LOLO FOREST

The Lolo Forest fought one long battle against fire from the latter part of June to the end of August. The organization had not only its own territory to protect, but was threatened by a continuous series of fires coming up from the Idaho side of the Bitterroot range from the wilderness country of the St. Joe and Clearwater, all the way from Stevens Peak to Lolo Pass. Most of the loss suffered in the Lolo was from the sweep of fire from Idaho on August 20 and 21.

Throughout July and the first part of August there was a series of fires, believed to be incendiary, extending from Frenchtown up the Nine Mile Valley. Ranger D. B. McGregor put up a fine fight on these fires, but as soon as one fire was beaten, another would be started, mostly in the slashings of the Western Lumber Company.

Five or six large fires were handled in succession, but one by one they were beaten, and when the big wind of August 20 arrived, the lines all held, and the Nine Mile Valley was saved.

In the meantime, the Lolo Rangers were carrying the fight over into Idaho. Ranger T.C. Spaulding took a big crew across Lolo Pass to the Lochsa country. Kenneth Robinson had a crew at the head of Fish Creek. Ranger H. P. Barringer of Lolo and Ranger J. S. Garrison of the Clearwater fought a long battle on fires coming up opposite the head of Trout Creek. Ranger F. Haun at Saltese, with fine assistance from Ranger R. A. Phillips and ranger J. E. Breen, did a splendid job of organization against the many fires threatening the upper St. Regis country. It is almost miraculous that, with the many fires crews strung along the summit of the Bitterroot Range, when the big fire hit them, not a man or a horse was lost from the Lolo fire crew.

When the fire swept across the St. Regis drainage on August 20 and 21, the towns of Taft, Haugan and DeBorgia were completely destroyed. Saltese was saved, except for on or two buildings, by a fine battle led by Ranger Haun and the Northern Pacific Railway crew. Haun tells of one man burned to death here. The man had been badly burned at Taft, and Haun and Breen had brought him down to Saltese, where he was put in a freight car, his burns dressed with oil and cotton. One of the man’s friends, having done is best to salvage whiskey supplies in Saltese before they burned, looked in to see how the man was doing and lit a match for illumination. The unfortunate man’s cotton dressings were ignited and he rushed forth screaming, and burned to death.

Excerpt from the collection of “When The Mountains Roared”, (Page 25 – 26), USDA Forest Service