

David Parker Godwin Official Personnel File Summary -

Born July 24, 1887, and died June 13, 1947

David Parker was initially employed May 19, 1908, as a Guard on the Inyo NF at a salary of \$900 per annum. Even though his title was Guard, his primary duties were working as a Land Examiner based on his prior experience working for several railroads as a surveyor in the Northeast of the U.S. In 1909, he was formally assigned as a Land Examiner checking Homestead occupancies and settlements, as well as forest boundaries.

On May 15, 1909, David was assigned as an Assistant Forest Ranger with a salary of \$1,000 per year and placed on detail from the District 5 headquarters in San Francisco indefinitely.

On October 10, 1910, David was assigned as Acting Forest Supervisor for the California National Forest in Willows, California. David continued as Forest Supervisor of the California NF, building a reputation in Fire Control. In March 1914, he was assigned to District 5 Headquarters as a Fire Protection Expert at the annual salary of \$2,000.

On July 13, 1917, David was placed on LWOP status. He was commissioned as a First Lieutenant in the 10th Regiment, Engineers (Forest) for service in France. David returned from France August 1919, travelling to the eastern U.S. He notified the USPS that he was not returning and was resigning to work in private activities in the eastern U.S. He was officially terminated on February 25, 1920.

Fifteen years later, in 1935, David wrote letters to an old friend, Roy Headley with whom he worked in California requesting reemployment with the USPS. David had been working in the textile business in New York City and since it was during the Depression, "business adventures had dropped him from the peak of success." David also wrote explaining how proud he was of the "outfit" purchasing land in the Eastern U.S. (under the Weeks Act). Roy was now Chief of Operations for the USFS, which included Fire Control. Roy attempted to assign him as Regional Fire Control Officer in Missoula, but the position had just been filled.

On September 21, 1935, Roy appointed David as "Senior Forester" at a salary of \$4,600 per annum to his office in Washington, DC. On December 2, Roy Headley wrote a 7-page "Memorandum For Mr. Godwin" outlining David's new duties. They included heading up an "Aerial Fire Retarding Project." Aircraft recommended included an Autogyro from companies in Pennsylvania and Rhode Island and a biplane. Included for dropping items from aircraft is to be the use of explosives, frothy mixtures, and water.

In 1937, David began authoring and having published the quarterly news notebook "Fire Control Notes." It provides news articles about fire control and prevention shared with Federal, state, and private organizations. The publication continues today with several changes in titles.

From 1936 to June 1939, David oversaw the Fire Retarding Program in California, including the purchase of the first airplane purchased by the USPS. The program proved to be unsuccessful, so the airplane and pilot (Harold King) were transferred to Region Six. For a couple months, retardant drops continued in Region Six, but still unsuccessful. As a result, arrangements were made to experiment using the airplane

for dropping fire guards/fighters to fires by parachute. This became the Smokejumper Experiment in the fall of 1939 in Winthrop, Washington.

The smokejumping experiment proved successful so it was continued in 1940 as an operational experiment. By the beginning of 1940, the potential for WWII was draining Federal funds for potential warfare. The USFS airplane was sold. However, with support from Regional Fire Control Officers, the smokejumping program continued using contract aircraft and pilots.

In 1941, David married Thelma Strabel author of several novels. One was a novel titled "Forest Ranger" in which Paramount Studios produced a full-length movie. It included smokejumpers serving as stunt men in its production.

David had an intense interest in the use of aircraft in fire control. In August 1943, David wrote a "Confidential Memorandum" reporting on a visit he made to the Laurinburg-Maxon Army Air Base in North Carolina reporting on possible use of Military Infantry Troop Gliders, CG-4A for ferrying firefighters to forest fires. He wrote that open forest areas could be used for dropping gliders with up to 16 fire fighters. The empty gliders could be retrieved by a DC-3 aircraft from the forest for reuse. He continued saying that after the War, there would be surplus gliders and experienced pilots available.

During the War years, David served as the Secretary of Agriculture's "Military Liaison." David coordinated with the War Dept. for such activities as:

- Project Firefly/Japanese balloon project,
- Negotiated with the Army, cooperative agreements for the Army to fight forest fires and provide aircraft patrol flights,
- An Air Raid Warning System over forested areas,
- Military helicopter test flying on national forests,
- Dropping from large bombers, quantities of water or chemicals on forest fires,
- Experiments designed to remove snags and fire hazards through use of jellied gasoline and similar products, and
- Post war assistance in fire suppression including use of aircraft and assistance for fire suppression.

In December of 1946, David was promoted to Chief of Fire Control for the USFS, a position he had longed to achieve for several years.

On June 13, 1947, David died in an airplane crash in the Blue Ridge Mountains of West Virginia. He was returning on a Pennsylvania Central Air Lines flight back from a joint meeting of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and the Society of American Forester at Madison, Wisconsin, held the previous day.