

Ed Myers: From Flunky to Fire Lookout

Going West

I should tell how I left North Dakota to begin with. It was the fall of 1934, and my Dad had given me the news sometime during the summer that he couldn't afford to send me through any more school. I only had two years of high school done and he couldn't afford to send me back. So four of us—myself and my cousins Rich and Ray Croy and a cousin of theirs from east of Williston whose name, I think, was Harvey Vanderburg—made plans to get on the freight train and go west.

I was a little bit afraid of my Dad's reaction when he found out about this, so I didn't tell him. But I did tell Mom. I had my clothes—what little clothes I had, an extra shirt and pants and underwear—rolled up in a little roll with a belt around them, out on the porch, kind of hid. And that's the way I was going to go. Anyway, to make a long story short, my mother said that isn't the way to do it. Tell your Dad.

So I did. And he didn't get mad at all. He wanted to know how much money I had, and I had a couple dollars. He said, "Well, let's go out and sweep up the granaries." And so we went out to all the granaries with a shovel and a broom and swept them all out, put the sacks of wheat in the car and took them into Williston. When we got them sold, I had a total of five dollars, so I felt pretty rich.

Freight Train to Libby

Our first destination was going to be Libby, Montana. That's because our cousins Chuck and John Dobias had a shack on an aunt's place there. It was a little twelve-by-twelve building, and it had a table and a chair or two and a wood stove, and one bed. Also living in Libby was the Withee family, our uncle, but we weren't going to be staying with him, as he had lost his first wife (our aunt) and had remarried so that wouldn't have worked out.

Mostly what I remember on the freight train was cold, being awfully cold. This was early September. We rode boxcars with twenty-five or thirty other men, or flatcars with machinery, or rode on top, just hanging on. You had to get off at every stop, and sometimes your car might be left to be filled with wheat or machinery, so you got on another. When we got to Havre, Ray and the cousin decided they would take a different train down to Great Falls. They knew somebody down there or something and thought they would be able to get a job that way.

Rich and I stayed on the Great Northern and went over the top of the mountains. We just about froze; we didn't have any blankets or anything. When we got to Libby, the freight train went right straight through to beat the dickens, about forty miles per hour. We were about ready to jump and somebody else in the box car said, "Don't jump, don't jump, you'll kill yourself." So we rode right on and got off at Troy, which is about twenty miles further, because that was a division point on the railroad.

We hitchhiked back the next morning, but we didn't get any rides. We walked all the way—twenty miles. In our old, broken-down shoes, it wasn't a very good time.

When we got back to Libby, Chuck had two jobs, and he also had some dates for the weekend. He didn't really want the one job digging a hole for a septic tank so he gave that job to me. I worked there for three days, and got paid about three dollars a day.

Right away we could see that there weren't enough jobs in Libby to take care of all the people coming in from North Dakota and Montana and everywhere else. These freight trains were full of people because all we had in North Dakota was wind and dry weather. We hadn't had a crop since 1928, and this was 1934.

Going to Avery

So I wrote to my brother Ernie, who at the time was the barber in Avery, Idaho, to see if there were any jobs over there. He answered immediately, "If you can get here, you can go right to work. The whole country's burning up with forest fires."

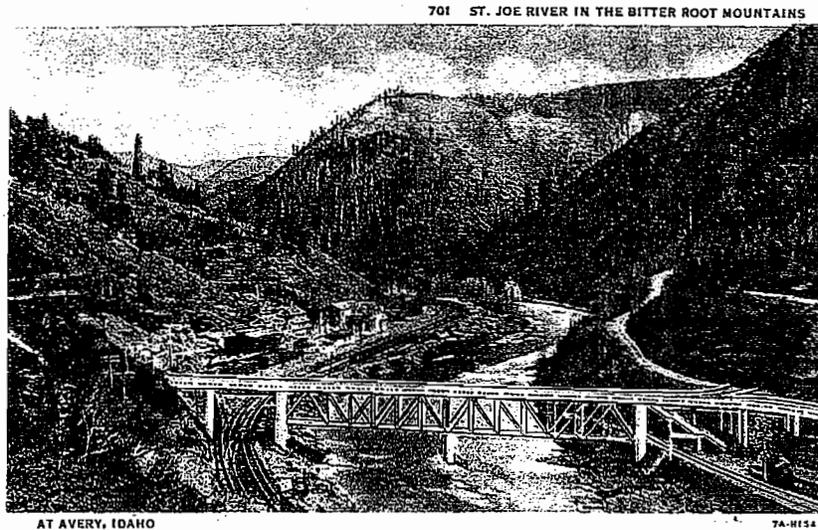
I couldn't get on a freight train in Libby because they didn't stop there, so I bought a ticket for about two-bits to go the twenty miles back to Troy. I think it was the first time I ever rode on a passenger train. I got in and took the first seat available and that happened to be the seat where the conductor sat. He started talking to me, and looking at my clothes and my age, and he never did ask me for my ticket, just assumed I'd crawled on and didn't have one, so he didn't embarrass me by asking for it. He told me I'd have to get off in Troy or they'd throw me off. So I got off in Troy and got on a freight train for Spokane.

I got into Hillyard in Spokane in the evening and started walking up the tracks. A couple of fellows were sitting in a car and they asked me what I was doing there and questioned me a bit. The one fellow turned out to be running for sheriff, and he said, "Come on, get in the car, we'll give you a ride downtown." He took me right to the Milwaukee Railroad station where I'd leave from the next morning. Avery was on the Milwaukee Railroad, and they didn't have any freight trains into Spokane—they leased track from the Union Pacific and ran a passenger line—so I had to buy a ticket.

I went across the street and got a room for twenty-five cents, and when I slammed the door shut the darn doorknob fell off and I was locked in my room. I crawled through the transom and got the doorknob and shoved it back through. I'd no more than got back in the room when somebody knocked on the door. I

opened it and there was a gal out there wiggling all over the place. She wanted to come in, and Lord, I didn't want her. Here I was staying in a whore house, and I didn't know it.

The next morning I went over and got on the train. I got to Avery about noon on a Saturday, and Tuesday morning I went to work for the Forest Service as a flunky.



Postcard of Avery, Idaho from 1930s

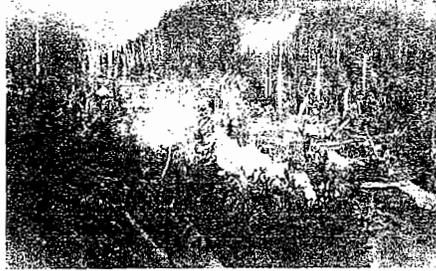
Forest Service Flunky

As a flunky, you'd go to work at four a.m., and you did anything and everything that the cook needed you to do—you cut wood, washed dishes, scrubbed floors, peeled potatoes, anything and everything. This was a man cook I worked for, and he was pretty good at teaching me how to do things.

After three or four days, another fire started further out in the district. That particular morning, I went to work at four a.m. as usual, and I waited and waited and waited and no cook showed up. So I remembered the things he did in the morning. I cut up the bacon and started it frying on the back of the stove, and the hotcakes I had all mixed up (they were sour-dough hotcakes so you didn't have to do very much). And there was nothing to do but just cook for these people, and they were busy doing something else so they didn't have time to help me. So that's the way we got by for quite awhile. Mostly they had to eat meat and potatoes, and I didn't have too much trouble with breakfast, but eventually we ran out of bread and cake and cookies and I wasn't good enough at the time to do anything about that.

They had been looking for a cook, and they finally found a retired lady cook downtown. She said she would cook if she could have a helper in addition to a flunky, so she talked another lady into the assistant's role. (The assistant, Ruth Lindow, worked for Ernie when he was the postmaster, and she later became the postmistress for thirty years or so.) The two of them were good friends and they worked together and I was the flunky. That was probably one of the easiest times I had flunkying. They dirtied a lot of pots and pans and dishes, but they were always trying to help out on everything. They hardly even asked me to peel potatoes.

That went on for ten days or two weeks, and then it started to rain, which put out most of the fires or got them under control. About that time the two cooks quit or were let go, and it was getting so close to the end of the season that they just closed up the kitchen.



Blister rust camp

They sent me up toward Round Top—fifteen or twenty miles up to a blister rust camp where they pulled the weed that gets down underneath and kills the white pine tree. A fellow gave me a ride by pickup and dropped me off where the trail started to the Fishhook Basin, and he went on to the Round Top Ranger Station. I had quite a time walking down in there because I hardly knew what a trail was.

I pulled weeds for a while, until the flunky in this camp quit. The cook found out I had worked as a flunky, and since it was raining all the time and I'd rather not pull weeds, I went into the kitchen.

I learned a lot from this cook, because he felt that everybody should know everything. So after a week, I was cooking the potatoes and vegetables, everything but the meat. Then word came up somehow from Ernie that there was a job opening up at the grocery store, and I'd better come down and get it because it would be a steady job. So I quit and hiked out to the road, and caught a ride or two going down, and I went to work for Ernie White at the grocery store.

Working in the Avery Store

There were no telephones in Avery, so my job was to drive a Dodge panel truck out first thing in the morning both ways and take orders from all the people who lived there. I delivered milk on the first trip, take orders, come back and put them up into boxes, then start out after eleven and again after my lunch delivering the orders. I was paid fifty dollars a month, twenty dollars of which went to Ernie and Lucille for board. The hours were eight a.m. to six p.m., and until 1 p.m. on Sundays.

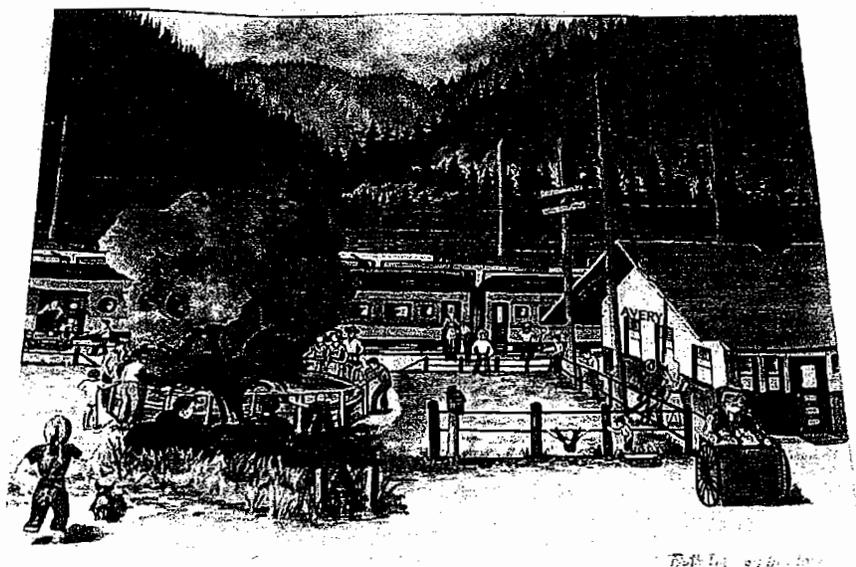
On the first day, the owner's wife said it was time to go to lunch and I asked, "How long do we take for lunch?" She said, "As long as it takes to eat." So I got that message the first day.

I enjoyed this job. Avery was such a pretty little town at that time. The town was mainly just railroad-owned, a good portion of it, and the Theriault family owned a portion of it, and the Forest Service had a portion of it, and that was about it. A few houses that were individually owned otherwise.

There was no wind there to speak of, and lots of snow. The snow would stand up on the tree branches until it got so heavy that the branches would just shake it down. There was no way out during the winter except by railroad.

There was a swinging bridge down by the roundhouse that went across the St. Joe River. Once it was so filled with snow that I got stuck right in the middle of it. I tried to back up to get another start, and the right-hand side of the car went over the side. I was glad it was the right-hand side because I got off on the other side and walked over to the roundhouse and they helped me get out of there. Ernie White was so mad about it that he wouldn't let me go down in there to take orders anymore until the railroad cleared off the bridge. The wives weren't about to let me quit taking orders, so it wasn't very long before they had the snow off of that bridge.

At noon every day, the train came in and I always had to meet it. That's when the bread and milk and fresh vegetables came in, and I had to bring that up to the store and put it away. The canned goods usually came by freight train, so we just waited till it showed up and the people at the depot let us know it was there. Gasoline came by freight in fifty gallon drums. You had to roll them onto the truck and roll them off. No help from the boss; he wasn't a bit interested in rolling those barrels off.



Ruth Larson Lindow painting of Avery, Idaho in 1930s

Sunday morning was usually a very easy day, so far as customers were concerned. We didn't go out to take orders on that day. So whenever we got caught up about nine or so in the morning, I usually had to take the car and do the maintenance work on it, because there was no service station in Avery. I had to change the oil and grease it and that kind of stuff.

Cutting Meat

We got our meat for the store mostly in hindquarters of beef, and loins of pork, and once in a while, a front quarter which we had to cut up ourselves. I finally learned how to cut those up but never did get very good at it. But I had to do it because the boss didn't like to do it.

We ground our own hamburger. There was a great big wheel on this grinder, and you'd get it going real fast and then stuff the meat in the other side. Once I got my finger too far down in there and flattened it out. There was only one doctor—that was the railroad doctor—and he was gone. Somebody said Mrs. Harold Theriault had been a nurse when she was younger. So I went down to see her, and she shaped it and bandaged it, and I didn't lose the finger but it's still a little bit flat. I'll show it to you.

And... then we couldn't get anybody to buy any hamburger for a long time. Even though we told them that we had thrown all that out, they didn't believe us. They waited quite a long while, till they knew it was either spoiled or gone. They weren't about to eat any of my finger.

Outdated Forest Service Food

This next story was told to me as the truth. The Forest Service was told to get rid of all their outdated food, which were mainly canned goods. The depression was still very bad then. A lot of people who usually worked for the railroad weren't working, and, of course, those who worked for the Forest Service just worked during the summer mostly. So the assistant ranger walked up and down Avery and told everyone he met that on a certain day he was going to take a truckload of this outdated food up to the Forest Service dump. When that day came, they went up with the truck to their dump. Right behind them came half of the people from Avery. They picked it all up and carried it back down again and used it, because there really wasn't anything wrong with it. The stuff that was all dented too bad to use they covered up in a day or two.

Other Jobs in Avery

There were other jobs where a person could make a little extra money, and that's about all I was interested in then, because I wanted to go back to school. I worked once in a while for the fellow who worked for the Theriaults in the pool hall, when he wanted to take a little time off. They had a table where they played panguingue, and you'd go around every half hour and say, "Bean." Then each one had to pay you a nickel, and that was their rent for the chair. The house cleared eighty cents an hour, since there were seven or eight at a table, and they played every evening and a lot of afternoons and mornings. Some of them drank beer which I had to bring them; there were no mixed drinks. The pool hall had a lot of fishing tackle, and a couple pool tables.

I also did a little bit of babysitting. There was a high school there, but I think it was just the first two years, then everyone else had to go down to St. Maries to go to school. So there was very much a shortage of babysitters; that's the reason I got that job.

Red Ives to Pole Mountain and Mallard Peak

I worked until spring at the store and then Chuck Gill, a younger brother of Pete Gill who was a good friend of Ernie's, told me that there were a couple jobs opening up at Red Ives, and why didn't I go up there with him. So I said okay and I quit the job with Ernie White and away we went. We caught a Forest Service truck out of Avery that went across the hill to Wallace, then up to St. Regis, and then over the hill from St. Regis to Red Ives.

Working for the Forest Service, I cleared \$60 a month the first year and \$90 a month the last year. They provided everything, from food to Band-Aids, and there was no way to cash most of the paychecks so it built up for school.

When we got there, they were short on help. They sent Chuck up to Mallard Peak to stay with his brother, Pete, and go into training there, and they sent me up to Pole Mountain. Jack Cool had that one and he had a lot of trails to clear and a lot of work to do, so he got the job of training me. We cleared all the close trails there and one from Pole Mountain down towards the river.

Middle of July or so we had a big storm, and lightning strikes all over the place, and fires. There was one fire started around Mallard Peak and they called us at Pole Mountain and said I better go over there and help Pete and Chuck put it out, because it looked like it could be a pretty good-sized one. So I went over there, and it was kind of a hard trip. It was dark already, but I didn't have any trouble finding the fire because it had the whole side of the mountain lit up.

Pete was an old-timer at it. He didn't seem to be working too hard, and Chuck didn't seem to be working too hard either. I was all ready to get right in there and shovel it in, and Pete said, "Oh no, we've got to keep warm overnight. We'll just keep it contained and we'll put it out in the morning." So that's what we did. One of us stayed with it all day long the next day making sure it was out. I think we were supposed to stay with it for twenty-four hours after it was over.

Afterwards we went up to Mallard Peak, which is a pretty high (almost 7000-foot) mountain in awfully rough country. They ate real well there. On the north side of the mountain there was a great big snow bank, and they'd built a cave into it, like a big refrigerator. It didn't take me long to find out they had a big venison in there, which was out of season, but we needed the fresh meat.

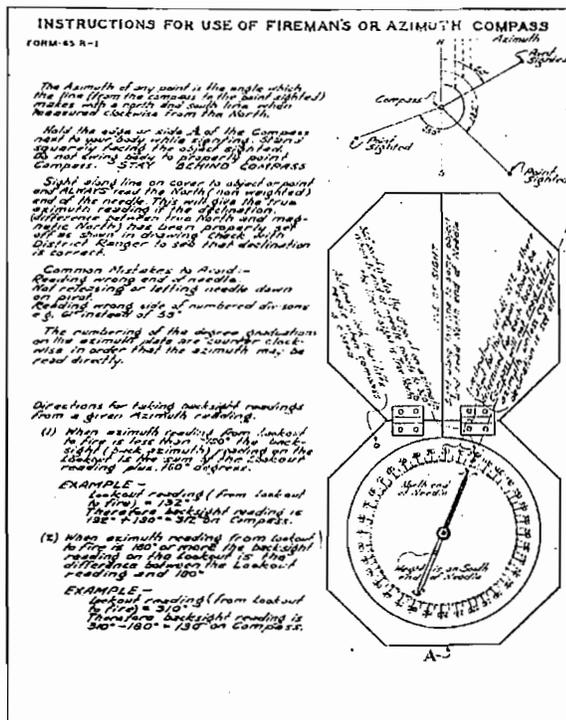


Pack train

Mulligan Hump

They called from Red Ives and said there was a pack train coming up and we were to go with it to Mulligan Hump, and open up the trail on the way. Then I was to stay at Mulligan Hump. It took us a long time to get across. We ran into one snow bank on the north side of the mountain that was six feet deep, and we had to shovel that out to get the pack train through.

Mulligan Hump itself was a tent camp. There was no lookout there. You just had to take your map and azimuth board up on top of the peak and sit there on a rock and watch for fires. You were supposed to go up there whenever there was a storm. That was kind of a silly thing to try to do. The wind would come up with those storms and you couldn't hold anything down. Finally they said just stay by the telephone.



Instructions for use of azimuth compass

One fire was about five or six miles down toward the other ranger district. There was a trail down at the bottom, but I thought I could get there better by following the ridge down. I think I was wrong, but I finally got down there. There were two men already there, so I helped them finish up on that fire, and then I went down the hill with them to a trail camp on the Clearwater River in this other district. I went back to Mulligan Hump the next day.

To put out another fire between Mallard Peak and Mulligan Hump, I came down from Mulligan Hump and Chuck came down from Mallard Peak. After we knocked the tree down and got the fire on the ground, we went up the hill and cut big chunks of snow and rolled the snow onto the fire. The steam went way up in the air when it hit.

Once a fellow came up and said we were to clean out the trail going out the other direction from Mulligan Hump to this other district, because there was a big-shot from Missoula coming up there with a horse and a couple mules with his stuff. We worked on that and got it almost all open before he came through.

While I was at Mulligan Hump, I used to go up on top of the peak and watch the moose eat off the bottom of a little lake below. I'd sit there sometimes for hours and watch them eat.

Back to Williston

After the first of September, I called down and said I didn't see how I could stay any longer because I had to go to school. So they said come on down and leave this other fellow to finish up the season.

It was twenty-six miles down. I left after an early breakfast and got down for dinner that night. I sure moved. I was ready to go.

There was no road down the St. Joe River yet, so I got a ride over to St. Regis and took the train to Avery. Then I took the train back to Williston and started my junior year in high school.

I worked for Arnie Peterson for a while in the store, then I went to work in the theater taking tickets and ushering, a job I worked at for the next two winters. In the spring, I started hitchhiking back to Avery so I could get back to work.

I had very poor luck hitchhiking, getting as far as Cut Bank, Montana, which wasn't very far. I was running out of time so I had to buy a ticket to Spokane and then to Avery. Then I took the train to St. Regis, where there was a tavern that let all of us Forest Service guys stay until our ride showed up. It was just a room in the back with no furniture where you'd sleep on the floor. When the truck came over to pick up supplies, their last stop would be this tavern to pick up any of us who were there and take us over the mountain.

Paddy McIntyre

My second year in the forest service, I guess they figured if I could take Mulligan Hump (which was never used after that again), I could take Paddy McIntyre for a little while on a trail crew. So that's what I did.

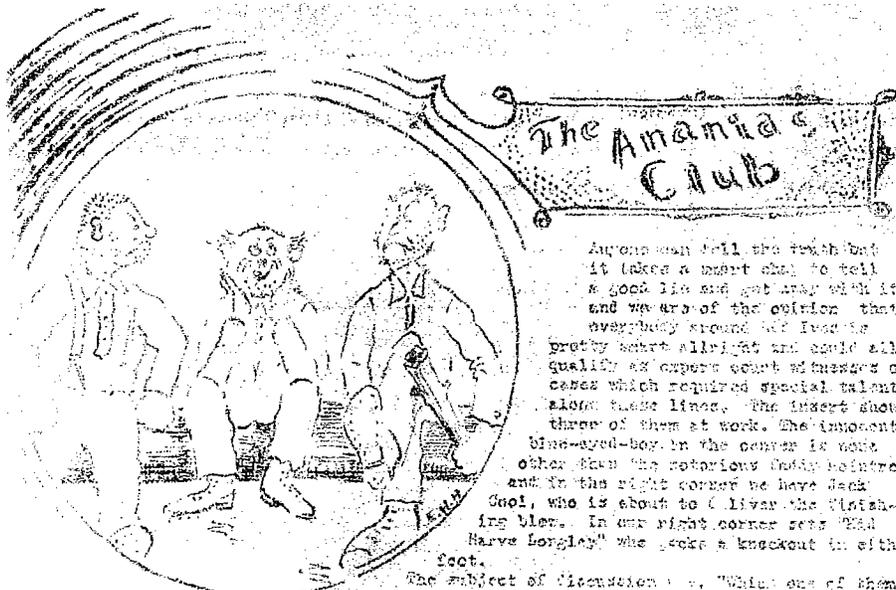
Red Dennis said he "never met anybody quite as dirty as Paddy McIntyre," and that was the understatement of the year. Paddy was a good person to work with. He was a hard worker and there was always training going on up there in the mountains.

When we got back from a day's work, he'd say, "You go catch the fish for dinner and I'll start the rest of it." I kept a fishing pole up the creek a little ways, leaned up against a tree. I didn't have a real one, just a wood pole with some line. I used the same tackle all the time and it took me about a half hour to catch enough fish for dinner. I think we ate fish every night we were there.

He'd always peel the potatoes and when I got back, I'd look at those potatoes and they were just as black as black can be. So I'd usually grab a pan of water and say, "Here, Paddy, I'll help you out," and I'd scrub those potatoes as best I could. After that dirt was on there, though—

I liked the old guy, but I'd say to him, "Why don't you let me do that, you sit down for a while, you've had a rough day. I think you did most of the work." You could say things like that and he'd grin and sit down for a while. And I would do some of the work, and the more work I could get, the cleaner the food was. But part of the time you just had to close your eyes to it, and go ahead and take it the way it was.

Anyway, we finally got all of these trails cleared that we could from there, and it was about time for it to get hot and dry, and it was also time for us to go down for our big training.



Anyone can tell the truth but it takes a smart chap to tell a good lie and get away with it and we are of the opinion that everybody around our lives is pretty smart all right and could all qualify as expert court witnesses on cases which required special talent along these lines. The insert shows three of them at work. The innocent blue-eyed-boy in the center is none other than the notorious Golly McIntire and in the right corner we have Jack Gool, who is about to deliver the finishing blow. In our right corner sits "Ed Harve Longley" who looks a knockout in either foot.

The subject of discussion was, "Which one of them had been the hungriest." Gool claimed that once he hadn't eaten for a week and finally decided to boil up his snowshoe leather into a soup. "I cooked the mess for ten hours," said Gool, "before I could come here but I made a great mistake as I went and drank the soup too." "You know," continued Gool, "that all snowshoes are painted with seven coats of varnish so they will slide over the snow easily and that varnish had all boiled off into the soup and made my insides so slick that it was years before I could get anything to stay on my stomach and even now I can eat it up in a while!"

"Harve Longley" then started out with a harrowing tale of hunger when he was shipwrecked once in the south seas. (We doubt if Harve has ever been closer to them than Gooly's Alsea Lake, but let it go anyway.) "For thirty days and nights I had only a bite to eat," said Harve, "until a flying fish flopped on the raft. I grabbed it and swallowed it whole and just turned around to give my partner the raspberry when the damned thing flew out again and I was hungrier than ever!" Harve lacks the smoothness and polish of Gool but will do very well as a pinch-hitter until some real perspiration comes along.

"Paddy" then aimed a jab of fearless at a hole in Gool's shoe and started to tell of the winter of '49 in the wilds of the Bartooth range. "Yes sir I sure was hungry out there in them hills," said Paddy. "It was a bad year for rabbits and no birds and about the only thing I could shoot was a woodpecker or hood-owl once in a while. I had my old cougar heard with me too that year and was figuring on eating him but we'd been together so long he seemed like a brother to me. On the day when I decided to put him on to cook he treed a big cougar outside the Buck creek cabin. I went down and shot the cougar out of the tree and the both of us was so hungry that we couldn't wait to cook it but I started in chawing on one end of the driver and the head chomped down on the other end. He was in the middle of the cougar and my car dog started in growling at me. That made me so dazed and I lost my bumper and shot him and as him for supper and since then I've had no use for dogs or a trapline."

Excerpt from Red Ives Bulletin by E.H. Hanson et al.

Spring Training at Red Ives

Every spring (actually almost the middle of summer), just before all of us went up on the lookouts from our trail work and telephone work, we would go into a grueling three-day training period at Red Ives. We'd work half the night and run out compass lines, and climb poles (you had to climb a pole and go down it again in a certain length of time), you had to splice telephone wires and hook up telephones the correct way, because you usually had to hook up your own telephone when you got up to the lookout. We had to saw wood, but that was a funny thing to do because by that time we all knew how to saw trees off a trail the right way.

The third and last night was always on a Saturday. They loaded the truck full of men—everybody wanted to party—back to St. Regis, and all of us went on a great big drunk.

Sunday morning, back into the truck and they'd take you to the closest trailhead to your lookout, and just drop you off. They'd just go up this road and say, "Okay, Pole Mountain... Club Peak... Beaver...." I say those three because I was there one summer on each of them. They almost had to call us like we were on a train or bus because all of us were so hungover that we barely could get out of the truck and get our pack put on our back and walk into the lookout.



Backpack and gear

Club and Beaver Peak Lookouts

It's too hard to remember what happened at each one, so I'll talk about Club Peak and Beaver Peak together. They're both so similar it doesn't make any difference.

Club Peak lookout was what I would call an easy peak. Maybe they gave it to me because they had given me Paddy McIntyre for those couple of weeks. They dropped me off at Elk Prairie, where the road and trail came together.

When we arrived at our lookout, the food was there. The pack train had already come in and left big piles of canned food, a slab of bacon, potatoes, onions, and a half-case of eggs. Sometimes the packer would even hook up the telephone if he wanted to call in; he always brought the batteries with him. Sometimes you had to hook it up yourself.

Usually you got one more trip during the middle of the summer with food. They would call you up a week or so before they were coming up to your place and ask you what you needed. You always got new bacon and eggs. You already have guessed that we had no refrigeration or electricity, so the eggs and bacon

you hung on the stilts of the lookout—that was the coolest place—and you always broke your eggs out in a dish or pan before you cooked them, for obvious reasons.

The first job was to walk down the mountain and get water, and then clean up the place. Each lookout had its own waterhole. There was usually a little sign pointing at it, or there were some directions, or else you talked to the person who was there the year before and he told you where it was.



Signs to water on Clearwater-St. Joe Divide

Then you cleaned up the place, put the shutters up so you could see out. The shutters were down to keep the windows from breaking during the winter, and to keep the animals out.

A lot of people have asked, what did we do with our time up there? We spent a lot of time cooking, hiking, carrying water; we'd pick huckleberries, saw and split wood, clean house; lots and lots of hikes. I'd call into the dispatcher and tell him I wanted to patrol the ridge to Elk Prairie; he'd mark it down where I was and I would take off. We dealt mostly with the dispatcher, sometimes with the assistant ranger, very seldom with the ranger himself.

Water and Lightning

People said there was always a shortage of water, but I was never short on water because I took a trip down nearly every morning before I called in. (You had to call in three times a day—seven in the morning, noon, and five in the afternoon—and also whenever you headed out of telephone range.) Those water packs held four or five gallons. First you used your water for cooking and cleaning up the dishes and that sort of stuff, then you poured what was left in the pack into a tub out on the catwalk. After the water in the tub was deep enough you took a bath, and later washed your clothes in that water and then scrubbed the floor with it. Most of the lookouts were very clean people, partially because we had so much time on our hands. You could watch for smoke at the same time you did the clean-up jobs.

We had on our lookouts a lightning rod right up the center of the building. It ran down the four sides to the rod going down into the ground. That's where the last of your water went after you got through using it for everything else. You didn't have to remind anybody to pour this water on the ground line, because that was our safety thing. During an electric storm you could watch the electricity run down these copper lines on the four walls and it was just like watching water running down them.

One time at Club Peak we were all on the line talking, and I had the telephone headphones hooked over my ears, and the speaker part was hooked around my neck so it sat on my chest. We were watching this lightning storm coming a long ways away; we didn't think there was any danger at all. We were kind of half joking about it, wondering whether it would even hit us or not, and by gosh, the next thing I knew I was picking myself off the floor. The odor from burned sweatshirt was just terrible. This mouthpiece had three rivets holding it together, and it had burned three holes right through my sweatshirt and into me. The lightning strike came down someplace between me and Elk Prairie—it certainly wasn't where the storm was, because the storm was way back west for miles—but it had followed the line in and got me. Two of those burns healed up and disappeared in a short time, but the third one I still carry—I have it right this minute.

Telephone Line and the CC Kid

The year I was at Club Peak they wanted the telephone line fixed up and repaired from Club Peak to Elk Prairie. So they sent me up one of the CC boys from the camp to help because it was pretty hard to work on a telephone line alone. You'd climb up a tree or a pole, and get positioned. You always had a rope hanging on your work belt that reached clear to the ground, and you'd holler for a hatchet and the CC boy would hook the hatchet on and you'd pull it up and use it and let it back down again or throw it down (actually, we never threw anything back down that had a sharp edge but any of the other tools we threw down).

This CC kid that I drew was one of the most worthless people I've ever worked with. He wouldn't lift a finger before eight or after five. So it usually ended up when we finished the day's work that I had to cook for him and wash the dishes. He was afraid to climb poles or trees, and he wouldn't learn.

Once I was going up a tree, clearing the branches as I was going along, and the darn hatchet slipped and hit me right above the eye. The blood was running down, and the kid went about half crazy down there because he thought I was going to bleed to death. I got down and went to the lookout and called in and told them about it, and they said you better hike down here to the road and we'll meet you. They took me to the nearest CC camp, but by this time it was nine or ten at night, and I had done this close to noon, so it was too late to take stitches. So all he did was tape it up and put a bandage around my head and I went back to work. On the way back, somebody (the dispatcher or the assistant ranger) asked me, "Have you got that line rebuilt yet?" I said, "Well, it's rebuilt about as far as it will be if I have to put up with that CC boy any longer." He said, "Okay," and talked to the ranger and they got him out of there.

Missed a Fire

While I was at Club Peak I missed a fire; I felt real bad about that. I was looking over toward Pole Mountain and down between there and the road was a little dust coming up over the ridge and I thought, my gosh, I wonder if there's a pack train over there, some animals running around? I forgot about it—it was gray, and we had it drummed into us that smoke was blue and dust was gray—then about this time Red Dennis, who had been inspecting at Pole Mountain, was on his way down and he smelled smoke. He went up and located it. It was a little tiny flame, took him about an hour or so to put it out. He walked up on the ridge to see what he could see, and the only thing he could see was my lookout, so it was me all right who missed it.

Rangers and Red Dennis

When I first came to Avery as a flunky, I worked for a ranger named Renfrow. The first year on Mulligan Hump was Walt Bott, the second and third years, one was Fred Leftwich and the other was Fred Maas. The fourth and last year was Hilding.

The assistant ranger was the duty sergeant, so to speak. In our case it was Red Dennis that we worked with most of the time. He knew every trail, every peak, everything. He knew the common name and the Latin name of every growing thing. He thought the rest of us, when we were walking through the forest, were pretty much walking with blindfolds on, and he was probably right. I knew the difference between a tamarack and a white pine, and every time he was walking with me, he was determined he was going to teach me, and he had a pretty poor pupil.

Red Dennis said in his write-up in Russell's *Hardships and Happy Times* that the road opened up the St. Joe River in 1935, and yet I know in 1936 I still went up there by way of St. Regis. I'm not going to argue with him because he had a photographic mind; he remembered everything that he read. He was probably right—I think probably what happened was that the road just wasn't fit for travel that spring or any other spring. Even right now, the road is not very good, and this is fifty years later. We're probably both right.

Killing Time With a Warped Sense of Humor

When we went up to these lookouts, you can bet that we'd have an inspection every summer, either by the ranger or the assistant ranger, and he would just drop in. Of course, we didn't have any trouble having the place clean, because we had more time on our hands than we knew what to do with. We worked a lot of our time on fire-packs; they always hung right next to the door. When they sent you to a fire, within a couple minutes you were on your way. Anything that was sharp, like the axe—that was kept so sharp that you could almost shave with it all the time.

All of us had our different ways of killing time. I call this my warped sense of humor, this one thing I did. The year before I went to Beaver Peak, there was a forestry student at Beaver Peak from Bemidji, Minnesota. He was a real nice kid but half-homesick all the time. The year I was at Beaver Peak, he was at Peggy Peak, the only one with a road to it. He was the only one of the whole darn bunch of us who had enough money to buy a green outfit to wear. He didn't mind people dropping in on him; he had company all the time. But to get back to the story—

He left a bunch of his home town papers at Beaver Peak that had these little stories in there with the names of people that went to visit somebody else or they had company from somewhere—New York or Seattle—and for lack of anything else to do, I was reading his papers and I got on the telephone once with him. I picked some of these names out of there and I said, "They're right down here below. They've got a pack string and they're camping and they've got a guide going with them." Oh boy, he wanted to talk to them right now. I said, "Well, they're busy right now, they're setting up their tents," and I kept him on the line on this thing for a long time. Finally, when he got right down to really insisting that he talk to them I had to admit that I had put the thing all together myself. Boy, he was mad for a couple of days, but after a while he got over it and didn't blame me any for doing it just to kill time.

Pole Mountain

My last year up there was at Pole Mountain. That one was my big year. I was credited with reporting in six fires, which was way, way above average. I don't remember even having any fires at either Club or Beaver. And I put out three of those six fires.

One of the six was put out by the man from Mallard Peak, and when he went down there and put it out and saw that it had been closer to Pole than Mallard, he sure was mad, but I actually think that he had a real easy summer that year, which wasn't normal for Mallard; Mallard was usually a real busy one, so he really didn't have anything to kick about.

One of the six was on the river road, and the dispatcher, who happened to be Waddy Kloninger then, wanted to get out because he was tied down so much to that telephone. So he drove down there, and it happened to be a Cat tractor that blew out a lot of smoke getting started, and I happened to be looking that way at the time. Waddy was a good friend of mine, and he nicknamed me "Eagle Eye" for a time.

The sixth fire I do not remember at all. Someone else must have been sent to it, or else it was part of Waddy's imagination. I'm not sure; he's the one who said I had six.

FORM 100, 1-64

PART ONE

REPORT MADE AT _____ DATE _____

FIRE DISPATCHER ACTION RECORD

A. DISPATCHER AND OFFICE ADDRESS

NAME _____ NO. _____ CLASS _____
FIRE STATION _____ (LESS OR NONE)
1. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
2. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
3. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
4. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
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7. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
8. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
9. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
10. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
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12. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
13. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
14. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
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19. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
20. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____

FORM 100, 1-64 (CONT'D)

B. DISPATCHER INITIALS, CONTROL NUMBER

1. FIRE STATION DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
2. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
3. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
4. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
5. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
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8. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
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17. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
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19. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
20. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____

FORM 100, 1-64 (CONT'D)

C. DISPATCHER ACTION RECORD

1. FIRE STATION DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
2. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
3. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
4. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
5. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____
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20. DISPATCHED BY _____ AT _____ TO _____

Fire dispatcher action record (3 pages)

The Art of Shingle-Staining A Cupola: Many people, believe it or not, do not know the proper technique to use in shingle-staining a cupola of a log lookout house.

The cupola on Pole Mountain is the third story of the lookout, and the roof is such a steep one that a fly wouldn't dare walk around on it without glue on his back for fear that he would roll over and not be able to land on his feet again.

The first thing to do on this job is to take a good strong rope and throw it over the top. Make it fast on both ends, preferably, on your alidade. Now hook your toe through the burl of your can of stain and proceed to shimmy up the rope. Be sure to kick your foot far enough out when you feel your shins rub the end of the saw or you will lose the first can of stain on your roof sign and spoil it. The roof sign, by the way, should be on all lookouts in case an airplane crashes into the peak. The aviator can then look out his window and see how far he has to walk to get a new plane.

Now, we will assume that you are on the roof with the can of stain and a brush. Don't forget the brush the first trip because there is no place to leave the stain while you go back after the brush. You will just have to take the stain back down with you and then you will be farther behind than ever, because while you were up there, you looked over all four edges and swore that you would never go back up again if you ever got down in one piece. When you have everything on top, you wonder what method should be used for those far edges. The first method that comes to your mind is just to lean clear over and pour it on, but this doesn't work so efficiently because the stain has a funny habit of finding the small grooves and running down them. This takes about five gallons to the square foot. Well, that leaves the old brush-and-arm method.

First, you take a firm hold of the rope and slide down part way but soon find that two hands cannot hold a can, a brush, and a rope. Holding the brush with the teeth works only on the way down, too. The hand just refuses to take as long a sweep as your good old right arm would.

You give that up and crawl back to the top, if you have enough strength left, and pull out all the slivers you have accumulated.

The next method is to hook your toes over the top and slide down face first. This works good for the first foot on the bottom but, when you try to slide back up to work the next foot, your legs bend the wrong way. When you hook your knees, you find yourself facing the sky.

Gosh, there goes the telephone, and down the rope you slide. The can of stain has no cover and you get doused from the top with it. Just as you spit this out, you feel yourself aliding down over the foot. You thought sure the shingles had soaked up long before now.

Well, at least we got 12 square feet stained, and that's better than none at all. It's time to eat, anyway. - Ed Myers, Lookout, Pole Mt. District, St. Joe.

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Ed Myers article in USFS Northern Region News, Missoula, MT, September, 1939, Special Field Edition

Food at the Lookouts

One morning when I was at Pole Mountain, I remember Waddy called and said, "Are you interested enough in some fresh meat to walk down to the road?" It didn't take me very long to take off on that trip. I always went Boy Scout style, which was run ten steps and walk ten steps (unless you were coming back up, then there was too much climbing to go that way). I can't imagine now going that far down to the road and back again just for a little handful of fresh beef, but I didn't even think twice then.

Pole Mountain was where I tried making ice cream. Once. You made it out of canned cream, put it in a coffee can with table salt on the outside, then out to your snowbank on the north side. It wasn't any good; never did get it hard.

The first time I ever baked bread was on Mulligan Hump. I read the directions, and everything went fine, it even rose. I stuck it in the oven and when it came out it had turned up on both ends just like a boat. I looked inside the oven to see what had happened and I could see the fire burning through some little holes, not very big holes but enough to ruin the oven. So I got away from making bread there. I made a lot of baking powder biscuits; it was all right for that. And it was still good enough for baking hams; ham was one of our big staple items.

Forest Service
Requisition and Invoice

REQUISITION AND INVOICE

ORIGINAL

FOREST

Order No.

Ordered by Charge FY 19

Date of order Charge FY 19

To District Charge FY 19

Destination Charge FY 19

Item	Unit	Amount ordered	Amount shipped	Item	Unit	Amount ordered	Amount shipped
Flour				Vegetable, Canned			
Wheat, Club	100 lb			Chow, 100 lb	Can		
Wheat, Club	100 lb			Chow, 100 lb	Can		
...

Filed by Date Packed by Date

Charged by Date Received by Date

Shipped on Date Person receiving above listed items shall note on back of form all shortages and damaged goods.

Forest Service food requisition form

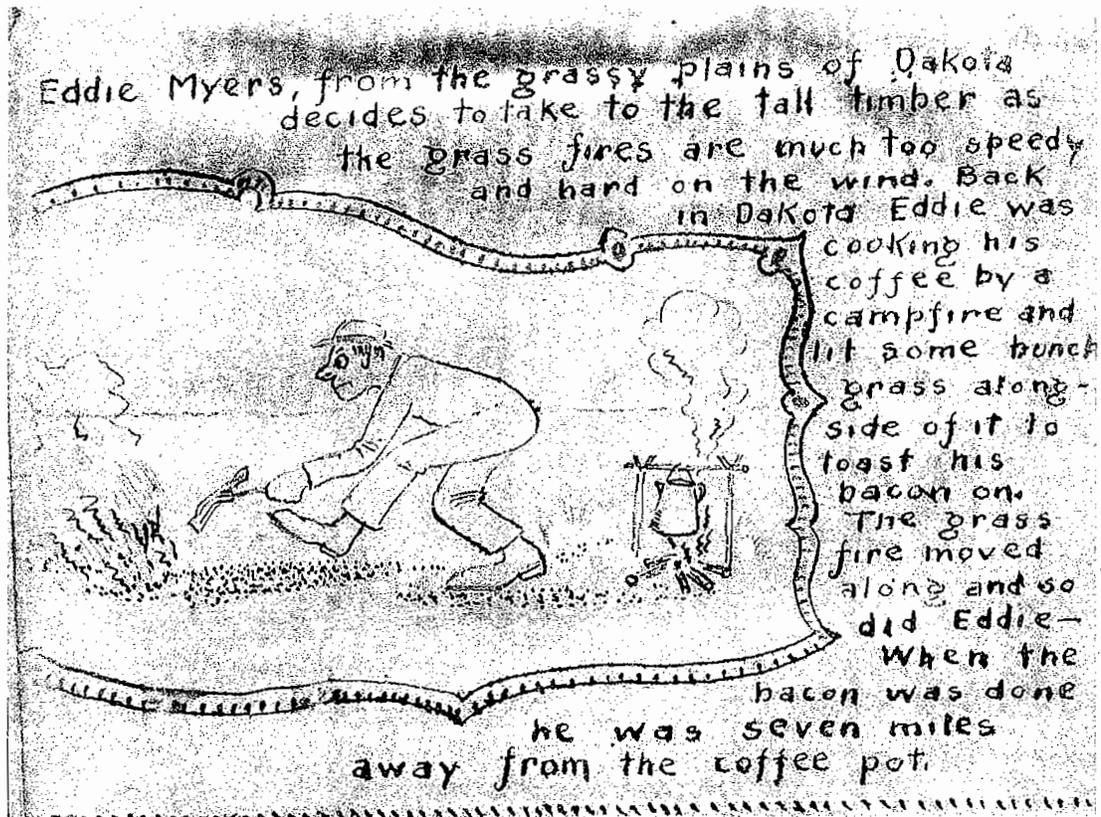
We Were All Eighteen

I have been asked a few times how so many of us kids got by going to work at an early age. Well, it was depression time, and I think it was eighteen that they allowed you to work for the Forest Service. So we were all eighteen, regardless of what our age was, until we actually became eighteen. In fact, I don't remember anybody, especially around Avery, that didn't try to help the other person out during those depression days, because we were all broke. The ranger wouldn't even think about age. As long as you put down eighteen, it was all right with him.

From Pole to Pole

Here I am at about the end of my Forest Service days. I started out at Pole Mountain for a couple weeks of training, and I ended up my last year, 1938, at Pole Mountain, my most successful year—the most fires. It's a good thing I had these jobs with the Forest Service, because if it hadn't been for the Forest Service, I would never have finished high school. I would have had to stop at the end of my sophomore year, and that would have been the end of it.

And so, here's the end of it.



E.H. Hanson cartoon from Red Ives Bulletin, September, 1936

Ed Myers currently lives in Spokane, Washington. He and his family make annual trips to the St. Joe River and Red Ives. These memoirs were compiled by his son, David Myers, September, 2003, Seattle, Washington.

*For Mallard Peak
Ed Myers*

9/20/03 - Delivered to
Mallard Peak,
David Myers