

Incident Summary Page for the 100 Fires Project

Incident Name: Camas Creek Fire	Incident Date & Time: 08/13/1929
Incident Location: Chelan National Forest (now the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest) in Washington state	Incident Size: No acreage on record however the fire burned for 62 days
Types of resources involved: U.S. Forest Service firefighters	# of Fatalities/injuries: 3 fatalities
Reason this fire was selected for the 100 Fires list: ➤ Fire is historically significant	
Conditions leading up to the event:	
In 1929 the fire season began early in the summer and on July 2 a severe lightning storm swept through the Cascade Mountains of Oregon and Washington, leaving hundreds of fires in its wake. Atmospheric humidity then dropped with high winds following and the fires spread to such size and intensity, especially in Washington, that they raced roughshod over the efforts of thousands of men trying to stop them.	
Brief description of the event:	
On August 11 during a blowup on the Camas Creek Fire in the Chelan National Forest. Douglas Ingram, who was the Pacific Northwest Regional Range Manager, showed an exceptional coolness in leading a crew of about a dozen men out of a trap to safety. He took them into a small clearing and to get them out of their panicking condition told them to lie prone as the fire passed over. <i>“Ingram whittled and told stories while the fire raged on all sides of their little clearing and finally passed over, leaving the men unharmed.”</i> The testimony is unanimous, had it not been for Ingram the crew might have tried to rush through the fire and they would certainly have been lost. Two days later on August 13, Ingram was acting as Camas Creek Fire camp organizer. When fire behavior began to dramatically increase, he considered the danger too great for the men to remain where they were and ordered the crews off the line. As the fire later blew up his action undoubtedly saved the lives of this crew. Later that same afternoon, after the fires passage, Ingram and young local firefighter Ernani St. Luise set off to size-up the situation and look for a new campsite. Ingram asked no one to go with him, but St. Luise who was a University of Washington athlete, volunteered. They started down a ridgetop trail through dense Lodgepole pine, but were turned back after finding the fire was making a flanking movement which might cut them off. They were last seen retracing their steps towards camp but then turned off the trail before reaching camp. At some point on this reconnaissance mission they were overrun by the fire. Their bodies were discovered about two weeks later between McFarland Creek and Squaw Creek, two miles from where they were last seen. All evidence indicates they were cut off by the fire and were overrun. There was a third firefighter fatality on this fire 10 days later; J.F. Marten died from an apparent heart attack on the fireline.	
Fire behavior factors that were present during the event:	
Drought, low humidity, and multiple starts, over a prolonged period of time, created a situation where the manpower for fire suppression was overwhelmed.	
Operational lessons available for learning from this incident:	
Selection of fire camp locations need to balance the advantage of close access logistics with safety from the threat of fire spread.	
Notable impact or historical significance for the wildland fire service from this incident:	
While this incident does not strictly meet the criteria of 3 firefighter fatalities by entrapment for the 100 Fires Project, it was selected to highlight the 1929 fire season which witnessed the deaths of 14 U.S. Forest Service firefighters as well as five local cooperator fatalities and one Los Angeles County Fire Department fatality. The official NWCG publication titled <i>Historical Wildland Firefighter Fatalities 1910-1996</i> (PMS 822/NFES 1849) identifies only three firefighter fatality incidents during the entire 22 year span from 1911 to 1932. The publication also incorrectly places the Camas Creek incident in the year 1933. The 1929 fire season is not the only year in this 22 year span where data was under reported. This data discrepancy should be considered a significant problem for anyone doing historical safety studies or comparisons. Recent work at the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center has identified more than 70 separate firefighter fatality incidents in this same time span, some with multiple fatalities.	

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With only one exception, all of those who died as a result of fires on the national forests were temporary hire U.S. Forest Service employees. It is believed by the U.S. Forest Service that Douglas Ingram was the first forest officer under permanent appointment to have lost his life while fighting fire.

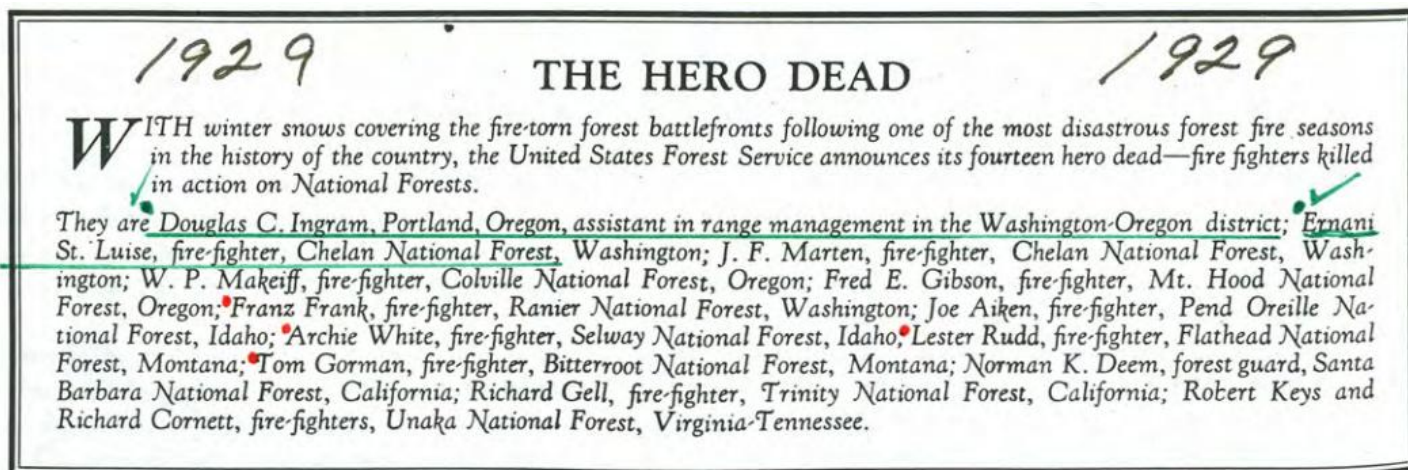
Links to more information on this incident:

- https://ppolinks.com/forestservicemuseum/2004_13_2d.pdf
- <https://lessons.wildfire.gov/incident/camas-creek-fire-entrapment-fatalities-1929>
- <https://wlfalwaysremember.net/1929/08/13/chelan-nf-fires/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1158743947611457&id=917880645031123&set=a.917937711692083>
- https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5407534.pdf

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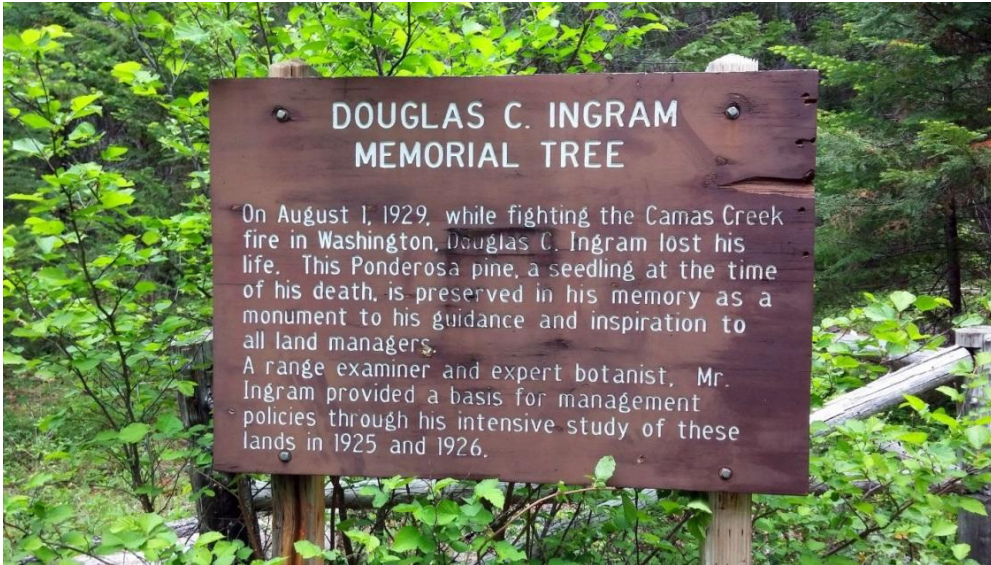


Excerpt from the November 1929 edition of *American Forests* magazine

DATE	FIRE NAME/ LOCATION	No.	AGENCY	FIRE BEHAVIOR OBSERVED	REMARKS
1910	Coeur d'Alene St. Joe, ID	72	USFS	Dry fuels and lightning followed by strong winds caused massive firestorms and rapid runs.	Seven large crews were overrun with no access, communication, and little equipment available.
1910	Cabinet NF	4	USFS	Same as above.	Four men panicked in an entrapment situation, ran uphill out of a rock slide being used as a safety zone.
1910	Pend Oreille NF	2	USFS	Same as above.	Two men ran into the flames. Witnesses said they appeared disoriented by smoke.
1926	King's Canyon Toiyabe NF, CA	5	USFS	Unanticipated downslope winds on lee side of Sierras pushed fire into second growth with brush.	Firefighters had gone downhill for water and were trapped on the road when the wind changed.
1929	Dollar Mt. Colville NF, WA	1	USFS	Sudden wind change in relatively light fuels.	Firefighter tried to outrun fire uphill.
1931	Coffee Mill Mariposa Ru, CA	3	CDF	Unknown	
1933	Kamus Burn Okanagon NF, WA	2	USFS	Fire in light fuels and wind changed direction.	Firefighters tried to outrun fire but failed.
1933	Griffith Park, CA	25	Other	Fire burned in light chaparral near Griffith Park. Winds shifted.	Firefighters tried to run to safety. 128 injured.

All incidents from 1910 to 1933 identified in the *Historical Wildland Firefighter Fatalities 1910-1996* National Wildfire Coordinating Group publication (PMS 822/NFES 1849)

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KILLED IN ACTION
Douglas C. Ingram, veteran Forest Service officer, who made the supreme sacrifice

CHELAN FOREST FIRE CLAIMS 3RD VICTIM

Fighter Drops Dead on Camas Creek; Bodies of Other Two Re- covered

PORTLAND, Ore., Aug. 26.—(P)—While fighting the Camas creek fire in the Chelan National forest, Washington, the same blaze which had already claimed the lives of Douglas C. Ingram, Portland, and Ermannie St. Luise of Chelan, J. F. Martin, another Chelan forest firefighter, dropped dead Saturday, Maj. John D. Guthrie, chief of the district forest office here, was informed today.

An autopsy will be held to determine whether death resulted from organic trouble or from the flames, Maj. Gutarie said.

The bodies of Ingram and St. Luise were brought to Chelan yesterday. Maj. Guthrie was informed that the bodies, found in a heavy lodge pole pine growth, were badly burned. It

was thought the men may have first been overcome by gas and then succumbed to the flames.

The Camas creek fire was reported under control by the chief district forester.

One Killed and Five Hurt in Fires

MISSOULA, Mont., Aug. 26.—(P)—Five forestt firefighters have been injured, one killed, a number of buildings have been destroyed and thousands of men are scattered along a wide front, in an effort to check the forest fires in northwestern Montana and northern Idaho.

All available men from several towns have been sent to the front line to stem the flames that have destroyed thousands of acres of timber.

The men who were injured were fighting the Train creek fire and were treated at Kalispel, Mont. E. Morgan, a firefighter from Missoula, lost his life when he fell from a freight train near Whitefish, Mont.

A number of buildings have been destroyed in the half moon fire in the locality of Whitefish, Mont., it is reported. On a few ranches the fire swept to the very doors of the ranch houses, but did not destroy the structures.

A 14-hour battle with the flames to save his home and cabins, near Lake McDonald, was reported by Dr. Roderick Houston. Single handed, he fought the blaze and saved his property.