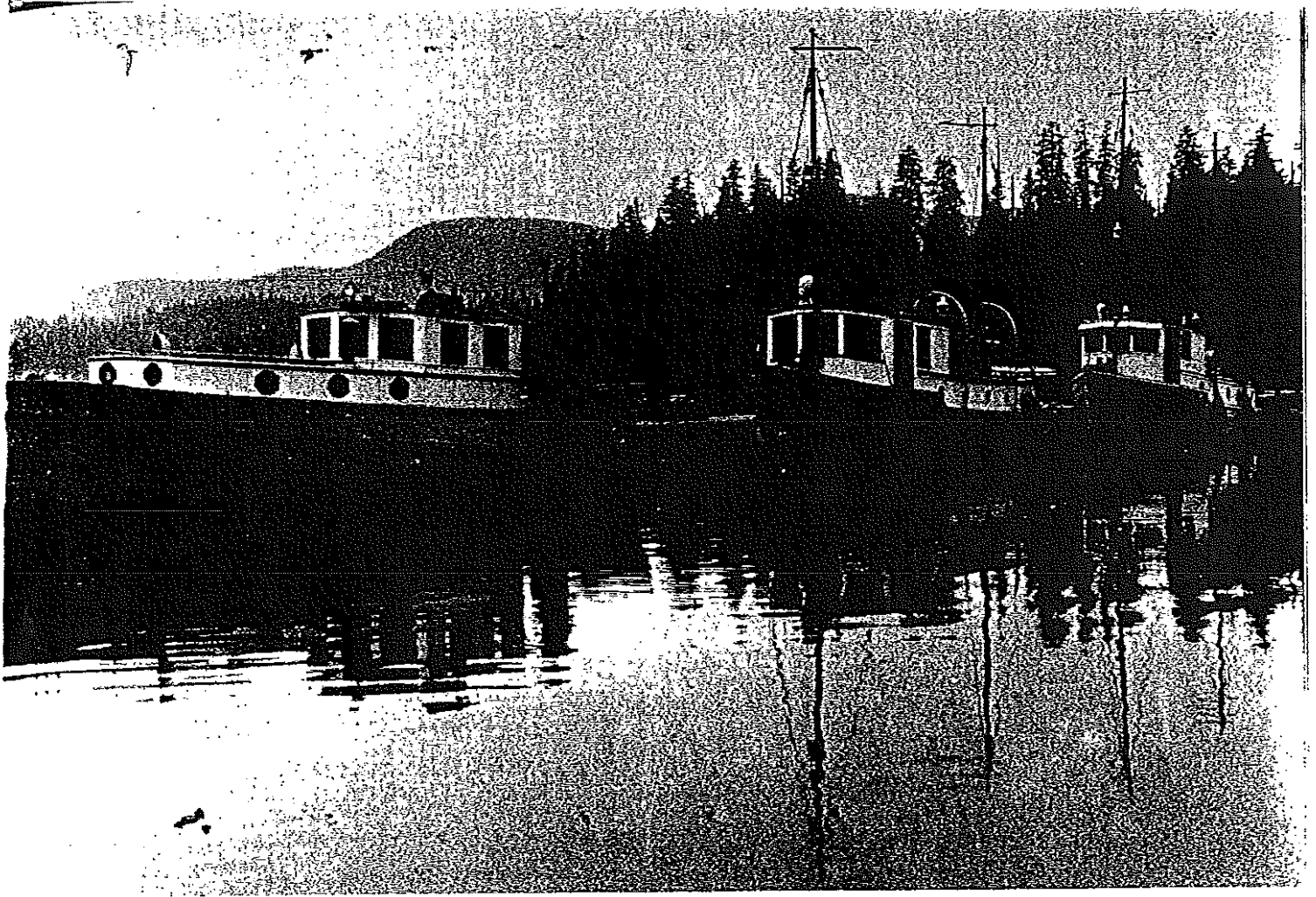




Five years later.

Douglas Fir, Cottonwood and Oliver Clark at Thurston Bay in 1930

Back to reality. Heroes can be a problem, because they tend to create villains. And some time back there in 1925 a nasty whisper began to rustle through the bush. 'Root and Branch' stomped on it, fast.

"... we wish to call attention to an unfortunate misunderstanding, for which we ourselves have possibly but all unwittingly been partly to blame. Naturally the first reports of this distressing affair were somewhat incomplete and disjointed, and the impression seems to be current that Clark's comrades left him to his fate. Nothing could be further from the truth. Supervisor J. Thompson and Engineer Haley who were upon the Forest Branch launch, clung for hours to the outskirts of that raging inferno at the imminent risk of their own lives, in the vain hope of saving Clark. Time and time again their craft was actually afire, but still they stayed until all hope of rescuing Clark had fled and they were able to rescue only his body. Then, and not until then, did they leave the spot."

FOREST RANGER, AHOY

And so on Tuesday, November 3rd., 1925, the Premier, John Oliver, unveiled an illuminated scroll to the memory of Clark. In his address the Premier paid tribute to Clark's courage; and the memorial scroll, together with a portrait of Clark, was placed prominently in the Provincial Library. "There to remain," the Premier said, "so long as these buildings shall stand."

Or at least until the place was renovated. The scroll read as follows:

"TO THE MEMORY OF OLIVER GOSNOLD CLARK

Ranger, B. C. Forest Service,
who lost his life in the noble discharge of his duty on the twenty-fifth day of June, 1925, at Port Neville.

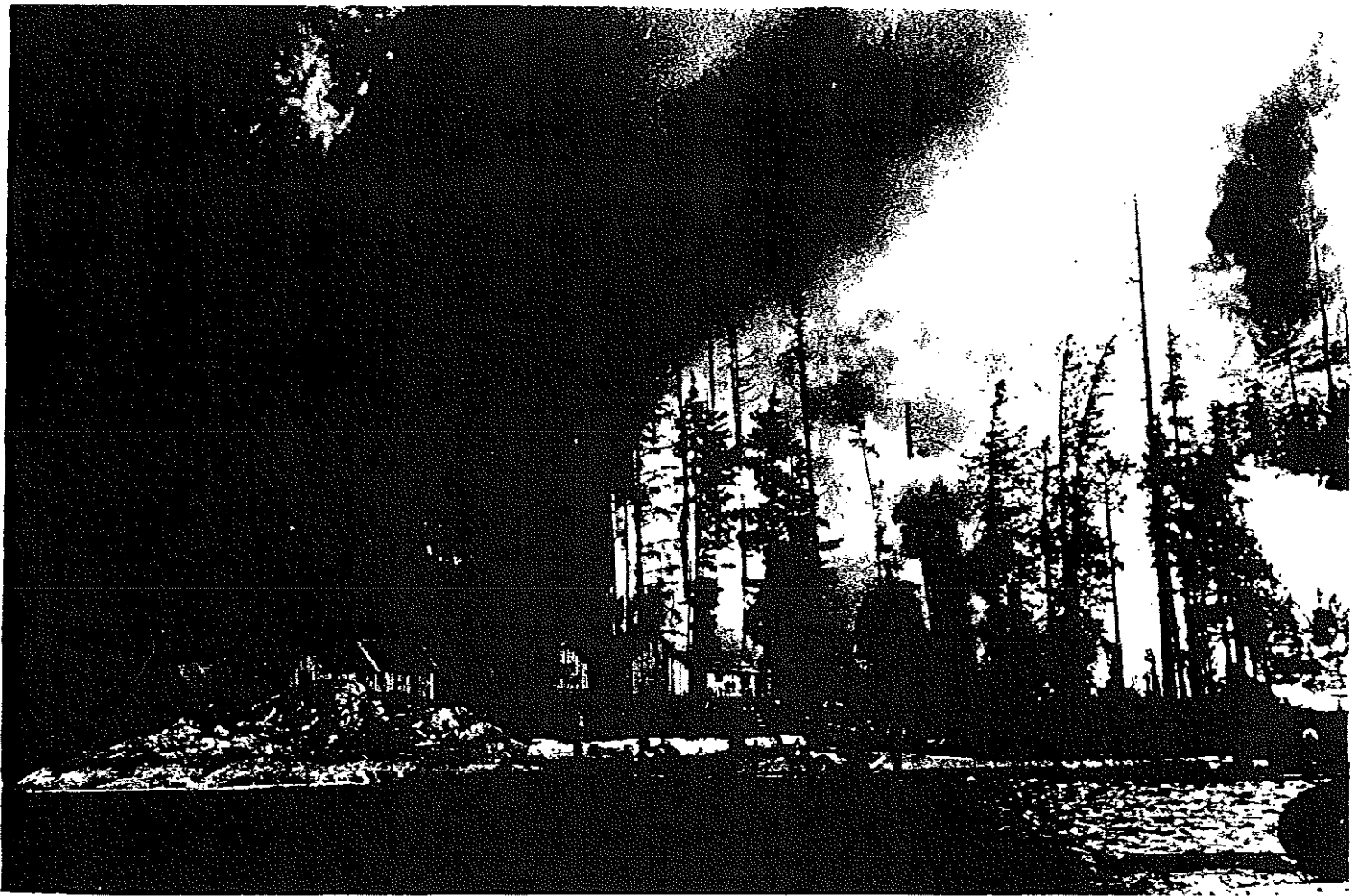
.....

A fire, of which he had charge, was whipped beyond control by a sudden change of wind, leaving only a few minutes for escape. Ignoring his own danger, Clark carried the warning to his crews and saw them safely to rafts and boats in the bay. He returned to the logging camp to make sure that no one had been missed. His body was subsequently found by his comrades, his Forest Service badge tightly clasped in his lifeless hand, bearing mute testimony that under the supreme test he had magnificently conceived and nobly discharged his duty. Ranger Clark has gone, but has left us an inspiring example of courage and devotion to duty which will persist until the last Forest Fire is conquered and completely out."

* * * * *

It is perhaps the intrusion of terrible facts into the romance and idealism of that era which results in the stumbling reaction of the writers of the day. It was as though the horrible death of Clark had to be woven into the tapestry of the times, to take its place among the fantasy of primeval forests and surging ocean, and stern men going inflexibly about their duty, never shirking, giving their all, sleeping without blankets.

In less than five months after his death Oliver Clark had become slightly unreal, almost mythical. I want to *know* Clark, to *feel* for him, the way I knew and felt for Campbell when he put the torch to the *Leila R.* But I can't. I can't get at the real man; he's all dressed up in legend like gift wrapping. I find myself giving inordinate attention to one single nonsense question: Did Clark *really* die with his badge in his hand?



Port Neville, June 25, 1925 at 1.45 p.m.

“Assistant Ranger CLARK was engaged in organizing the women and children and sending them down to the Forest Service launch which was standing by. There was no time to spare as the fire swept down on the hamlet as the people were got out, but CLARK went back to search the houses in case any children might have been left behind in the rush for safety. Unfortunately he did not mention that he was doing so, and the boat pulled out of range before he was missed. As soon as possible, his companions went back in a small boat, and found his body near the landing.

“CLARK was a veteran of the Great War and was looked upon as a thoroughly efficient officer of the Provincial Forest Service.”

* * * * *

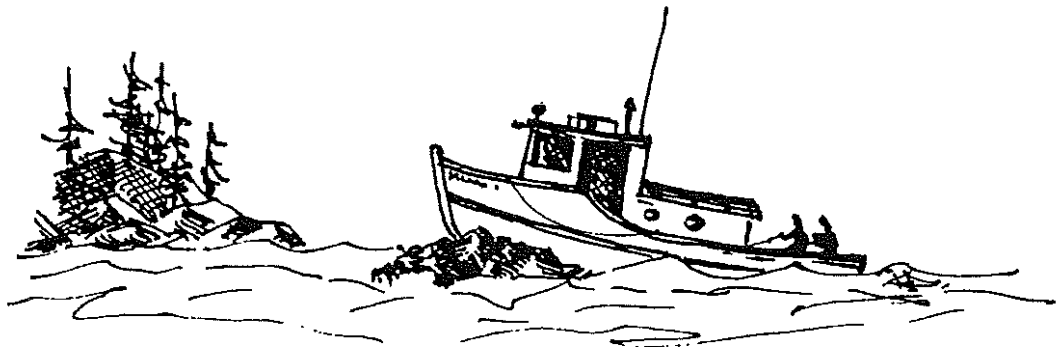
FOREST RANGER, AHOY

So at the end of 1925 they named a boat after him.

"I christen this vessel the *Oliver Clark* and may she prove as staunch and true in the service as the valiant man whose name she bears." Thus said Miss Doris Pattullo, daughter of the Premier. The vessel measured forty feet long with a nine foot six inch beam and a Vivian 16 h.p. heavy duty engine. She was built by Rodd Brothers in Victoria.

And finally, realism in the person of Wilf Archer, ex-Ranger, sitting in his office at Campbell River in 1981, bluff and forthright:

"Sure, I ran the old *Oliver Clark* for a couple of years. She was a long, skinny double-ender and by then she had a six-cylinder Chrysler gas engine. The engine was right in the back of the boat and the wheelhouse was right in front. In between you had the living quarters and the galley, and you ran her single-handed. To get back to the engine you had to gallop all the full length of the boat. It didn't seem to matter how good a condition she was in; when you came in for a landing either your throttle would stick or your clutch cord would break, and you'd have to go running for that bloody engine and throw it out of gear . . . Aaargh, she was a right bastard."



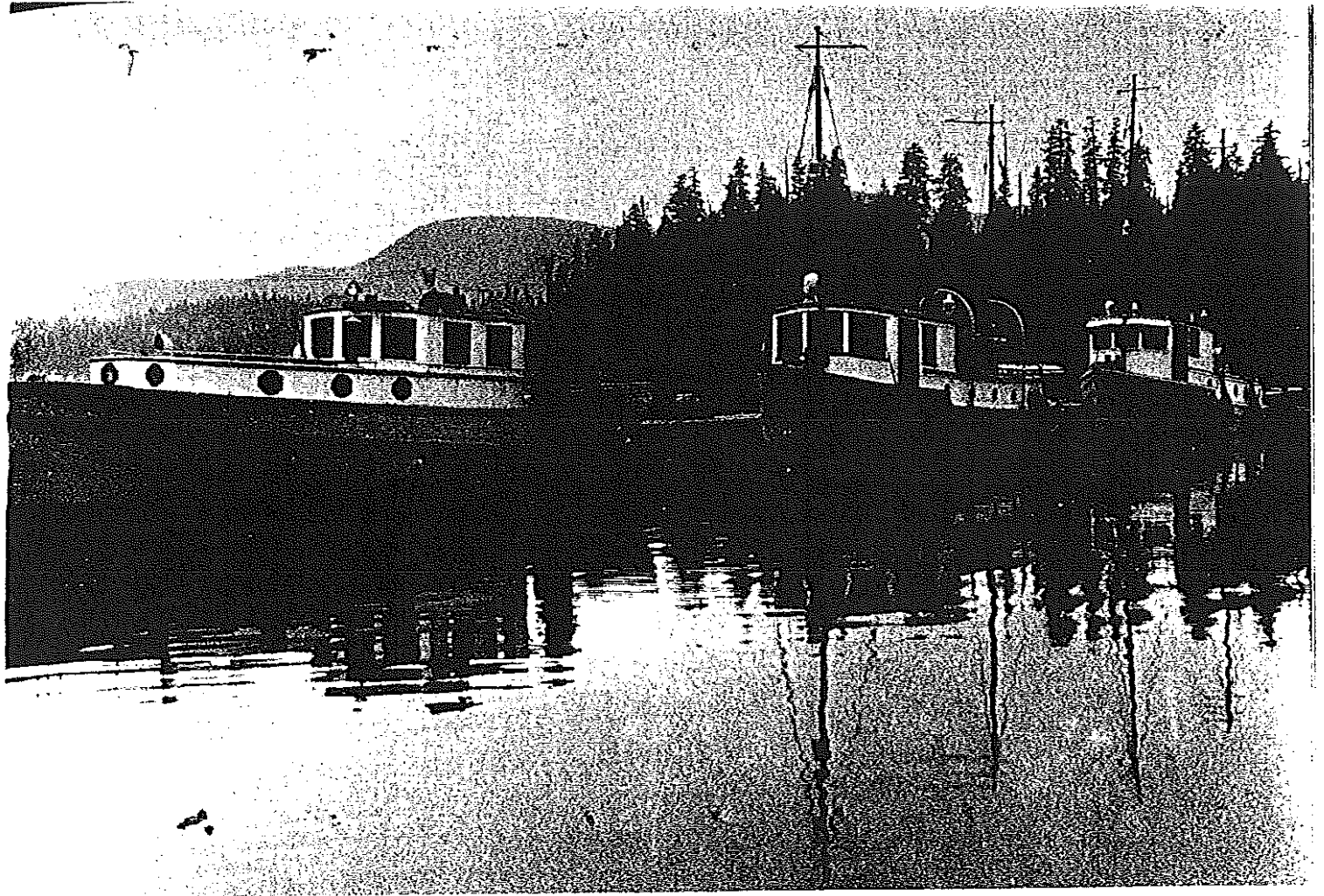


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