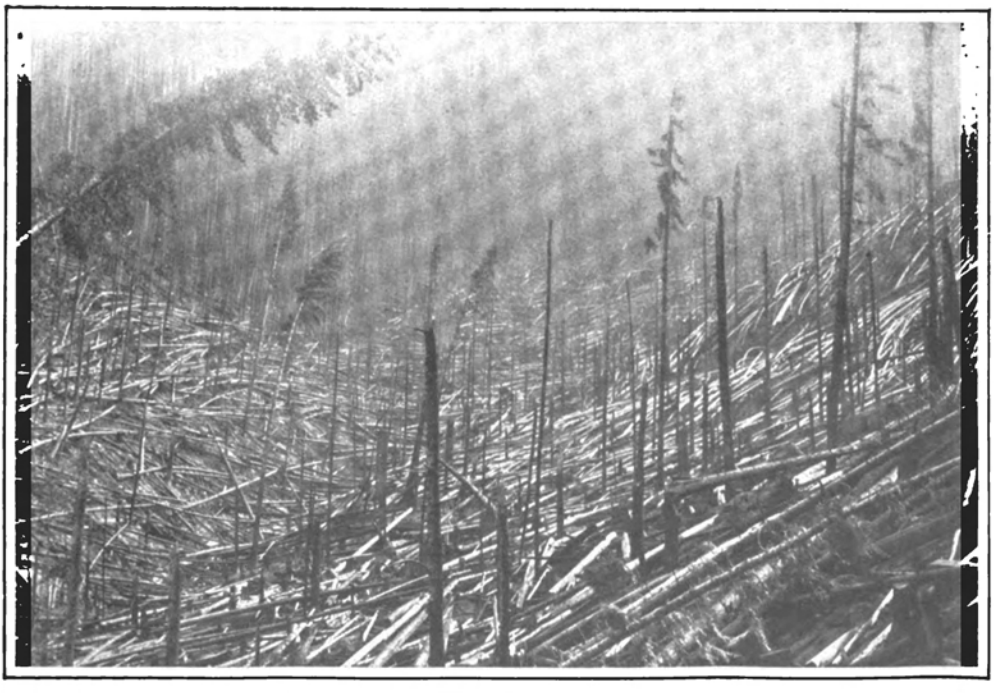
WHERE THE GREEN FOREST LATELY STOOD——

went through it were dumb in their struggle for words to measure its horrors. "The world was afire," they said, "the earth, the air, everything." Lightning flashed out of the great clouds of smoke; incandescent flames, burning like carbon gas, sprang up, whistling their sharp notes above the roar of tempest and fire and the crash of falling trees—sprang up with nothing to feed on but air. In the superheated atmosphere it appeared that all nature had become outlawed.

No, there never was a forest fire like this. Even Pelée, with its mud deluge, its gas, caped the first charge. Six hours destroyed what the ages had wrought; for foresters say that many of the trees lost in the fire were more than a thousand years old. Some of the largest cedars ever found have grown in the Coeur d'Alene reserve, thousands of them from four to twelve feet in diameter. It is believed that they sprang from the soil in the same period which saw the birth of the giant sequoias of California, and it is known that many of California's big redwoods are not merely a thousand but twenty-five hundred years old. Many a patriarch older, perhaps, than the cedars upon the slopes

Photographs by W. D McLellan, Spokane, Washington.

——THERE SPREADS NOW A SCENE OF DESOLATION. BLACKENED TRUNKS, PILED IN THE SPORT OF THE DESTRUCTIVE FIRE-STORM LIKE STRAWS, LIE THICK UPON THE STEEP MOUNTAIN SIDES, OR STAND, STRIPPED OF LIMBS AND BARK—GAUNT SKELETONS IN A PICTURE OF DEATH.



W. R. LANNING, CHIEF CARPENTER OF THE MISSOULA DIVISION OF THE CHICAGO, MILWAUKEE & PUGET SOUND R. R., SAVED THE LIVES OF NO LESS THAN FIVE HUNDRED PEOPLE.

of Lebanon, lies prone upon the ground, its grandeur and its grace forever gone.

More ghastly is the human wreckage in the black trail of the great fire that overwhelmed settlers, rangers, hamlets. Bodies of men were found in the track of the fire on hands and knees, faces turned back in the direction from which it descended upon them. It struck them with death suddenly, leaving in many cases scarcely more than their bones.

Many of the dead were not identified. In many cases the bodies were almost entirely consumed, the watches, knives, and coins carried by the men melted. The fear that they might not be identified seemed to loom before these lost men at the last moment above all others. Wife, mother, friend, far away, might never know, and might misjudge the dead. So the poor roasting wretches took many means to preserve from the flames letters, cards, trinkets, by which they might be known. Some scraped with the last strength of their burning hands little holes in the earth, put their papers in them, then flung their shriveled bodies down upon the cache to die. Some had only time to place the identifying articles under their chests before the shrieking red death overwhelmed them. They were found so, their names preserved to those from whom they were divided.

And the injury to the living was more serious than the suffering of the dead. Human beings in greater numbers have perished in other, and heavier, calamities than this, but never before have human beings lived through the tortures which hundreds endured in this fire; some caught in cañons roofed in flame that streamed from hilltop to hilltop, fighting the flames there through hours and hours of terrific heat; some floundering through blazing woods to lake margins, to river sides, maimed, flayed, blinded, contorted.

Courtesy of W. G. Weigle.

EDWARD C. PULASKI WAS IN COMMAND OF FORTY MEN ON PLACER CREEK. THEY WERE FORCED TO TAKE REFUGE IN THE TUNNEL OF AN ABANDONED MINE. PULASKI STOOD AT THE ENTRANCE WITH DRAWN GUN, FORCING THE MEN BACK, AND SAVED ALL BUT SIX.

Certainly, many more were lost in the fire than the official report of the dead shows. None has been reported by the government representatives save those whose remains have been found. In addition to the list of eighty-one dead, there are 125 missing, unaccounted for. Doubtless they, too, are dead and the fire has obliterated all trace of them.

And yet—

Any one of the small fires from which the destructive flood of flame sprang could have been put out by one forest guard at the beginning, *if he could have reached it.* It sometimes takes a man hours to work his way even a few miles through the tangle of underbrush and fallen timber in these old woods. For *there are no trails in the forest of the Northwest,* although the need of them has been constantly pointed out, the building of them unremittingly urged, by the men in the forestry service, ever since the reservations were made. For the want of a nail the shoe was cast, the rider thrown, the battle lost; for the want of trails the finest white pine forests in the United States were laid waste and scores of lives were lost. The government hadn't even tools for the recruits to work with—for those who were hired to help fight the August fires, everything had to be bought. Supplies, even water in some cases, had to be carried to them by packhorses, and the government had no horses. Horses were hired this past summer at two dollars a day each, enough money being paid out thus to buy horses for the various ranger stations in the Northwest for ten years. "Give us trails, telephone lines, horses"—that is the constant supplication to the powers of the men who are trying to guard the forest reserves. *Forty-five miles of trail in the Coeur d'Alene reserve would have saved the lives of fifty men.*

There was no lack of men—and brave men—to fight the fire. The foresters had been watching night and day; they had hired men by hundreds from Butte, Missoula, Helena, Spokane, and distributed them in gangs of twenty to one hundred through the four reserves in Montana and Idaho—an army of 2,500 men. Each gang was under the direction of an experienced man, ranger or forest guard, who knew the country foot by foot. Camps had been established near the various fires, which were looked upon by the rangers as so many dangerous beasts, well leashed, but safer for being well guarded, also.

Some of the fire fighters were still at work, some in camp, some on the way to camp, when the tornado struck, fanning the hitherto confined fires into ungovernable fury. Instantly the rangers and all old hands saw in this great fire, reaching out with speed incredible, something against which man could not stand and fight, from which he could not fly and live. Quick action, cunning, knowledge of the forest, might be combined to save the lives of those incapable of acting for themselves. There was not a man of the guards, rangers, or foremen who could not have saved himself without much difficulty, knowing so well what to do; but there was not one of them who did not think of his men first. Many of them suffered injuries in saving others from which they will never recover.

"Drop everything but your water bottles, men, stay together and follow me," was the invariable order issued by the foresters in charge of the gangs. In many cases the men, unaware of their danger, took the order as an indication of cowardice on the part of their leader. Some of them jeered, refusing to obey. Others insisted on going to camp for supper. Days afterward some of their bones were collected among the ruins of the forest. Out of Ranger Debitt's force of eight hundred men, fifty-nine were lost, disregard of orders being accountable in almost every case. But where the men stuck to the rangers and foremen they were saved.

Riley Bonsteel, a barber from Missoula, was in a gang of forty, part of a detail of ninety men under the direction of Ranger W. H. Rock, of Avery. Bonsteel is a man of more than ordinary intelligence. He went out to be a fire fighter for the fun of it, like many another poor fellow who did not come through it as fortunately as he. He was one of the few, out of dozens with whom the writer talked, who could describe the scene through which he lived. Most of them shivered when asked about it. "Well, it was just awful," was as far as words could carry them. They would look down at swathed hands, bound in slings upon their chest, turn, walk away. It was not like being in a burning house; it was a burning world.

Bonsteel and his comrades were working in apparent security when they heard the fire approaching. The ranger ordered all hands to follow him, heading for an old burn of about five acres in extent, which was

near at hand. Racing for it, they reached the clearing just ahead of the fire. Trees were falling in every direction, the fire was screaming, the wind roaring. Coals of fire as big as a man's fist pelted them as thick as hail. It was night, about half past seven o'clock, and the world was red, a pit of hideous red. Between each two men there were two gallons of water, carried in flexible bottles. This water had been apportioned to them for the night, shortly before the wild fire came.

Overhead, across the old burn strewn with logs and forest débris, streamed an unbroken river of fire. From man to man the ranger went, telling them what to do. He had to shout in their ears, the roar of destruction was so great. If they hoped to live they must lie on the lee side of the fallen logs, faces to the ground. Already the air was so hot it cut the lungs like the fumes of acid; smoke and gases were stifling. Men stood in the fantastic light, their impotent arms lifted toward the sheet of hemming flame, shrieking prayers to the Almighty. The ranger was compelled at last to threaten some of them with his revolver before he could induce them to lie down in that fiery bed, two men in a place, so each could watch the other's clothing. Then he stood over them, like a shepherd over a flock of frightened sheep, holding them in for the supreme trial which was to come.

As far as it went, the water was used to wet the coats and blankets some of them had brought away in the rush, and to saturate handkerchiefs, which were bound over mouths and nostrils, at the ranger's direction. Each man had been told to breathe as near the ground as he could grovel. At intervals there fell a lull in the wild tumult of outlawed elements, and then were heard the shrieks and groans of roasting men, their piteous prayers for mercy. The logs all around them caught fire, the heavens rained fire. It seemed a marvel that a man could live a moment there. Once they saw one of their tortured number spring to his feet and dash away into the wall of fire. He fell, the flames closing round him. He alone, of the forty men, was lost.

After two hours of this broiling heat little puffs of cool wind began to break through their oven walls. An hour more and it had cooled so men left their shelters. Two volunteered to go to the creek, a mile away, for water. They went, through stifling smoke, over beds of coals, under the swinging menace of burning branches and tottering trunks, returning in safety. They found that the water of the icy stream had been heated by falling trunks of trees, which pent it up in a dam of fire. It was found afterward that fish in the stream had been boiled. Yet men, under the guidance of an experienced forester, lived through it, to join again, as from the dead, the world of the living.

Another ranger, Edward C. Pulaski, of Wallace, Idaho, was in command of forty men on Placer Creek. When he saw that the fire was out of hand, threatening their safety, he ordered his men to break camp and start for Wallace, about eight miles distant. Placing them in single file, ordering them to remain together, Pulaski took the lead and the start was made. They had not proceeded far when they appeared to have become suddenly surrounded by fire. The men grew panicky. Pulaski went among them to give assurance that he would lead them out safely, if they would follow him. Then, placing one of them, an old man crippled by rheumatism, upon his horse, Pulaski took the bridle and resumed the march.

Smoke was so dense that the men had to hold to each other to prevent becoming separated and lost. It was impossible, in spite of the giant flames which leaped around them, to see a man ten feet away. Falling trees crashed around them, rending their way to earth through the limbs. Pulaski says that he saw columns of clear, white fire spring up like will-o'-the-wisps, feeding upon air. It seemed at length that their progress was choked by fire. Pulaski halted them, soaked a gunnysack with water, slipped it over his head, dashed away into the flames. The men began to prepare for death, believing the ranger would never return. But in a little while he was back, to lead them on. Halting them every little while, he dashed off on his perilous forays, coming back always to beckon them ahead.

Long before that time Pulaski, alone, could have reached a place of safety, but the men could not have saved themselves. Pulaski finally reached the tunnel of an abandoned mine, toward which he had been working, and ordered the men in. Even then the timbers at the mouth of the tunnel were on fire. It seemed an insecure retreat. Some of the men questioned the ranger's judgment and would not enter. "Get inside of that tunnel," said Pulaski, drawing

his revolver. "It's death for the man that disobeys me."

It was a short tunnel, but timbered all its length. Near the entrance a small spring trickled a feeble stream. The ranger led his horse into the cave, ordered his men to lie with faces against the ground, and began dashing water from the small pools upon the burning mine timbers. Already the tunnel was packed with smoke from the outside fires. The men found breathing more difficult than they had in the open, and begged the ranger to let them go. By that time the hurricane had mounted to its height. Blazing trees fell across the mouth of the tunnel, pouring fresh volumes of smoke into it.

In the gang of forty there were but few Americans, the others being of mixed nationalities. These few helped Pulaski to keep back the fire from the mine timbers until they fell, one by one, overcome by smoke and heat. The others, lying on the ground, were praying in many tongues, crying, begging for breath. A Swede sprang up and rushed upon the ranger, who stood grimly fighting the foe without and watching his men within, crying that he would kill Pulaski if he did not let him pass. The ranger drove him back with his revolver, compelling him to lie down.

In the five hours which followed, the cave became a madhouse. Gasping men, devoid of every sense but the need of air to breathe, rushed upon him, grappled him, to be flung by the hardy ranger to the ground. They were raging maniacs, bereft of reason by such torture as men seldom endure, and live. But Pulaski held them there, to a man. How he stood at the mouth of that black pit and lived, when men who breathed near the earth smothered, choked, died, is a matter which sets a new standard for American hardihood. Even the horse which the ranger led into the tunnel fell to the ground and expired long before Pulaski sank.

The men became quiet after a while, some of them forever. At last the ranger's tough lungs and huge frame could bear no more. His senses clouded, his limbs failed, he fell. Outside, the fires burned low, the cool winds came, stealing into the smothering prison. Some one revived, crawled to the outside, filled his lungs with sweet air, shouted. Others joined him, creeping painfully, going back presently to help their companions out. Six of them were dead.

It was believed at first that Ranger Pulaski would lose his sight, but a few days in hospital brought him out sound and whole. At the end of a week he was ready for duty again. But for his heroic work all of the forty men would have perished.

Pulaski is the great-grandson of Count Casimir Pulaski, Polish exile, who fought and died for the cause of American independence. He is the oldest male in the direct line of descent, and inheritor of the title—count. But Pulaski, American forest ranger, does not go in for that sort of thing.

Ranger Bell, who had charge of a crew farther in the woods in the same fire, was entirely surrounded and sought shelter on the Joseph Beauchamp homestead. This homestead had only about half an acre cleared, which gave very little protection to the men, owing to the dense timber surrounding it. One large tree was blown down, falling on three of the crew, killing them outright, before the fire came.

The remainder of the crew, save seven men, got into a small stream near the cabin. There they lay, the fire burning all around them, even over them, protected only by the low bank of the streamlet from being crushed by the great trees which fell across it. All of the men who sought refuge in the stream were saved, although severely burned. The seven who left the main crew crawled into a ditch near by. They were burned beyond recognition.

Heroism like Pulaski's and Bell's was not always so successful even as theirs.

Ranger C. H. Watson rode eighty miles through the burning forest to the nearest station to raise a relief party for the rescue of six men in the Cabinet forest. These men became separated from the main body and were unable to find their way back to the camp. When Watson missed them, he set out, alone, to search for them. Four days and nights he roamed the burning, smoke-clogged wilderness without food, rest, or sleep. Failing in his quest, he turned his face toward headquarters of the military detachment doing patrol duty in the burning district. The camp was eighty miles away.

He was worn and burned when he started on his long ride, his horse was jaded, but he pushed on. At times the smoke was so dense that he was compelled to dismount and lie with his face against the ground. His horse often fell, struggling for breath. Side by side man and beast would lie, reviving at

length to rise and stagger on. One entire day the ranger walked and rode through a stretch of burning forest, from which blazing moss, bark, and foliage fell upon him and his horse. When he at last reached the military station, to which his compass and his unerring sense of direction had guided him as straight as a pigeon flies to its loft, the saddle upon which he sat was fire-crisped, the hair had been burned completely from his horse, his clothing hung in blackened shreds. Blood gushed from his lungs as he spoke, his eyes were almost sightless, his face and body raw with burns.

Yet he clung, reeling, to his saddle and insisted on leading the rescue party, which he pleaded must set out at once. They lifted him from his grotesque mount, against his protests. Next morning he led the relief party back into the woods, but it arrived too late. The six men were lost.

Many fire fighters, miners, and settlers are alive to-day through the prompt action of Ranger R. M. Debitt, in charge of the forestry station at Avery, Idaho. Debitt sent messengers into the threatened territory before the fire broke, ordering everybody out. Those in his district who heeded the warning were saved, reaching the railroad in time to be taken on board the relief trains. One gang of fire fighters on the north fork of the St. Joe River ignored Debitt's order to get out, and most of the men were lost. It was at the request of Debitt, also, that the Chicago, Milwaukee & Puget Sound Railway ran special trains from Avery to St. Joe, carrying out the inhabitants and picking up refugees along the line. But for those relief trains hundreds must have perished along the St. Joe River.

Avery was one of the last places in the Coeur d'Alene reserve to be reached by the fire. While the flames were pressing down upon it, the women and children were removed on a special train. They were given just thirty minutes to get ready. Already the roar of the approaching fire could be heard. Four passenger coaches were loaded, and the train set out for St. Joe under command of Sergeant John James of Company G, 25th United States Infantry, from Fort George Wright, Washington—a negro company, which, under command of Lieutenant E. E. Lewis, had been detailed to patrol the burning district and preserve order. Privates Chester Gerrard, William Hogue, Roy Green, and G. W. Bright were stationed on the platforms of the cars.

"They stuck to their posts like men," said Ranger Debitt. "The forests all along the way were on fire, the heat so intense that the varnish on the coaches blistered and the windows cracked. These negro soldiers stood on the platforms through this bath of fire and kept the doors closed, holding back the heat-crazed women and children, many of whom would have leaped off and been lost if they had not been restrained."

Another train of box cars carried most of the men away from Avery, the negro soldiers remaining to the last.

On the day the fire became unmanageable there were no fewer than a thousand people along the line of the C., M. & P. S. Railroad in the forty-eight miles between Avery, Idaho, and Haugan, Montana. These were mainly railway employees, their wives and children, and refugees from the interior, although there were many trades people in the villages. Four work trains were busy on that stretch of track under the direction of C. H. Marshall and W. R. Lanning, superintendent and chief carpenter, respectively, of the Missoula division. A telephone message to Superintendent Marshall from the girl operator at Kyle, a small station, gave the first alarm of the approaching fire. While they were talking the wires went down.

Marshall and Lanning at once ordered two of the trains to proceed along the line, picking up everybody. "Don't pass anybody, no matter who it is, and put every living soul aboard, whether they want to go or not," was the order given to the trainmen and the few American laborers who, the railroad officials knew from past experience, were the only men in the jumble of nationalities upon whom they could depend.

Before the trains had gone far, the fire was in sight. From mountain to mountain the flames leaped, with the speed of a fast train, sowing brands upon the slopes to kindle slower, even more deadly, fires. With the fire came the gale. Stones of a pound weight, gravel, dust, débris of the forest, were hurled before it, and soon clouds of smoke, fire-tainted, scorching, thicker than ever, completely obscured the sun.

More than four hundred people were herded into the cars east of the St. Paul Pass tunnel by Mr. Lanning and carried into the great tube, which is almost two

miles long. There they remained in safety, suffering somewhat from smoke. Under the direction of Superintendent Marshall several hundred were taken out by way of the east, to Haugan. In another, and shorter, tunnel, two hundred people found refuge. They were pulled there on a train by Engineer Roberts, who ran a blazing bridge, over seven hundred feet long and a hundred feet high, to put them there. When they reached the tunnel the oil in the tank was frying.

But that did not take care of all the people. Scattered along the line between the great tunnel and Kyle, Idaho, were many whom it seemed impossible to save. The fire was pouring across the track, many bridges were going. "We'll make a try for it, just the same," said Lanning.

An engineer and a fireman volunteered for the perilous venture, likewise a conductor on one of the work trains. With an engine and three cars they set out. It was apparent to all as they proceeded that they would never be able to return to the big tunnel. When the train reached the refugees huddled along the track, many of them had to be lifted, bodily, and put aboard. "Groups of Hungarians, bundles of bedding and clothes on their backs, stood crying, tears streaming down their faces," said Lanning. "We had to pick some of them up and put them in the cars, but when they once understood that there was a chance for life they fell to fighting, pulling each other from the train, pushing women and children out of the way, but sticking to their bedding to the last. We had to cut the ropes from their shoulders to make them let the bundles go."

Forty-seven people were picked up by Lanning's forlorn hope, and a run was made for tunnel 32, a short bore, but the only available refuge. As the train rushed forward the smoke was so thick that the engineer could not see the steam dome of his boiler. He did not know when the engine might strike a burned bridge or a fallen tree, but there was nothing to do but go on. He opened her wide and let her go, pounding into the mystery of smoke.

They made the tunnel, pulled into the middle of it, and stopped. Even there the fire reached in after them, and almost got them, too. A rivulet ran through the tunnel, and, by keeping their clothes wet, they managed to endure. The heat was so great along that stretch of railway, which was heavily bordered with timber, that pick handles were utterly consumed where the tools lay upon the ground, one in a place, as the workmen dropped them, apart from any other inflammable material. Water in barrels at the ends of bridges was boiled and evaporated away, the staves burning down to the level of the water as it sank. Fish in the streams were cooked; for days they floated, by thousands. Ties were burned out of the railroad tracks, the rails were buckled and kinked like wire. Everything was swept clean to the tunnels' mouths.

After forty-eight hours in his hot dungeon, Chief Carpenter Lanning walked out, to find nineteen of his bridges burned in forty-eight miles of track. He went to work to replace them. With 500 men, working night and day, he labored. In eleven and one half days he rebuilt sixteen bridges, ranging from 360 to 775 feet in length, and from 16 to 120 feet high, every one of them standard, permanent bridges. It was one of the most stupendous achievements in the history of railroading.

Besides that, Lanning, alone, has to his credit 500 human lives. He hasn't much to say about it; only this: "An American owes that to his country and his kind."

Superintendent Marshall also deserves great credit. But for the unselfish risk of life by these two truly brave men, the death roll of the Bitter Root divide would have been appalling. Only those who could have struggled on foot into the tunnels could have survived. Few would have made it, in that suffocating smoke and blinding heat.

Nor was the heroic work of the rangers limited to the six hours during which the fire raged. On Sunday morning, August 21, four crews set to work cutting trails to injured men and taking them out on packhorses. Of this rescue work, W. G. Weigle, of Wallace, forest supervisor of the Coeur d'Alene national forest, was the head, and through his unceasing toil and energy scores were saved from the list of the dead.

It was here in the Coeur d'Alene reserve, and in the Clearwater Reserve in western Montana that the fire spent its greatest force. In Wallace alone the loss was more than a million dollars. Wallace, by the way, is the home of Senator Heyburn. It seems like a visitation—the occurrence of this destructive fire in the territory represented by two senators—Heyburn, of Idaho, and Carter, of Montana—active in opposing appropriations for the protection of the

national forest reserves. In Senator Heyburn's state more than two thousand people became refugees from the flames, flying for their lives to Spokane and other cities.

The men in the forestry service did all that men could do in this terrible emergency. They fought the fire, and they fought it well. It may be charged in time—hints are being made already—that there was incompetency shown in the management of this forest fire. This is not true. The inability to reach the first fires before they grew to importance is not the fault of the forest guards or supervisors. *They had to cut trails.*

As for the origin of those first fires, it is not likely that they were started by the enemies of the government's conservation policy, as was at first reported, although this theory has its supporters in the Northwest. Forest supervisors and rangers attribute the beginning of the various isolated fires, from which the widespread conflagration sprang, to lightning, in most cases. Unguarded fires of careless or ignorant hunters and campers may have started a blaze or two, but the forestry men do not place the blame there, for the forest guards watch campers and hunters in the national forests with the greatest care.

Final, and official, figures on the damage resulting from this fire cannot be given for many months. The following figures are not official, nor final. They are based on estimates made two weeks after the fire. Government officials in the forestry service in the burned district say this estimate is conservative, too low rather than too high.

Human lives lost (known)	81
Missing and unaccounted for	125
Number square miles burned	2,000
Market value of timber in forest	$100,000,000
Loss in young timber	50,000,000
Loss to railroads (burned district)	3,000,000
Loss to city of Wallace	1,000,000
To settlers and lumber companies	5,000,000
Cost of fighting fire	150,000
Loss in labor to communities burned	500,000,000
Total loss	$659,150,000

The heaviest item in the loss attendant upon this fire was wages which would have been paid for labor in getting the timber out of these vast forests. This work was steadily going on, the government making constant contracts and sales. Supervisor Weigle estimates that the loss in labor to the communities burned will amount to five hundred million dollars.

There will be some salvage. Where the fallen timber is accessible it will be sold, such as is fit for lumber. The white pine must be removed within two years, as it becomes useless after that time. Along the railroad lines the government will sell what the fire spared for less than half its original value. But the fallen trunks in remote places must rot upon the ground. There is not enough of this wood left to pay lumber companies for building roads to get it out.

Where the green forest lately stood there spreads now a scene of desolation. Blackened trunks, piled in the sport of that destructive fire-storm like straws, lie thick upon the steep mountainsides, or stand, stripped of limbs and bark—gaunt skeletons in a picture of death. Mile upon mile the tumbled hills roll away, without a sprig of green to ease the melancholy wreckage.

This cruel waste of national property and of human life lies a heavy shadow upon the door-steps of certain members of the Congress of the United States. It could have been prevented. Let the people get that fact by rote, and remember it in time to come. IT COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED. If the forest supervisors had been provided with the proper equipment, if money had been appropriated to make trails and buy tools, horses, supplies, and to engage a sufficient force of foresters, this fire would not have occurred. This national calamity is blamable to the petulance and vindictiveness of certain men.

It was not even upon the selfish footing of the tragedies and disregard of human woe in our industrial world—this great national tragedy—because there was not the incentive of individual gain behind it. It is all loss, dead, irretrievable loss, due to the pique, the bias, the bull-headedness of a knot of men who have sulked and planted their hulks in the way of appropriations for the protection and improvement of these national reserves.

The blame lies at their doors, at the doors of these paid servants of the people. They did it. And this indictment, subscribed to by the frenzied hands of burning men, sealed by the calcined, fire-cleaned skulls, is not to be buried away out of sight with the other indictments of them, and the rest of their sins. It will lie there exposed, bare and unanswerable, for years, a blackened, burned-up, useless, needless waste.