

James Virgil Burnett 1912-1976

June 1976

Boating Mishap on Selway Claims Two Lives

A tragic accident Friday afternoon, on a hazardous section 2½ miles West of the junction of the Selway River and Moose creek, about 60 miles east of Kooskia, Idaho took the lives of Thomas A. Whelan, 18, of Nine Miles, Montana, and of James V. Burnett, 65, North Bend, Ore. The latter was a Stevensville native. They were part of a seven man group traveling from Paradise to Selway Falls in two rubber rafts and the raft went into what is called a "blind hole," an area just back of standing waves. Also in the raft were Whelan's uncle, Robert Farr, the latter a son-in-law of Burnett, and son Robert Jr. The younger Farr was flipped out also but managed to swim to shore and was not injured. The elder Farr was able to stay with the raft.

Rev. Wayne Wardwell officiated and pallbearers were Martin Buxton, Jim Buxton, Doug Flanagin, Jim Lauderback, Donald Dowling and David Tawney.

Funeral services were held for Mr. Burnett at the Dowling chapel yesterday with interment in Riverview cemetery. Funeral services were held for Mr. Whelan at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Frenchtown where the young man had attended school and was valedictorian of the 1976 graduating class. He was a native of Missoula, son of Larry and Barbara Whelan of Nine Mile. Cremation was done. He is survived besides his parents, by five sisters, a foster brother and grandmothers Georgia Farr of Alberton and Mrs. Lawrence Whelan, Butte.

James Virgil Burnett was born Jan. 5, 1911, son of James and Etta Sanders Burnett. The mother died July 4, 1930 and the father July 23, 1951. James attended Stevensville and Hamilton schools and was graduated from Victor High School with the class of 1930. He attended the UM School of Forestry and worked for the Forest Service for a time. He was later employed at the Rocky Mtn. lab. He ranched in the Philipsburg area during WWII and later was a building contractor and owned a hardware store and lumber yard in Philipsburg. He married Alma Johnson of that town and she passed away. His second marriage was to Dorothy Zittel who died Feb. 23, 1961. He later married Arseal Neu of Philipsburg and they moved to North Bend where he was a millwright for Weyerhaeuser Lumber until retiring in January.

Surviving beside the widow is a daughter, Janice Farr, Boise, Ida.; stepchildren Colleen Blohm, Portland; Pvt. Colvin Neu, Korea; sisters, Mrs. John (Mabel) Dowling, Mrs. Neil (Gertrude) Flanagin, Mrs. Marlin (Lois) Buxton, all of Hamilton; brother, Clifford Burnett, Portland; four grandchildren.

Mr. Burnett's grandfather came to Montana in 1878 and to the Bitter Root in 1882. He was a contractor and James Jr. assisted his father in building many structures in western Montana including Main Hall at UM, the first permanent structure on the campus. Among the Hamilton buildings was the Lincoln annex, recently torn down, the Hamilton hotel, now site of a service station, the Burns block on Main.