

Lumberjack

Eric Stauffer was a tall, bearded man, he moved a large frame body. His strength was well known among his fellow lumberjacks. He worked the Chaland mountains, logging millions of acres. They turned the area into a desert around 1905. Now the area is known as the Chaland Desert.

By 1906 Eric started working for another company. They had a big job in Brazil. They were logging out trees deep in the rainforest. Every day Eric worked alongside the Amazon River with a team of surveyors.

Eric walked along a rise when he slipped down the opposite edge. When he came to a stop, he saw a glimmer that caught his attention. Eric picked up a yellow rock to get a better look. Eric thought he knew what it was, but he needed to have it checked out. He went to his Boss to ask for an idea on how to get it looked at. His Boss took one look pulling Eric to the side. Eric's boss told him that it sure looked like Gold and that Eric should keep this a secret. If anyone was told, it could get dangerous. Eric was advised to travel to the main camp and have his rock locked up. He secured his yellow prize then returned to the logging camp to the spot he found the rock. When he arrived, he found that his boss had started digging, finding more of them. Eric could see he now had a partner.

The two men filled several wooden boxes and soon it was time to get out of there. They had to use mules from the logging crews to carry the heavy boxes out to the trail that would lead back to the main camp. The trail was long edged by a jungle full of biting things. Most of it was too narrow for a truck and really just a footpath much of the way. The two men felt uneasy; they knew they could get jumped at any time. The longer the guys were out there the more danger they were in.

After a week walking with the mules, Eric couldn't take another step. They knew resting there for a few days would be very dangerous. Eric and his boss felt they had to take time to recharge, so the guys set up a small two-man campsite off the trail several yards away into the brush line thinking they might hide yet still see anyone walking the trail.

They stayed in their camping spot sleeping a lot. On the third day they heard men on horseback coming along the path. As they passed the camp, they didn't notice them. Eric's boss spoke a little Spanish, but these men were speaking Brazilian. What Eric saw was that several of the men were from the logging camp riding with locals. He also could see they had guns. Not just sidearms, but big guns; the kind you hunt men with. That night Eric and his boss knew what they had to do to stay alive.

Morning came with the sun coming through the trees. They made a plan to divide up the gold, each taking a mule then go in different directions so as not to be followed through the jungle each man vowing that if they made it out alive, they would call on the other. Eric spent forty days making his way through the jungle, dealing with so many bugs, most of which kept biting him the whole way. He heard roaring pumas, the call of brides. His loneliness was starting to weaken his spirits.

About forty-five days in, Eric came across a river. By now Eric couldn't tell which way he was going. But he knew that all rivers run out to the ocean and that would be a good place to be. Eric walked along the river's edge following the flow of water. He spotted a canoe laying on

the bank. It had to belong to someone around. Maybe this thing was dangerous, Eric knew he had to get out of there. It sure would be faster if he took the canoe. He knew he couldn't take all the gold he had, so he loaded the canoe with what it could hold. The rest he left lay on the bank; the jungle would take it back. He took off the ropes from the mule then set it free.

Eric took the canoe down river, going to a place he had no idea of or where he would come out at. That was if he could survive the river. Danger was around every bend, in the river death could come fast. At times he was going as fast as the river flowed. Other times it was a slow lazy current. He was so tired he wanted to sleep, but there was no time for that now.

It was now his thirtieth day on the river he flowed out into an open area filled with reeds and white long-legged birds. He came to a stop in the tall grass. Eric pulled the canoe with what gold was left upon the shoreline. He spent the rest of the day looking for something to eat as he tried to figure out where he was. Off down the shore line he saw a small ocean side village. Here he might find some kind of help, at least something to eat.

As he got closer to the huts, he saw a few boys kicking some old, tattered soccer ball around. He knew he couldn't talk to them, maybe he could still get them to understand. He opened his mouth and rubbed his stomach letting them know he was hungry. An old woman came out to him with something to eat. Eric couldn't tell what it was, but it went down fast enough, it didn't matter.

He was able to get another mule from the boy's father by trading for his watch. After loading up the mule Eric was ready to move on. He needed a way; a boat, truck, or something to get him to an airport. Eric would be happy for a ship. The sun had come and gone three times when Eric came to a fishing village. There were several large sea going ships just offshore. With some talking, some coffee and some gold he was able to get a ride to Gulfport, Mississippi. Eric off loaded his gold then went to New Orleans. Once he found a place to rest, he stopped to call his boss. He had a vow to keep. To Eric's surprise, the man answered the call. He had made it out, all the way to Baton Rouge. They met at the old Absinthe House for a beer. They said their goodbyes and then went on their own ways.

Eric moved to New Iberia. The two men met several times in LaFayette. Eric died in 1955 at 95 years old. He left a family that loved him. His grandchildren hold a memorial service for Eric each year in June to honor his life at their First Life Celebration. Eric's grandson, Tom Staufer, told us that Eric's old boss was named Bill J. Sikorsky.

Bill's grandson was coming to the 2022 First Life to share this time with them.

Report sent in by: Tom Staufer.

S.G.L. Researcher
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