

BUSHFIRE

BULLETIN



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The views expressed in articles in the Bushfire Bulletin do not necessarily reflect the views of the policies of the NSW Rural Fire Service.

Cover photo by Nick Moir

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COMMISSIONER'S FOREWORD

As I write this end of the year message, the skies are grey, it's humid and reasonable rain has and continues to fall over many parts of New South Wales. What a stark contrast to this time last year. Let's hope that situation prevails for the next few months. A change of pace and time to enjoy the festive season with family and friends is something every RFS member has more than earned.

Rural Fire Service volunteer firefighters and staff have had to endure much in the last couple of years. A series of very severe fire seasons, substantial legislative change, greater accountability and scrutiny, and rapidly changing community expectations, have tested our resolve.

The year's end sees us still immersed in issues dealing with our expanding role in helping to provide a safer community. The challenge is considerable from both the perspective of our volunteers and that of the staff, but meeting the challenge has many benefits for us all.

As I travel around New South Wales and meet volunteers, sometimes for the first time and others for the second or third, I never cease to be moved by the dedication, energy, commitment and professionalism of those who make the RFS what it is today, one of the world's great emergency services.

It is true of course that we could not have evolved to the degree we have, had it not been for our members' willingness to accept the need for change. Change more often than not, is difficult to contend with. But it is heartening to see the way in which we have, not always without question, recognised the need for it to occur. Please accept that we who are charged with managing the Service are not about change for its own sake but rather to ensure that our great volunteer-based organisation survives in a contemporary world, not for the next year or two but for at least the next hundred.

Can I say to everyone who is part of the Service, you have given much of yourselves, often not without pain, in the interests of community safety. For that, you have a grateful community and you have my profound gratitude. A job well done.

With the festive season just around the corner I would like to say simply, have a peaceful and joyous Christmas, what you have given in the last year is its own reward.



Phil Koperberg





1 GENERAL NEWS



*Local firefighter join with visiting Oxley Zone crews to notify residents of the situation
Photo by Cameron Wade*



600 FIGHT BLAZES IN NORTHERN TABLELANDS

Thirty-one fires affected the Northern Tablelands in September during one of the first Section 44s to be declared in the 2003-2004 fire season.

About 120 firefighters were on the ground each day – amounting to about 600 in total. Over 45000 hectares were affected with most fires burning in inaccessible country.

On 1 September 2003, Severn, Inverell and Tenterfield districts experienced extreme weather conditions, which resulted in a total of 25 fires burning quite actively over the next 14 days.

Most of the fires were private property permit burns that got out of control in the difficult conditions.

Forecasted winds for 7 September arrived two days early, fanning several private and public land hazard reduction burns. Burning in remote areas, the fires continued, with local resources working hard to contain them.

On 15 September 2003, at 14:30 hours the Commissioner declared a Section 44 under the Rural Fires Act 1997 for the Northern Tablelands incorporating, Inverell, Tenterfield and Severn Rural Fire Districts.

An Incident Management Team (IMT) was formed and assembled at the Tenterfield Fire Control Centre and a forward command centre was established at Glen Innes National Parks and Wildlife Service office.

Windy conditions prevailed throughout the campaign, although temperatures varied, remaining quite low on some days, which assisted crews.

RFS volunteers were joined by NSW Fire Brigades, National Parks and Wildlife Service and State Forests' firefighters. All were supported by a range of agencies, councils and welfare groups.

RFS task forces arrived from Oxley, Moree, Upper Hunter, Clarence Valley, Coffs Harbour, Lower Hunter, Mid North Coast and three from Region West, two from Region East and two from Region North.

Fire has been spotting up to three kilometres ahead of itself...

Investigators said the intensity was off the scale.

Conditions peaked on the weekend of 27 September and the community of Wyalaliba came under threat as the Hewitt's Peak fire spotted. Firefighters saved many homes and received the recognition of residents for their skills, dedication and success.

Thousands of hours of hard containment work was carried out by firefighters before heavy rains fell two weeks after the declaration, turning firegrounds to swamps and dousing the fires.

TUESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER

Reasonable fire activity with Girrard flaring into open country and crews working all day on the Kangawalla fire line. Crews were working hard to establish containment lines on most fires, particularly Hewitt's Peak, Capoopmeta, Bebo, Poverty Point and The Oaks fires. Others remained quiet with lines holding and patrolling in often difficult terrain continuing.

WEDNESDAY 17 SEPTEMBER

Fire activity was predominantly to the east of Tenterfield, however major operations occurred on Hewitt's Creek to the east of Glen Innes. Crews and the IMT were disappointed to discover a new fire, possibly deliberate, west of the active edge of the Oakwood Creek fire and opposite a proposed containment line. Crews quickly controlled it, keeping it to 10ha.

THURSDAY 18 SEPTEMBER

Volatile fire activity on Kangawalla and Oakwood Creek fires saw them move quickly in warm temperatures. With adverse weather predicted the decision to backburn during the day was difficult. Fires were expected to reach lines in the next 24 hours, compromising crews and fire boundaries. Backburns were given the go ahead. Evening backburns conducted on these fires and Capoopmeta. Major backburns planned for Oakwood Creek, Hewitt's Peak and Oaks fire off well-constructed lines.

FRIDAY 19 SEPTEMBER

Firefighters were protecting property at Poverty Point with excellent results – no losses. Crews were also extremely busy on the Oaks, Oakwood Creek, Kangawalla and Capoopmeta fires. All backburning went well with crews in a good position for a weekend of bad weather.

SATURDAY 20 SEPTEMBER

Crews contained a run on the Heinz fire. The Sandy Creek fire's run through swamp was slowed with water bombing. Poverty Point moved slightly east. Focus centred on Oakwood Creek as it moved toward Hewitt's Peak fire.

SUNDAY 21 SEPTEMBER

Firefighters successfully contained The Oaks, Poverty Point, Oakwood Creek and Capoopmeta after five days of backburning – a credit to all involved. Deliberate ignitions again troubled crews with police and fire investigators called in. The Kangawalla fire broke containment lines with crews and heavy plant establishing new lines. Helicopters bombed the area to assist.

MONDAY 22 SEPTEMBER

Two new fires reported. Willows contained with help of aircraft. Local brigades rounded up a small fire near Drake, Tenterfield. Crews also assisted the New England Team with a fire burning south of Gilgai where houses were threatened.

TUESDAY 23 SEPTEMBER

Fire was active again on Oaks, Hewitt's Peak, Oakwood Creek and Sandy Creek. Crews were maintaining perimeters. Incendiary work was completed on Hewitts Creek, bringing one of the fire fronts down to backburn lines. A number of fires still burned internally or in inaccessible country with containment lines impossible because of rough terrain.

WEDNESDAY 24 SEPTEMBER

Firefighters did major backburning operations during the evening on the Oaks and completed backburns on Sandy Creek.

THURSDAY 25 SEPTEMBER

New fires were reported during the day. One, possibly a spotfire from Butterleaf and another to the south of Butterleaf joined the main fire. Another at Malara, east of Tenterfield near Ewingar. Water bombing was initiated as soon as the Malara fire was reported however its intensity meant little progress was achieved. The McMinimus fire to the northwest of Tenterfield in Queensland was extremely active on the NSW side of the border but still burning in remote country. Sandy creek broke containment lines, heading down an escarpment to the east.

FRIDAY 26 SEPTEMBER

Fifteen of the 31 fires had been declared out by this stage. A successful day at Sandy Creek, Oaks with backburning from containment lines holding. Crews and helicopters were busy on all fronts, but particularly Hewitt's Peak where minor spot overs occurred in the afternoon. Containment lines were established. Qld's McMinimus fire was progressing slowly in NSW.

SATURDAY 27 SEPTEMBER

Severe conditions tested lines and firefighters. Winds in excess of 90kph from the west, temperatures of 29 degrees and humidity around 20 per cent. Hewitt's Peak broke containment lines running through the Wyalaliba community. Brigades were in property protection mode and saved four dwellings. Five structures in total were destroyed, including one inhabited and one uninhabited dwelling and one inhabited caravan. Fire has been spotting up to three kilometres ahead of itself, from ridge to ridge this afternoon. Investigators said the intensity was off the scale. Trees fell over with the winds and branches rolled off with very little or no scorching.

The Oaks fire also had several spot overs, which crews contained and managed to maintain the southwestern perimeter, although the main front still pushed to the southeast. All available crews were deployed to the fireground, doing an excellent job holding the fire from affecting further property.

SUNDAY 28 SEPTEMBER

Containment strategies for these two fires are the priority as are containment lines for Malara and McMinimus. Predicted weather for the next two days is favourable and firefighters will use it to their advantage.

MONDAY 29 SEPTEMBER

Relatively quiet fire activity with good ground made on containment lines for Hewitt's Peak Complex. The fire became active around properties this afternoon as it worked its way down from the hills, however, a western taskforce and local crews were based around properties in the Wyaliba community for protection. Brigades saved a caravan occupied as a dwelling as the fire approached rapidly through heavy grass fuels. The Oaks was active again with minor spot-overs which units contained quickly preventing problems. Two days of heavy plant work on containment lines for McMinimus nearly completed.

TUESDAY 30 SEPTEMBER

Resources focus on McMinimus backburn after containment lines completed. Fire protection around Wyaliba from Hewitt's Peak Complex completed and crews will now complete containment lines and backburning. Patrolling of the Oaks fire, which is quiet, and crews tasked to McMinimus. Malara will become the focus once this work is completed.



One of 5 structures lost in the wyaliba community during the fires - Photos by Cameron Wade

WEDNESDAY 1 OCTOBER

Light rain across the Northern Tablelands is a welcome sight for firefighters. Region East Taskforces enroute to Tenterfield continue on their way. They will finalise containment lines on McMinimus if rain clears. All fires quiet, but the final result will not be known until tomorrow.

THURSDAY 2 OCTOBER

Wet weather continues across the Section 44 declaration area. Heavy rain overnight in Tenterfield and Glen Innes with 100mm recorded in 12 hours. All firegrounds are untrafficable. Lightning strikes occur during thunderstorms raising fears of fresh fires, but substantial rainfall alleviates this. The Bush Fire Management Committee met and recommended the Section 44 be revoked on Friday.

REMOTE AREA TEAMS BOOSTED

The NSW Rural Fire Service will train and equip 40 new Remote Area Firefighting Teams to fight fires in rugged and isolated terrain across the State.

Next year 200 RFS volunteers will undergo the extensive training needed to equip them to join RAFT.

The RFS currently has 19 teams comprised of some 95 individual firefighters.

Recognising that intensive training is essential because of the special skills of dry firefighting and dangerous terrain involved, the NSW government has earmarked \$150,000 for the program.

The RFS will spend more than \$60,000 to equip the new RAFT program across NSW.

The teams will then be available to operate across NSW as needed.

Interim criteria for interested volunteers is available from Fire Control Centres.



PORTABLE PUMPS IN VITAL FLOOD SAVE

A dozen Sutherland Rural Fire District portable fire pumps were vital in preventing homes being flooded in the southern Sydney suburb of Kurnell in May.

Working under the State Emergency Service, Kurnell, Grays Point, Engadine, Loftus, Menai and Illawong RFS Brigades were called to help when more than 300 mm of rain in just three days causing the water table beneath the suburb to rise and flood streets, yards and at least one home.

Torres, Balboa and Cook Streets were the worst affected, said Sutherland SES controller David Monk.

Working in torrential rain and often under torchlight, RFS volunteers set up pumps on any high ground available and began pumping towards Botany Bay the rising water rapidly pooling around homes.

The six RFS brigades were rotated to the suburb with the pumping operation spanning three days

"We had eight homes under flood threat. Only one had water enter," Mr Monk said.

The six RFS brigades were rotated to the suburb, each time taking a vehicle, two portable pumps and appropriate lengths of suction and delivery

hose. The pumping operation spanned three days. The flood emergency in Sutherland Shire lasted for six days. When it was feared the Woronora River might burst its banks, SES volunteers went from house to house on both sides of the river telling residents that the area was on "flood watch".

Elsewhere in the Shire, the Hacking River was in full flood, causing the closure of the Audley Weir. The Waterways Authority issued an unusual warning to navigators using the river. Five sets of picnic furniture had been swept away from the Audley picnic reserve, over the weir and out into the river.

Just south of the Shire Sir Bertram Stevens Drive was closed when it was feared the heavy rain would cause rockslides. Closure of the Drive and the Audley Weir meant extended driving for some residents of Maianbar and Bundeena.

During the six days, during which the Minister for Emergency Services declared the Sutherland Shire a "disaster zone", the SES received 353 calls for help. "Eighty percent of the calls were for flooding and the remainder for water entering roofs or to fallen trees," Mr Monk said.

The SES assisted at Taren Point and Miranda where in the early stages of the "big wet" numerous buildings including a hotel and roads were inundated. Apart from asking the Sutherland RFS for assistance, Mr Monk brought in SES units from Camden, Waverley, Liverpool and Bankstown.

Story by Grahame Davis

SURFBEACH BRIGADE STATION OPENING

After a previous attempt to open Surfbeach Brigade Station was cancelled due to the declaration of a section 44, Commissioner Phil Koperberg declared the Station officially open on Saturday July 19, 2003.

The entire Brigade turned out for the ceremony alongside local members of parliament.

"They stand out like shining beacons for their volunteer ethos."

The Commissioner praised the Eurobodalla District and particularly the members of Surfbeach Rural Fire Brigade.

"They stand out like shining beacons for their volunteer ethos."

In addition to a new station, the Commissioner also handed over keys to the Brigade's new Cat 1 tanker and Cat 11 pumper.



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RFS ASSISTS NATIONAL BUSHFI

"At a time when a lot of emotive comment is being made about bushfire management, firefighting agencies across the nation have welcomed the Coalition of Australian Government Inquiry's independent and balanced approach as it investigates bushfire mitigation and management. The RFS will be contributing to the NSW Government's detailed submission to the Inquiry. The RFS has a solid track record on making change where it is based on strong scientific or operational evidence and we look forward to the Inquiry's recommendations."

Phil Koperberg, Commissioner



The Coalition of Australian Government's (COAG) Inquiry currently underway, is arguably the most important national investigation held in Australia in decades.

The National Inquiry on Bushfire Management, Prevention and Mitigation is being conducted under the auspices of the COAG and was announced by the Prime Minister on October 10 2003.

COAG comprises the Prime Minister, State Premiers, Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA).

Chairman of the COAG Bushfire Inquiry Panel is Mr Stuart Ellis AM, previously the Chief Executive Officer of the South Australian Country Fire Service. Professor Peter Kanowski, Australian National University Professor of Forestry and Professor Robert Whelan, Dean of Science, University of Wollongong will also join the panel.

"We've made the changes necessary to build the best bushfire fighting force in the world."

The scientifically-based Inquiry will outline the facts of last season's major bushfires. Having established the facts, the Inquiry will then examine the efficiency with which major bushfire fighting resources are managed on a national basis.

It will also investigate the effectiveness of current management practices particularly in Crown lands, state forests, national parks, other open space areas adjacent to urban development and private property.

It will also explore measures such as local government planning and best use of technology to minimise the impacts of bushfires.

The objective is to consider issues and identify situations where there may be opportunities to enhance national cooperation and achieve best practice.

The RFS has made a significant contribution to the COAG Inquiry, providing a detailed paper, which forms a large part of the NSW Government submission.

The RFS has also contributed to the Inquiry through the secondment of Jane Hollier (RFS Regional Management Officer), who is working within the secretariat along with representatives from the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service; CSIRO; Department of Environment and Heritage (Aust Government); and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Unlike the Federal Parliamentary Inquiry into Recent Australia Bushfires – also known as the Nairn Inquiry – the COAG Inquiry is scientifically based.

The NSW Government directed its agencies not to take part in the Nairn Inquiry. The Premier said he believed the Nairn Inquiry was a duplication of more than a dozen inquiries that preceded it and the COAG Inquiry that will follow it.

Of the 59 recommendations made in the Nairn Inquiry report, 11 fall outside NSW jurisdiction. Of the remaining 48 recommendations, NSW has already implemented or is implementing some 65 percent of them.

"Over the past two decades NSW agencies have implemented hundreds of recommendations from some 16 inquests and inquiries by the NSW Coroner, scientific bodies and the NSW Parliament, among others," RFS Commissioner Phil Koperberg said.

"We've made the changes necessary to build the best bushfire fighting force in the world," he said.

The Commissioner said the fact that most of the Nairn recommendations have already been

implemented in NSW is proof that the concerns of volunteers are heard and acted on.

Before the Nairn Inquiry was even considered, NSW had implemented a number of changes and improvements to take into account volunteer feedback. These include points listed below:

VOLUNTEER FEEDBACK

- > Streamlining of hazard reduction applications to make it faster and easier.
- > Joint agreement between RFS and NPWS to get more hazard reduction done in national parks.
- > Resource sharing to get more hazard reduction done on the urban interface.
- > More volunteers taking part in Incident Management Teams during bushfires to ensure local knowledge is used to full advantage.
- > Firetrail audit to identify important fire trails in all lands.

The RFS is a healthy, volunteer organisation made up of about 69,000 members. All have valid and diverse opinions about the direction of the organisation.

To ensure those opinions are heard, volunteers are represented on every committee at every level during bushfire management and suppression.

The COAG Inquiry is due to release its findings and recommendations in March 2004.



RE INQUIRY



Photos by Rolf Poole

RFS crews from Kellyville, Glenhaven, Middle Dural, North Rocks and Kenthurst brigades conduct a night hazard reduction in Fred Caterson Reserve, Castle Hill during September 2003.

LONG SERVICE PRESENTATION

Four Portland Rural Fire Brigade members were presented with long service certificates and badges during their station open day in September.



Left to Right:
Wendy Wilcox and Gary Wilcox (15 years each), Bruce Brown (25 years), Herb Coleman (35 years) and Portland Captain Allan Gerke. Merv Bennett's long service over 25 years was also acknowledged.

NATIONAL APPROACH TO AIRCRAFT PLACEMENT THIS FIRE SEASON

NSW RFS now runs a three-pronged strategy on aircraft use at a cost of more than \$7 Million.

1. NATIONAL AERIAL FIREFIGHTING ARRANGEMENTS

This fire season there is a national approach to aircraft placement. All States and the ACT have joined the National Aerial Firefighting Centre, a company set up to organise the scheme.

NSW is receiving \$2M of the \$5.5M the Commonwealth has agreed to provide. The NSW Government is providing a further \$5.2M to lease and operate aircraft.

Under the national strategy NSW will be allocated one heavy capacity aircraft (Air-Crane – "Isabelle") and two medium capacity aircraft (Bell214B which can fight fires and move firefighters).

The big advantage of this approach is that it allows us to move aircraft around the country as they're needed. For example if NSW again experiences a severe fire season while Victoria is experiencing a mild season we will be able to shift aircraft to NSW as required.

2. STATE CONTRACT ARRANGEMENTS

The RFS is spending \$1M on the lease of five aircraft for this season: two medium capacity helicopters (BK117's), two medium capacity fixed-wing aircraft (Air Tractor 802 and a Turbo Thrush) and a fixed-wing linescanning reconnaissance aircraft.

These aircraft are positioned according to operational requirements.

3. CASUAL HIRE OF AIRCRAFT

Availability - The RFS maintains a "call when needed" list of approved aircraft operators. The list is updated on an ongoing basis and currently comprises approximately 70 operators and 160 aircraft.

Operational standards - The RFS aviation safety program requires minimum operational and safety standards for operators, aircraft and pilots to be met in order to be included on the list of "call when needed" aircraft. The RFS also has standard operating procedures in place when engaged in aerial firefighting activities.

FIRETONE 2004

Lavington Rural Fire Brigade will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary on Sunday 28 March 2004 by holding the FIRETONE 2004 exhibition.

FIRETONE 2004 will include exhibitions of new and old fire trucks, emergency service vehicles, boats, cranes and loaders.

Food and drinks will be available on the day and all proceeds will go towards new equipment for Lavington Rural Fire Brigade.

If you are interested in displaying old trucks or fire equipment, or for more information, contact Bruce Barnes on **02 6025 4274** or **0412 112 180**.

EXERCISE NORTHERN 4

Region North will once again see hundreds of crews descend upon Glen Innes Showground basecamp for training exercise 'Northern 4'.

The event will run from 19 to 21 March 2004 and is designed to simulate real life situations under a Section 44 'Bushfire Emergency'.

Three vehicle strike teams will be deployed throughout Glen Innes to structure fires, bushfires and motor vehicle accidents. Crews will demonstrate their skills in relay pumping, rural fire driving, fire entrapment and Hazmat exercises.

Divisional and sector commanders will control the event, utilising full incident management structure. Incident Management Teams will develop burn plans for hazard reductions and utilise GPS equipment throughout the event.

Northern Tablelands Team Manager, Superintendent Matt Inwood said that more than 350 RFS firefighters are expected to participate with crews travelling from as far as West Moree, Hastings and Tweed Heads.

"In our first year we had 120 people, it just keeps getting bigger and better. It is a jam packed weekend and we are now looking at involving close to 400 firefighters," Supt Inwood said.

More than 40 brigades participated in 'Northern 3' in 2003 with firefighters extending their skill base and building strong friendships with other brigades.

More than 40 brigades participated in 'Northern 3' in 2003 with firefighters extending their skill base and building strong friendships with other brigades.

"Crews enjoy the exercises but more than that, they enjoy the camaraderie side of it. Everyone gets together and shares war stories, it really is a good all round atmosphere," said Supt Inwood.

"The feedback from last year was absolutely brilliant. Those from last year had such a great time that they are lining up to come again this year."

Rural Fire Brigades interested in participating in 'Northern 4' can contact Region North Operations Officer, Bryan Daly on 66 432 512.

REMOTE AREA FIREFIGHTING SKILLS IMPROVED BY NAVIGATION EVENT

Coal & Candle Rural Fire Brigade (Warringah-Pittwater) took part in one of the most demanding navigation events in Australia, the 2003 Wilderness Rescue Navigation Shield, or NavShield, on the weekend of 5-6 July.

The event is similar to orienteering and draws competing teams from various emergency and defence services, and bushwalking groups. As Coal & Candle is training members in remote area firefighting skills, NavShield was used as a good practice run between fire seasons.

RFS teams from various districts, including Baulkham Hills, Lithgow, Blue Mountains, and Hornsby, also took part.

Skills such as measuring distance and aiming-off are easily learnt in training but can be difficult to apply accurately

Teams were issued with topographic maps and a list of 6-figure grid references, representing small checkpoints to be found in the bush.

The course covered about 100 km², with the checkpoints given varying points values according to accessibility. Teams had to correctly plot the points on their maps, then plan a route to take them to the most checkpoints within the event's time limit - either 11 or 30 hours.

NavShield was held in the Gardens of Stone National Park near Lithgow, with terrain ranging from gentle and open, to sheer cliffs and dense scrub. The teams camped the night before the event, where temperatures reached about -4. Not the usual conditions for firefighters! We took the opportunity to catch up with the Navshield "regulars" from other brigades and services.

The event started after breakfast on Saturday. We headed off into the bush full of optimism about both our navigation skills and fitness. Two members were veterans of several previous NavShields, and for some, this was their first go.

The teams quickly learnt that skills such as measuring distance and aiming-off are easily learnt in training but can be difficult to apply accurately, and that watercourses marked on a 1975 map might not be that easy to find on the ground.

The use of 20m contours, not the usual 10m ones, threw several teams out when plotting routes involving climbs. All the teams criss-crossed the course, occasionally crossing paths - all very friendly but giving nothing away about checkpoint locations! After counting paces for two or three 350m legs, nothing beats finally finding the soccer-ball sized white and orange checkpoint markers in the scrub.

The evening saw the one day teams arriving back at base, either coming back early to relax, or running down a fire trail to get home at the last possible moment after squeezing in a late checkpoint.

Springwood Bushwalking club won, and Berowra RFB topped the RFS teams in the one day event, while Newcastle Bushwalkers narrowly beat Kangaroo Valley RFB to win the two day event.

Coal & Candle ran in the middle of the pack, with no clear superiority of any particular emergency service this year. All teams found the event a very worthwhile exercise for improving navigation, bushcraft, and other remote firefighting skills, as well as for excellent team-building.

**Story by Dan Meijer
Coal & Candle RFB
Warringah-Pittwater District.**

Photos by Kylie Morris



Coal & Candle firefighters Talone Higgins and Dan Meijer realise that navigating from point A to Point B in a straight line doesn't always work!



AG QUIP 2003 - ARE YOU PREPARED?

Are you prepared? was the theme for this year's display by Region North at the Ag Quip Field Days in Gunnedah. The marquee was focused on property preparation from rural to urban environment.

Recently burnt machinery was placed on display, attracting a huge amount of interest and comment from the public and other exhibitors.

Big Ed, the RFS community education bus and the show bags proved very popular with the children, most of whom showed good knowledge of 'stop, drop and roll', '000' and basic fire safety to earn their bag. Big Ed was supported with a display from RFS Engineering Services (Tony Slade), firefighting equipment and a mobile radio repeater.

During the field days a stove fire and a fuel tray were used to demonstrate the safe use of a fire blanket and extinguishers. These active demonstrations attracted large crowds throughout the three days and many enquiries on how to prepare their own home/property.

Special thanks to all the volunteers who worked on the stand, to Firetalk (Tamworth) for donating the extinguishers used during the demonstrations. Thanks also to Crawney Zone for liaising with the owners of the burnt machinery used on the display.

*By Chris Wallbridge
Community Safety Officer,
Region North.*



HUSKISSON BRIGADE OPEN DAY & EXPO

It all started on the weekend of 24-25 May, when eleven members of Huskisson Rural Fire Brigade piled into the bus and headed for the RFS Community Education Conference at Orange kids' area.

Community Education was a new adventure for the Brigade, an initiative of the Captain after the devastation of the Christmas fires of 2001/02 and the need to educate our residents in the Shoalhaven District.

The weekend away gave everyone a chance to see where the RFS was heading with Community Education. On the Sunday afternoon, we hadn't even left Orange and the wheels were in motion for a massive Open Day at the station.

Within a week of being home, a meeting was held, and the arduous task of planning the event started, and Sunday 24 August was chosen. A COMED committee was formed. The objective of the day was to raise the awareness of the Rural Fire Service, provide information for all the local residents on how to prepare their homes, and also give all the kids a chance to play with fire hoses and games.

The local businesses in the area were fantastic in their support, donating sausages and bread for the barbecue and lots of prizes for a raffle that was run in conjunction by our fundraising members.

Support was also received from Serco Sodexo Defence Services, located at HMAS Albatross by supplying an airfield fire tender for the day. The local community radio station also broadcast live from the station all day.

Various stalls were set up in the station with representatives from NPWS, Booderee National Park (ACT), NSW Police, Ambulance Service of NSW along with a local handyman offering services and a representative from Quell Firefighting Enterprises.

The day started early for the brigade with a pager call at 7am. Once the crew returned from that, it was all hands on deck to clean up the station and set up everything. The Open Day began at 10am with lovely sunny skies and a slight breeze.

It was estimated that between 500-600 people attended. People from as far away as Sydney dropped in and took away information about the RFS they didn't previously have.

The Shoalhaven Community Education Trailer was set up, running videos throughout the day with members of the brigade on standby to answer questions and give out pamphlets. As a result of the Open Day, the brigade now has more than ten street meetings organised in our area, and referrals for other areas.

What started out as a beautiful sunny day soon changed at about 1pm when the wind picked up and started causing havoc with the kids area out the back. Improvising by some of the members saw the smoke house moved inside.

It wasn't long after that the callouts started. First to a house fire at 2.30pm and while returning to the station, the unit was turned out again to grass alight. To add further turmoil, the district lost power. This would last for several days.

While cleaning up after the Open Day, crews responded several more times that evening including to the home of one of our members, that had lost part of the roof. Portable generators were set up at the station to run the radios and maintain crews on standby until about 11pm that night.

The Open Day itself was an incredibly successful event for the Brigade, raising the awareness of the local community and also giving self-assurance to all the members, that when you put your mind to it, you can achieve anything.

*By Anita MacAdam Region South
Community Safety Officer*



Volunteer Mark Mitchell showing some local kids how to use a hose.

THE ANNUAL STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS



Above:

A scenario that some crew leaders faced at the championships. A plane crashed into two cars, multiple deceased and injured..What would you do?

Left:

Llandilo cadet captain Daniel Watson and cadet Nathan Chapman participate in a hose drill event at Tamworth

The annual State Championships were held in Tamworth on the weekend of 26-28 September 2003.

Fourteen brigades entered the open events for senior crews and the junior section involved eight teams.

For the third consecutive year Forbes Central Rural Fire Brigade won the senior events.

Second place went to Jindera Rural Fire Brigade from Albury and a close third was the crew from Kingswood/Warral Brigade, Oxley.

Top crew leader position went first to Forbes Central, second to Jindera and third to Lismore.

Senior events included tanker, defensive structural, fireground procedures, old and new, motor vehicle, equipment failure, light tanker and chainsaw.

Congratulations to the other brigades competing:

- > Rivers (ACT)
- > Bilambil (Tweed)
- > Boothenba (Dubbo)
- > Gol Gol (Lower Western)
- > Huskisson (Shoalhaven)
- > Oakville (Hawkesbury)
- > Oxley (Oxley)
- > Pearl Beach (Gosford)
- > Varroville (Campbelltown)
- > Weddin HQ (Weddin)

Once again, the integration of the juniors into the championships worked successfully.

Cumberland Zone was the overall winner in the junior events with all three top teams hailing from the western suburbs of Sydney.

There was very little between the winners, St Pauls and equal second place teams, Llandilo and Orchard Hills Brigades.

The Llandilo junior crew leader took first place, followed by Orchard Hills and St Pauls.

Also providing strong competition were junior teams from Condobolin (Lachlan) Cooma/Monaro, Seahampton (Lake Macquarie), Tumut and Warringah.

Junior events included emergency, handtool, fireground procedures, old and new, water transfer, equipment failure and light tanker.

The State Championships will be held in Queanbeyan in 2004. More details will be posted closer to the date.

Photos by Cameron Wade

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DEL RIO
FIRE



Photo by Cameron Wade



At 1300 on Saturday 26 July 2003 Hawkesbury and Baulkham Hills crews responded to a reported kitchen fire at Del Rio Caravan Park Wisemans Ferry.

Wisemans Ferry 1 was first to arrive on scene and reported "Firecom Wisemans Ferry 1 Red Red Red, we have a two storey building 70m by 20m top floor fully involved in fire, additional resources needed urgently."

Crews from Lower McDonald, St Albans, Maroota, Lower Portland, Glenorie and NSWFB Station 82 contained the fire by relay pumping from the Hawkesbury River, portable pumping from a swimming pool and utilising two bulk water carriers.

Although the top floor of the structure was totally destroyed, equipment from the lower floor was salvageable.

YANCO-WAMOON BRIGADE FIREFIGHTER
GRADUATES

Year 10 students of Yanco Agricultural Boarding High School after being presented with their Village Firefighter Certificates. Kate Johnson, Alex Doulman and Alicia Matthews are active members of Yanco-Wamoon Rural Fire Brigade.

The presentation took place during school assembly by Yanco-Wamoon brigade Captain Carl Kenmir, FCO Matt Dando and East Group Captain Brian Miller.



Hornsby Ku-ring-gai volunteers were presented with National Medals and Long Service awards by the Commissioner Phil Koperberg and Mayor Cr John Muirhead in September 2003.



NEW PROTECTION SYSTEM

TUMBARUMBA BUSHFIRE TO TEST NEW TANKER SPRAY PROTECTION SYSTEM

A controlled bushfire in Tumburumba will help the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) test a new water spray protection system designed to improve the safety of firefighters trapped in dangerous 'tanker burnovers'.

The RFS and Country Fire Authority (CFA) of Victoria hope to test the tanker spray protection system they have developed over the past four years in real bushfire conditions in February.

Even though training and understanding of standard operating procedures for firegrounds helps firefighters avoid tanker burnovers, these dangerous events still occur.

The radiant heat generated by bushfire burning over a tanker can kill firefighters. If firefighters survive, severe burns are almost guaranteed.

As well as protective clothing and equipment, tankers provide some shelter from the radiant heat of bushfire.

Tanker spray protection systems are designed to increase that protection by maintaining the integrity of the cabin, particularly the windows, and reducing temperatures inside the cabin.

Even with training, equipment and this new technology, there are no safety guarantees.

Most fire authorities currently have a range of spray protection systems.

Determined to ensure these systems are as effective as possible and minimise the risk of deaths and injuries, the RFS embarked on a tanker

safety protection program four years ago.

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) of Victoria became a partner in this venture. These organisations joined with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) which provided the scientific expertise to carry out the complex research required.

These organisations have spent \$1.3m on the project. (Approximately \$450,000 RFS, \$450,000 CFA, \$400,000 CSIRO plus in kind contributions from fire authorities of about \$150,000 each.)

The RFS and CFA commissioned the CSIRO to:

- > Review the protection systems we already have in place
- > Develop the most effective system for our conditions
- > Test the new system

Part of the review of current systems involved burnover simulations held at the RFS hot fire training facilities in Mogo near Batemans Bay. Old tankers were subjected to extreme conditions using a specially designed array of gas burners that simulated bushfire conditions.

The expertise of the CSIRO was commissioned to ensure that the most accurate data available on the impact of a bushfire on a fire truck was obtained, analysed and utilised to improve on spray protection systems used on these vehicles.

The data collected by the CSIRO during the Mogo tests was used to develop the latest prototype.

Improvements to the tanker protection system included in the prototype:

- > Current systems use one central delivery point that provides an umbrella of water that can be blown away by strong wind. The new prototype uses a ring main around the entire tanker cabin with about 15 spray nozzles delivering water to force a stronger curtain over the tanker.
- > Radiation curtains over windows to significantly reduce temperatures.

- > Water sprays to stop wheels and pumps catching alight.

Now it is time to test the prototype in the real thing - during Operation Tumburumba. The planned bushfire will include temperatures over 30 degrees, winds up to 25km/h and humidity below 40 per cent.

After extensive research the site selected is on Maragle State Forest. It was chosen because:

- > The 25ha site will be protected on all sides - the Kosciusko National Park fire last year creates a good buffer zone to the east and State Forests of NSW has done hazard reduction burning around the experimental blocks.
- > The Maragle State Forest itself has the high fuel loads required to test the system
- > Tumburumba generally has a reliable fire season, so the required conditions should come about.

Authorities are very conscious that the fire will be lit during the hottest, driest and windiest part of the summer. These conditions are needed to truly test the spray system.

The preparation for this is immense. The local community has been consulted. State Forests NSW and surrounding land managers are cooperating. Fire authorities will provide tankers, personnel and an aircraft on standby to manage the burn.

The Federal Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) is contributing over \$150,000 to Operation Tumburumba. Two other CRC research projects will be incorporated into the Tumburumba burn.

Volunteer firefighters will be involved in the burn at Tumburumba. The input of volunteers has been essential during every step of the project. Volunteer advice was sought by RFS Engineering Services and volunteers assisted the Mogo tests.

This research into tanker overruns is being carried out as part of an ongoing commitment to improve firefighter safety.



Above: Officers from RFS, CFA and CSIRO inspect the cabin of the truck after the test.

Left: An old Bedford fitted with the new spray system is tested at MOGO testing facilities. Note the spray on the front and side windows.

Photos by Cameron Wade



GOSFORD DISTRICT RURAL FIRE DISTRICT NEW BULK WATER CARRIER

The Gosford Rural Fire District recently purchased a Scania six-wheel drive bulk water carrier.

The vehicle will hold 10,500 litres (three times the normal load of a Category 1 tanker). This huge capacity will enable three Category 1 tankers to fill up without having to leave the fireground,

The vehicle will hold
10,500 litres which is
three times the normal load
of a Category 1 tanker

saving an enormous amount of time when fighting fires, particularly in remote areas.

The carrier chassis was bought by Gosford City Council and Headquarters Rural Fire Brigade donations earlier this year for \$201,000.



MVA RESCUE SIMULATION - KENTHURST RURAL FIRE BRIGADE AND NSW FIRE BRIGADE STATION 71 CASTLE HILL

NSW Fire Brigade (NSWFB) Rescue Pumper 71 Castle Hill operated a joint motor vehicle accident rescue training exercise at Kenthurst Rural Fire Brigade Station in September 2003.

The training exercise designed by Station 71 Senior Firefighter Gaven Muller and Kenthurst Brigade Senior Deputy Captain Jeremy Clegg, was designed to give RFS crews exposure to NSWFB operations and expectations at a MVA rescue operation.

Kenthurst crews were briefed on the incident and taken through scene assessment strategies before assisting in stabilisation of the vehicle

“Kenthurst Brigade attends more than 20 incidents a year with Station 71, so it is critical that we understand their rescue operations and expectations. This exercise gave us the opportunity to not only recognise the importance of our combat agencies working together, but to strengthen our already effective working relationship,” said Snr Deputy Clegg.

Senior Deputy Clegg reinforced the role of RFS crews at MVA rescue incidents, highlighting the importance of parking vehicles in the fend off position, allowing access for other emergency vehicles and protecting the persons trapped and rescuers at the incident.

Kenthurst crews were briefed on the incident and taken through scene assessment strategies before assisting in stabilisation of the vehicle. Hydraulic rescue tools were set up in a tool dump where crews could access spreaders, shears and power rams in addition to patient protective equipment.

Senior Firefighter Muller explained that a person can be trapped by confinement or compression, and the aim of the rescue was to remove the car from the person, not the person from the car.

Crews were given the opportunity to understand how hydraulic rescue equipment operates and the considerations that need to be taken when working at a rescue incident.

“Fire protection is the primary task for the RFS at a MVA rescue incident. It is important that crews understand our operational expectations and procedures so they can work effectively with us,” said Snr Firefighter Muller.

Story and photo by Rebel Talbert

Kenthurst Rural Fire Brigade and NSWFB Station 71 crews working as a team at the simulated rescue incident.





ORRCON STEEL TUBE DIRECT AND ORRCON RACING SUPPORT RURAL FIRE SERVICE

V8 Touring car team drivers Mark Larkam, Jason Bargwanna and their sponsor Orrcon Steel and Tube Direct supported the NSW Rural Fire Service at the Ag Quip Agricultural field Days again this year. A touring car simulator was on display and a gold coin donation was required to drive the simulator with Orrcon Steel and Tube Direct matching dollar for dollar all money raised and donated to the RFS.

The money will be spent on purchasing GPS's for the Narrabri HQ Brigade's Category 1 and Category 7 tankers. The Brigade worked tirelessly at Ag Quip managing the racing car simulator on the Orrcon stand.

Jason Bargwanna and Tracy Mesken assisted in the ongoing fire simulations by demonstrating to the crowd how to safely extinguish a stove and fuel fire using a fire blanket and extinguisher.

*Chris Wallbridge
Community Safety Officer,
Region North*



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UPDATE

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE UPDATE

TANKER AND PUMP WORKSHOPS

Rob Butcher and Fred Brown held an excellent workshop for tanker operators and Captains at Gosford. These are very “hands-on”, with focus on volunteer firefighters. Others are planned but rely on district initiative to organise once the annual program has been finalised.

VEHICLE LOGBOOKS

A standard format has been developed for operational trial in districts. It is accepted that some districts have satisfactory logbook systems in place, but others do not.

A circular will soon be issued that outlines the role that logbooks play in ensuring that vehicles are “authorised” in their use.

FAULT REPORTING

A new system is being finalised that should be more responsive to problems and provide quicker solutions to equipment faults. Details will be available when implemented.

LOW VOLUME/ HIGH PRESSURE SPRAY SYSTEMS

A number of systems have been under review, and demonstrated over recent years. Formal testing was recently carried out on some systems. There is a place for these systems, but their operational role, OH&S concerns, and constraints on use have to be determined before they become approved RFS equipment.

GLOVES

Quality control is a major issue and the supplies are under review.

CAT 1 FRONT NEAR SIDE WHEEL WEAR

Evidence was presented that some Cat 1 tankers have excess tyre wear. If the problem is considered so serious, for example that it cannot be addressed by rotating the tyres, a modification kit for the steering knuckle post is available. The issue is addressed in an earlier circular (No. 61/95) which sets out the process, but note that a preliminary wheel alignment is essential. It should also be noted that the modification kit has given some problems with reliability, so the solution is not absolute.

HINO CAB/ CHASSIS

Three prototype Cat 1 tankers are being built this year for operational evaluation. They complement ones built some years ago.

ROOF NUMBERING I.D. FOR AIRCRAFT

During operations, aircraft sometimes attempt direct radio contact with a tanker using the ID number on the roof, often without success.

One reason is that the tanker crew are not aware of their ID number, and do not realise there is an aircraft overhead trying to contact them.

The more modern tankers have a reasonably sized ID sign, but the older ones only have the small aluminium BFO plate in the door support.

Some districts have a more conspicuous sign placed in the cabin, and a similar one is to be made available by Engineering Services.



GRASSLANDS CAT 1

A revised layout is under review by the Technical Committee following some complaints from volunteers about the current layout.

Technical Committee delegates should be contacted if volunteers have specific information to provide.





SAFETY CONCERNS



Photo by Dean Sewell

QUESTION INSTRUCTIONS IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR SAFETY

Firefighters can refuse to carry out instructions if their health and safety are genuinely threatened.

The RFS is reinforcing this fact and Bushfire Co-ordinating Committee's Policy No. 3/00 provision after the Coroner highlighted a number of breaches of operational procedures.

During a fire in 2002, a crew was directed by their Captain to carry out actions that contravened Fireground Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), their training, and common sense on safety.

The Coroner found that a tanker was positioned so that retreat from the fireground would be delayed, water supplies were completely exhausted and inadequate supervision was provided to inexperienced firefighters in a dangerous situation.

Members of the crew were aware that they were doing "the wrong thing" under instruction, but did not know what they could or should do about it.

Fortunately, no injuries resulted. But the RFS is working to ensure similar incidents do not occur again by reinforcing firefighters' rights and explaining what procedures should be followed.

The Coroner recommended the provisions of the Bushfire Co-ordinating Committee's Policy No. 3/00 be brought to the attention of all firefighters. It is available on the RFS website www.rfs.nsw.gov.au under Structure/ Statutory Committees/ Bush Fire Coordinating Committee.

This policy, "Co-ordinated Firefighting Operations Health and Safety" makes it clear that it is everyone's responsibility to ensure safe operations.

It provides for firefighters to refuse to carry out an instruction if their health and safety are genuinely threatened. Firefighters should report to the Incident Controller via the chain of command.

A further issue was that the operational debrief associated with this particular fire was carried out poorly. The firefighters felt intimidated by senior officers in raising legitimate concerns. Further, an email by a firefighter that raised issues was ignored by senior officers.

The Coroner recommended that the RFS should reinforce with all members the purpose and nature of the debrief process.

This is to ensure that any analysis and recommendations placed before operational

debriefs designed to improve systems and processes associated with safety issues are accorded a level of importance commensurate with their potential impact.

"Co-ordinated Firefighting Operations Health and Safety" makes it clear that it is everyone's responsibility to ensure safe operations.

A debrief is an important component of any operation and may take a number of forms. Volunteers are encouraged to attend debriefs themselves or use a representative, such as a Captain.

Any issue should always be taken up with senior officers in your brigade and/or your District or Zone office, in the first instance.

The Service will provide further guidance to officers to ensure debriefing procedures are followed.



ZONING - IS IT WORKING?

There's no denying the process of zoning rural fire districts has been a contentious move undertaken by the Service.

After nearly three years of bringing districts together to make the RFS more efficient and improve service delivery, staff and volunteers have had time to form opinions about zoning.

In this article, four RFS staff members offer their comments. Volunteers can contribute their point of view by writing to Bushfire Bulletin or emailing media@rfs.nsw.gov.au.

The zoning of rural fire districts began in earnest during 2000-01. The initiative coincided - where it was feasible - with the transfer of district staff.

Executive Director Operations and Regional Management, Mark Crossweller and Director, Regional Management, Mark Sullivan are managing the program.

Districts were analysed for possible business efficiencies and, in conjunction with district staff, public and captains forums were organised to get the opinions of communities and volunteers on the issue.

The program involves grouping neighbouring districts together.

Rather than doing a range of tasks for one district, RFS staff are given roles in the key functional areas of operations, community safety, learning and development and business administration.

Some of the staff positions include Zone Manager, Operations Officer, Community Safety Officer, Learning and Development Officer, Administration Officer.

They can then concentrate their skills and time in one functional area to deliver better service across all the districts in the zone under the leadership of a manager.

Southern Tablelands Zone Manager Adrian Carey, Canobolas Zone Manager David Hoadley, Canobolas Zone Operations Officer Brett Bowden and Crawney Zone Manager Steve Raymond have tackled the sometimes-difficult task of zoning head on.

WAS THERE ANY FALL OUT OVER THE PROCESS?

Steve Raymond:

Very little if any.

Brett Bowden:

Only a small amount about service delivery. Otherwise the general feeling was and is positive. From a staff perspective, most appreciate the ability to work within a functional area rather than be all things to all people. Being able to specialise is positive.

Adrian Carey:

Lots of concerns early but most have accepted the change is a benefit.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIG WIN FOR YOUR AREA?

Adrian Carey:

The big win for staff is sharing responsibilities and workload. The win for our community and volunteers is that all functional areas are now being addressed.

Steve Raymond:

Staff being able to specialise in one area, having backup when you are way on leave, sharing of on call duties, more resources available, less duplication of tasks, dollar savings when it comes to infrastructure. Too many to list.

David Hoadley:

Canobolas has developed several significant projects, possible because of the strong links between the districts working as a zone. The first is the Central West Bush Fire Management Project which uses community consultation to develop new operations and risk plans on a tenure blind basis. We have all our agencies and the community working together in a positive way across all the districts and all land. Orange City Council has approval from the Minister and the Commissioner to develop a training centre in conjunction with the new Fire Control Centre and funds of up to \$4.5M will be made available by Orange City Council. This facility will benefit volunteers and staff from a wide area of the state.

Caobolas Zone, through RFS Corporate Communications, is developing a website to enhance communication with volunteers and the community. We are looking to manage in a holistic way and think strategically in our planning developing a single budget and business plan.

WAS THE ZONE SET UP THE WAY YOU WANT?

Steve Raymond:

The Crawney Zone had been working as a co-operative group for over five years and the Fire Control Officers within the group were proactive in the setting up of the zone and drove the process.

Adrian Carey:

Yes our zone was set up the way the volunteers and staff decided after lots of discussion. After a 12-month trial the set up has been reviewed with little change.

David Hoadley:

Yes. We set up prior to the change of FCO employment to State Government. There was the ability to determine the management and operation structures and we had the support of the Service in doing this. At the time the process was new and there were very few precedents.

SOME PEOPLE ARE UNDECIDED ABOUT ZONING...WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO THEM?

Steve Raymond:

Work with it and make it the best you can because you know the local area and if you are positive about the changes, everyone else will be as well.

Adrian Carey:

Zoning is a management tool. It doesn't affect volunteers' firefighting role except to make it easier for the districts to work together when the time arises.

David Hoadley:

Most tend to be nervous and sceptical about zoning, fearing a loss of autonomy. Being able to "let go" and have someone else, who is not necessarily managed by that individual, take control over duties, responsibilities and the relationship with volunteers that they have managed previously is a difficult thing. Acceptance and trust is a thing that takes time!

Zoning and the focus that functional area management can bring can allow the FCO and staff to really achieve at work.



ZONING STATISTICS

Eighteen zones have been formed across NSW, representing about half of NSW's rural fire districts. Zones are not formed unless all stakeholders - including volunteers and councils - agree.

CANOBOLAS ZONE

Incorporating Blayney, Cabonne and Orange and is also teamed with Cowra. All volunteers have recently agreed to formalise the Zoning across the four Districts. Canobolas has been through the zoning process twice and been success on both occasions. The zone was formed in July 2001. There are seven staff for 91 brigades (Zone Manager, Operations, Operations Support, Community Safety, Learning & Development, Fire Mitigation and Administration).

CRAWNEY ZONE

Takes in Scone, Murrurundi, Quirindi and Nundle districts. The Crawney, Oxley and Gunnedah Team has eight districts in total. There are 10 staff working with 87 brigades. Crawney Zone has 39, Oxley Zone 36 and Gunnedah 12. The Crawney Zone was formed two and half years ago and the Crawney Oxley Group (COG) team has been running for six months.

SOUTHERN TABLELANDS ZONE

Districts are Yass, Gunning, Crookwell and Mulwaree with nine staff and 64 brigades. The Zone was formed in May 2002.



THE HISTORY OF THE 12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

"There is one Christmas Carol that has always baffled me. What in the world do leaping lords, french hens, swimming swans, and especially the partridge who won't come out of the pear tree have to do with Christmas?"

From 1558 until 1829, Roman Catholics in England were not permitted to practice their faith openly. Someone during that era wrote this carol as a catechism song for young Catholics. It has two levels of meaning: the surface meaning plus a hidden meaning known only to members of their church. Each element in the carol has a code word for a religious reality, which the children could remember.

The Partridge...

in a pear tree was Jesus Christ.

Two Turtledoves...

were the Old and New Testaments.

Three French Hens...

stood for faith, hope and love.

The Four Calling Birds...

were the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Five Golden Rings...

recalled the Torah or Law, the first five books of the Old Testament.

The Six Geese A-laying...

stood for the six days of creation.

Seven Swans A-swimming...

represented the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit-Prophesy, Serving, Teaching, Exhortation, Contribution, Leadership, and Mercy.

The Eight Maids A-milking...

were the eight beatitudes.

Nine Ladies Dancing...

were the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit-Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self Control.

The Ten Lords A-leaping...

were the Ten Commandments.

The Eleven Pipers Piping...

stood for the eleven faithful disciples.

The Twelve Drummers Drumming...

symbolised the twelve points of belief in the Apostles' Creed.

CHRISTMAS GIVES THE VISION OF LIFE SHARED ONE WITH ANOTHER!

We are living in a changing and increasingly dangerous world where many are struggling to find meaning for their lives.

Christmas brings a new vision to humanity. It defines character and behaviour in new ways. It challenges the accepted standards of society. Christmas quickens hope and dreaming and calls humanity forward. The world needs the vision Christmas gives.

Christmas gives a glimpse of a new world waiting to be explored, the world of the spirit. For centuries the natural, material world has beckoned, stimulating excitement and achievement. Now all oceans and continents have been explored, the highest mountains climbed, even outer space has been penetrated. As a result there has come a vast horizontal understanding of matter, of the physical universe.

Christmas opens up another task, the vertical exploration of existence. Modern civilisation has made only limited gains in its depth of understanding of life. There is much ignorance about the nature of God and His purposes for humanity. There is little realisation of the power of prayer. The possibilities of spiritual healing are ignored. Amid the frantic search for happiness, the secrets of religious joy remain hidden. Christmas points to this different world of the spirit. We are blind if we do not seek what lies behind the Christmas symbols of stars and angels and a baby lying in a manger in Bethlehem. One name given to Jesus was Immanuel, meaning God with us. Because God broke into history in a new way at the first Christmas He is capable of being known and studied. Christmas is a summons to learn of this God and share His vision for humanity.

There is little realisation of the power of prayer.

The possibilities of spiritual healing are ignored.

Christmas projects the vision of a responsible society. It calls all people voluntarily to accept responsibility for each other, and for what happens to the environment and for future generations.

Behind the Christmas story is a picture of a God who acted responsibly toward the world and its creatures. He could have washed His hands of the world. Yet in love He came, writing the greatest rescue story of all time. The birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus show a God willing to go to any length to lead people into His purposes for humanity.

Christmas gives the vision of life shared one with another. It is expressed clearly by Paul in scripture when he pleaded for people to bear one another's burdens.

Society operates not on the principle of sharing but competition. Christmas is a call to turn from

competition to sharing. It is urgently needed in large areas of Australian life. A spirit of unity between city and country would bring hope to those crippled by drought. All of us in secure employment must never forget the sufferings of the jobless.

The whole world needs to discover what is meant by the Christian ideal of neighbourly love and the spirit of sharing as exemplified in the teaching and example of Jesus of Nazareth. It would release a wave of generosity not only for a few weeks at Christmas but as a way of life.

Does God have a personal greeting for you this Christmas?
Don't miss it!

Christmas gives a vision of what human beings may become. In the birth and life of Jesus a picture is presented of how all people were meant to live. The birth of Jesus is the climax of a plan, which began at creation.

Christmas depicts a many sided vision, but it does more: it points to the power of God, which turns dreams into realities. It offers forgiveness for past failure without which mistakes of the past will be repeated. It offers deliverance to people who are trapped. It begets goodness. It points to the love and power of God, which are the hope of the world.

God came down that first Christmas in the person of His Son, to change people. When Jesus comes to you this Christmas in the "Private Property" of your heart it will be for the same reason. Does God have a personal greeting for you this Christmas? Don't miss it.

Our prayer is that your Christmas Past will bring wonderful memories, your Christmas Present be filled with happiness, and your Christmas Future will satisfy all your hopes and that He will continue to make a difference in each of us so that we will go on making a difference into 2004 and beyond.

An enjoyable and safe festive season to all, and to those who share the Christian faith we wish you a happy and Holy Christmas.

Captains Ron and Carol Anderson

FIREFLIES

WELL WORTH THE WATCH

In August 2002 the NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner was approached by Southern Star Television (Water Rats, Blue Heelers, Police Rescue and the ABC), with a view to producing a television drama series based on the Rural Fire Service. Media Officer Cameron Wade from the Corporate Communications section was given the task of overseeing the RFS contribution to the show and to ensure that the RFS was represented in an accurate and positive way.

The creator of the show, John O'Brien from Southern Star, together with Cameron researched the possible story lines and background to the series. The task at hand was to produce a two hour pilot episode, and if sold to other networks both in Australia and overseas, a further 18 episodes would be produced for the first series.

The story is about a small country town in the Hunter called Lost River. The town has a population of roughly 500 people and of course, a Rural Fire Brigade. The Captain is struggling to keep the numbers up in his Brigade so when a new family moves in he is keen to get them to join up. The

Brigade is dealing with the worst summer in years and besides the fires, a number of relationships are also being tested.

Filming started in June 2003. The production company are using three RFS districts to assist with the show, Warringah/Pittwater, Hornsby and Baulkham Hills. Fire trucks, buildings and firefighters from these districts are used to produce the fictitious Fox Cove District and of course the Lost River Brigade.

The first set of fires posed their own unique problems for the RFS crews. The volunteers were asked to create a major fire front that supposedly entraps the Lost River crew. The only problem with this was it had to be achieved in pouring rain and four inches of mud.

Never-the-less in true RFS style, the members of the Baulkham Hills brigades involved, rose to the challenge and the end result is a spectacular sequence of shots that has the audience in the middle of a firestorm.

Duffys Forest station (Warringah/Pittwater) was selected as the Lost River Brigade hangout and the

members of Duffys were very accommodating. The station was redecorated slightly to accommodate camera gear etc and the Brigades' vehicles had to be moved out each time filming took place.

The cast were put through a condensed Basic Firefighter course with Inspector Damien Eggleston of the Hornsby District running through the firefighting techniques required for the film. This training is ongoing and will include VF,AF,CL components as well as CABA.

The series has a top line cast with Jeremy Sims playing the captain of the Brigade, Libby Tanner as the new girl in town and many more familiar faces. The pilot will go to air on the ABC in February next year and already production on another nine episodes is well underway.

Director Rowan Woods frames up a scene watched by Cameron Wade and the crew. Cast and crew wore thick jackets to beat the cold even though it was meant to be an Extreme fire weather day.

Round Corner Brigade members watch on as film crew prepare to burn a Cat 1. Film Crew were given basic fire training and wore yellow PPE while on set.

Photos by Gary Johnston ABC





COMMUNITY AND RFS MANAGE HAZARDS TOGETHER



RFS officers harnessed community concern about bushfire hazards in Eugowra recently.

The result was local residents and all agencies working together to create fuel reduced asset protection zones and long term management policies to protect the central west village.

"Concerned about regrowth of fuel on vacant Crown land to the west of the village, the Eugowra Promotion and Progress Association Inc (EPPA) wrote to the RFS," said Community Safety Officer Supt. Arthur Sharp, Canobolas Zone.

"Village residents were concerned because wildfire went through the area in December 2001."

Lit in two places by arsonists, the fire was pushed by strong winds from the southwest across the Forbes Rd, lifted up into the canopy of Black Cyprus Pine on the vacant land and headed north through the western section of the village.

Most of the trees were destroyed. Light and rain now penetrated the canopy, causing ground fuels (grasses) to grow abundantly. But the area's sandy soil limited the use of large-scale earth moving equipment.

The letter asked that the fire risk to the area be alleviated. RFS officers from Canobolas Zone met with the EPPA in June.

A committee was formed to conduct a site inspection and agree on work required. Local residents led the committee and were joined by

representatives from the land managers, Department of Land and Water Conservation, staff and a Councillor from Cabonne Council and RFS officers.

"During the June inspection it was agreed that fuel reduced asset protection zones of at least ten metres would be placed around the boundary of the vacant Crown land were it adjoined private residential land to reduce the effects of another fire," Supt Sharp said.

In September RFS Canobolas Zone obtained \$5,500 from Fire Mitigation Works Funding to carry out the work.

An earthmoving company was contracted to undertake the work which was completed on 28 November 2003. The RFS intends to put in place a long-term management plan for the area after consultation with local residents and the Dept of Lands.

"Feedback from the community is very positive," said RFS Canobolas Zone Fire Mitigation Officer Geoff Selwood.

"Everyone seems to be happy with the result. We were all able to work together to achieve it. It seems that private property owners have used it as an example and are getting in and doing other works themselves, which is great."

Top Left: After consultation with the community, Dept of Lands, Council and RFS, a contractor was hired to put the firebreaks in.

Top Right: Eugowra (BEFORE) Community concerns about bushfire fuels on vacant land to the west of Eugowra caused residents to write to the RFS.

Right: Eugowra (AFTER) Eugowra residents Viv McMillan and George Soukup next to the firebreak put in place after community consultation and work with local land managers.



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RFS VOLUNTEERS

VOLUNTEER SKILLS PRAISED BY REVIEW TEAM

The strength of the skills, knowledge and commitment of RFS volunteers was acknowledged in the key findings of a recent review of the organisation's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to be used in a review of the Service's Strategic Plan.

The RFS Strategic Plan for 2003-2005 was released in March 2003. Having nearly completed its first year of life, an annual review was conducted to enable the next plan, for 2004-2006 to be developed and rolled out.

The Strategic Plan provides the Service with a clear list of prioritised programs and actions. It forms an integral part of the Service's other planning processes, such as the Service Delivery Model.

Two workshops were held focussing on the unique perspectives of each review group. Review participants included volunteers in one workshop and representatives from local government, National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW Fire

Brigades (to name just a few) at the other workshop.

They were asked to outline the strengths and weaknesses of the Service's four key result areas of:

- > Operations
- > Community Safety
- > Learning and Development
- > Management

The key findings were:

- > Recognition of the strength, knowledge and commitment of the volunteers within the Service
- > Improvement of both appropriateness and quality of equipment available for firefighting had occurred
- > Consolidation of internal systems and policies is required
- > An increase in the monitoring of external issues that affect the Service is needed in order to better react to them



- > More consideration is needed of the occupational health and safety impacts and liabilities for volunteers and staff
- > Review and improvement of internal and external communication strategies is needed, at senior management and district level.

The information collected during the review has been incorporated into a final report and used to set Service priorities for the next three years. A copy of the report is available on the RFS website www.rfs.nsw.gov.au under About Us/Strategic Plan.

VOLUNTEERS GUIDE BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT

The Commissioner has urged volunteers across NSW to explore opportunities to put their experience and local knowledge to work by joining any one of the host of committees which require volunteer representation.

"These committees play a vital role in the policies and practices of your Service and volunteer input is very important," Commissioner Phil Koperberg said.

"As well as turning out to do the hard work of frontline firefighting, the local knowledge of volunteers plays a vital part in bushfire management and the decision making needed in bushfire suppression.

"Volunteers are essential and respected members of Bush Fire Management Committees and the Incident Management Teams (IMT) which run Section 44s."

Bush Fire Management Committees are required to include a local volunteer firefighter to ensure that planning arrangements benefit from the views, knowledge and experience of the local brigade membership.

These committees are responsible for managing bushfire issues and creating Bush Fire Risk Management Plans. Volunteers are involved in the decision making that creates these plans and the hazard reduction programs included in them.

Ask at your district office about getting involved in your Bush Fire Management Committee.

IMTs are required to have a local brigade member or landholder on the team. Policy 1/99 of the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee stipulates "The IMT must include a person who has local knowledge of the area and can assist the IMT in effecting suppression activities".

This invariably results in the appointment of local volunteers or representatives to the IMT to provide necessary advice to address local issues.

The Commissioner of the RFS has introduced a training initiative to ensure that volunteers are increasingly placed in key positions in IMTs during Section 44 bushfire emergencies.

This training can be accessed through your Fire Control Centre.

Volunteers also sit on:

- > RFS Advisory Council
- > Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee
- > RFS Corporate Executive Group
- > RFS Technical Committee
- > RFS State Operations Committee
- > RFS Community Education Committee
- > RFS Operation Communications Committee
- > RFS Training Committee





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