

Title: An Account of What I Believe to Have Been an Electrical Phenomena Known as “St. Elmo’s Fire” at Mount Frazier Lookout, elevation 8027 feet.

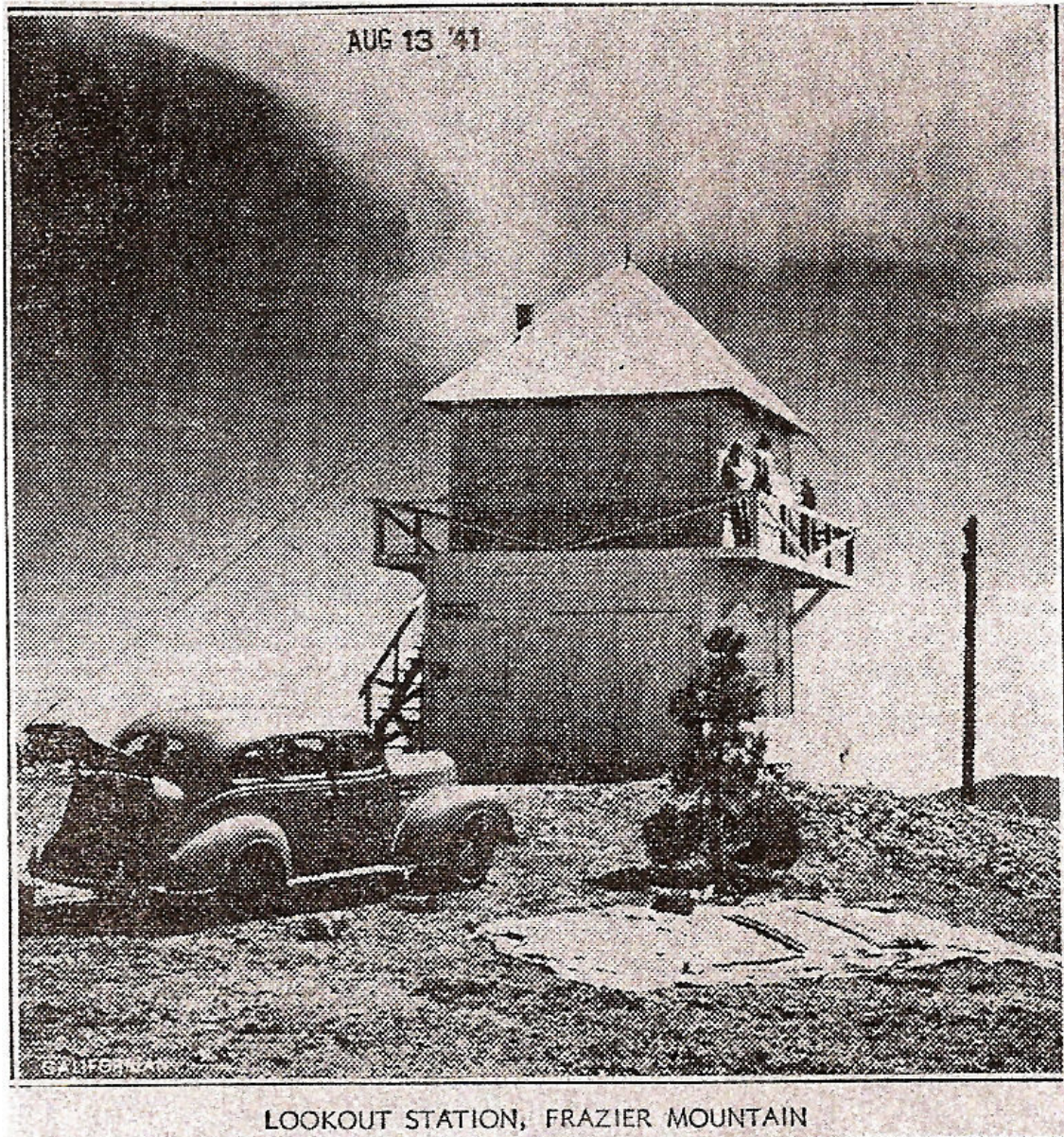
Introduction by Tom Johnston: This event took place on January 30, 1945 on Mtn. Frazier located in Ventura County near Gorman which is on the I5 Freeway. In the 1930’s a number of Fire Lookouts were constructed to spot forest fires at their early stage of burn. The Mt. Frazier lookout was one of such structures built (1934) on the top of this high mountain by the Forest Service. These lookouts were staffed during the fire season usually between May and October or the first substantial rain/snow. They also recorded daily weather observations which helped to determine the current level of fire danger.

World War Two was still in progress when the following account occurred. Japan was still seen as a threat. The phenomena described here as “St. Elmo’s Fire” is a bright electrical discharge from surrounding objects. The most common occurrence is from the leading edge of aircraft wings in flight.

The Aircraft Warning Service (**AWS**) was a civilian volunteer observer network connected by telephone to a filter center which passed along sighting reports to Air Defense Command for possible action.

The Aircraft Warning Service was deactivated on the East Coast in 1942-3. On the West Coast it remained in service until the summer of 1944 and was deactivated just shortly before **the Japanese Balloon Bombs – Fugo Balloons** – started arriving on the West Coast. These balloons released in Japan and carried by the jet stream held incendiary bombs to be dropped along the Pacific Coast of the U.S.A. To monitor the balloon bomb attacks an ad hoc observer network of US Forest Service, military, police and other government workers was established.

The husband and wife mentioned below were such volunteers who lived at the lookout tower.



Below picture of Frazier Mtn Lookout was taken in 2008



The following account was transcribed from the original document many years ago by a local resident of Frazier Park.

Date: January, 30, 1945 at 2 A.M. Telephone line check. "Blizzard storm increasing in violence, wind due east at 55-65 mph, snowing, also fog very dense. Visibility 100 feet or less, weather very bad. Believe this to be the worst storm of the season.

3:15 A.M. Discovered a very brilliant white light shining thru the storm toward lookout, bearing 52 degrees northeast at horizon level, that is, at eye level. The country in this direction is un-inhabited, no road or building, elevation 8000 feet. I was puzzled as to how any light no matter how strong could shine thru such dense fog and snow, as light appeared on a high ridge about a mile northeast of the lookout.

3:23 A.M. Phoned Ranger Station, asked night operator Yvonne (Miss Tiff) to awaken Jack (Mr. Curran) Assistant District Ranger. We discussed the possibility that light might be a white magnesium flare from a grounded plane that had made a forced landing and it should be reported to the Army Filter Board.

3:25 A.M. At this time my wife, Myrtle Brice, who was off duty and sleeping down blow in the A.W.S. shelter, a separate building, came up in the tower to report additional lights showing thru the storm not visible to me because of the building (A.W.S. shelter) but which shown thru her windows. These new lights appeared much further down on the same ridge and much nearer the lookout approximately 2 ½ miles due east and 1 ½ miles south of the first light.

3:35 A.M. I now talked to Mr. Meyer (District Ranger) who reported the above to Army Filter Board for investigation when we were unable to determine a satisfactory reason for these mysterious lights.

3:50 A.M. I made a final check up from the cat walk with binoculars. The first light having burned steadily for nearly an hour with equal intensity never wavering or moving an inch from its first reported position according to the Azimuths readings but now even as I watched thru the glasses it disappeared and I reported it to Ranger Meyer. Ten minutes later the light or rather lights came back on in the same position just as before while other lights appeared on the ground in the snow. Now on all sides of the lookout beginning with two bright white lights about the size of very strong flash lights held waist high above the snow one slightly behind the other and appeared to be two people on the road southwest of the lookout wading thru the deep snow up to the lookout. When first seen were 150 yards west of the lookout and as we watched them from the cat walk preparing to hail them for identification before permitting them up in the tower, they disappeared within 30 yards of us. I reported I was sure there were two people from perhaps a wrecked plane but could not understand their disappearance so close to the tower. It was then that a large pine tree about 30 yards, size 55-60 feet tall and 20 inches in diameter thru the trunk began to light up even as I watched, first a high branch on the north side and about 15 to 20 minutes to be completely covered on all sides. The lights appeared in long strings as the one took 40 to 50 foot lengths of wire and attached light globes to size of small hen's eggs at fairly regular intervals of a foot or so and flung them each string of lights haphazardly every which way across and around the tree much as one would light an outdoor Christmas tree. Each light was separate and distinct and glowed with a strong white light and were so numerous it was impossible to count them. In this case a deep blue green haze developed around the more lighted branches. The above tree was some 100 feet or so from the observers cat walk. High wind and snow did not affect the lights which when once appeared burned steadily by the hour. On turning away from this we observed many lights coming on all around the lookout. Some were single, separate, in the middle of the open trunks and thru the branches innumerable. All shown brilliantly thru even at times when trees and other objects disappeared completely in a particularly heavy gust of wind and snow.

4:00 A.M. I now reported to Ranger Meyer that lights were appearing on the cat walk within reach of my hand. First my wife noticed that some wooden uprights attached to the railing of the cat walk glowing brilliantly near their ends. At this time the insulators (porcelain) on the vertical radio antennae suddenly glowed with an intense pure white light. These were only a foot away from the railing of the cat walk and were within ease reaching distance. There was no trace of a bluish green haze around these. They were dazzling white and since the tower was in total darkness the effect was most unusual. The numerous wires, radio, telephone and tower brace wires at all times remained invisible. It was that the 2" X 4" cross pieces on the top ends of the uprights became brilliantly lighted. These wood cross bars 18 inches long had square sawn ends from each corner of which there are four to an end, a separate cone of fire about six inches long projected. These fluctuated at high speed and were of an intense blue light with a small white center and resembled in size, color fluctuation the standard size of a plumber's or tinsmith's blow torch. There being a surprising resemblance (blow torch, brass 1/8 gallon container size). There were now eight distinct cones of fire, 4 to an end. One to a corner of the short cross bars. These (cones of fire) whose length was approximately 6 inches and whose diameter was about 30 degrees were white fire, the

size of a thimble at the small neck of the cone where attached and gradually faded to an intense bluish green. Six inches further on the broad end of the cone these were the only lights that appeared to flare in unusually heavy gusts of wind. Many of the lights were within easy reach of the observer and permitted the closest inspection, several times I held my gloved hand to their outer edges. I was under the impression that had I held up my hand, lights would have appeared on all five fingers. I had intended to place my bare hand in a number of the light cones especially at their base, to see if there would be any feeling or sensation but did not do so because of the intense cold quickly numbed my hands. The lights were not on all corners of the lookout and did not always seek the higher projections. None appeared on corners where lighting rods passed within a few inches. The telephone poles next to the lookout and having rods did not show lights. However our flag pole being of iron pipe showed a large brilliant white light on its top. This appeared to be of the intensity of a 50 watt (incandescent) light surrounded by blue green haze the size of a basketball. This was also very steady in its intensity and glowed for hours.

4:00 A.M. I might add that about 40 minutes after the first light was sighted there were two vivid lightning flashes about a minute or so apart. All this time the storm, intensely cold, extremely high wind from due east, blinding snow fall, at times everything except the lights being blotted out. The dense fog and high wind did not seem to affect them in the least or lessen their brilliance. The cones of light on the cat walk flared out in all direction, seemingly unaffected by the heaviest gust of wind. It may be one that with the exception of several brief periods of comparative calm, started from the northwest and completely cover all points of the compass with equal intensity until five days later ended where it began, northwest. The wind exceptionally high, gradually shifting from the northwest to west, southwest to south to southeast, east to northeast, northeast to north, etc snowing all the while. We observed the above lights from the cat walk for some 2 ½ hours at which time we retired indoors, first phoning Ranger Meyer that I believed I had solved the mystery by recalling an illustration I had once studied in my school geography showing strange lights on the masts and spars of sailing ship known as St. Elmos's Fire. How much longer the display lasted I do not know as all our window had been thickly iced over preventing further observation.

The above is a true account written by A.W.A. airplane watching station observers on duty at Mount Frazier, 34-Quincy-6.

Mr. and Mrs. Norman Brice

COPY SENT TO WEATHER BUREAU AND AUTHENTICATED BY THE
WEATHER BUREAU.

End of report

Tom Johnston edited the transcribed copy to produce the above report in September 2014
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