



# Montana's Waldron Creek Fire: The 1931 Tragedy and the Forgotten Five (Disaster)

*Dr. Charles Palmer*

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On August 25, 1931, five men died fighting the devastating Waldron Creek Fire west of Choteau, Montana. Lacking training and preparation, Herbert Novotny, Frank Williamson, Hjalmer G. Gunnarson, Ted Bierchen and Charles Allen dashed into the flames and never stood a chance. The Teton County coroner added insult to injury, noting that each had “no one to blame but himself.” Three men were buried in unmarked graves. Records show that the body of the fifth was returned to his family, but no burial site is known. Only one has a headstone. National Smokejumper Association chief historian Dr. Charles Palmer shines a light on this important story, finally honoring the heroic sacrifice that led to critical changes in wildland firefighting.

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