

# "WATER OFF"

NEWSLETTER OF THE  
RETIRED FIREFIGHTERS'  
ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA  
(VICTORIAN BRANCH) INC.



February 2007 Vol 11 No 1  
Inc/No: A16839F

## Change of Venue for RFA Meetings.

Parking and public transport problems eased after successful negotiations with the Management of the Brunswick Campus of R.M.I.T. and RFA member John Hudson.

**For further details see Secretary/Treasurer's Report page 3 and detailed map page 4.**

**WOOL STORES FIRE**  
**SOMERVILLE ROAD - WEST FOOTSCRAY -**  
**13<sup>TH</sup>. January 1960**

*Below: Smouldering remains of two of the six wool stores involved in the fire.*

*Full story on Page 8 of this issue.*

Photo courtesy Melb. Sun News Pictorial



# “GENERAL MEETING”

**Notice is hereby given of our next General Meeting to be held at the Brunswick Campus R.M.I.T. 25 Dawson Street Brunswick, (Melway 29 F8) 1030 Hours, Wednesday 21st February 2007**

## **AGENDA ITEMS.**

- Minutes of last General meeting.**
- President’s Report.**
- Secretary/Treasurer’s Report.**
- Guest Speaker: Member of Peer Support Group**
- General Business.**

Please come along, bring your partner and have your say in the running of the Association. Join in the fellowship of your old friends and make new ones.

Lunch and beverages available.

**JOHN BROWN**  
**SECRETARY/TREASURER**  
**Ph: 03 9336 2492**

## **OFFICE BEARERS**

**President,** Mike McCumisky  
**Vice President,** Ian Fowler  
**Sec./Treasurer,** John Brown

### **General Committee;**

Ian Geddes  
John Laverick  
Ken McGillivray  
John Schintler  
John Wallace  
**Auditor;** Theo Teklenburg

**“Water Off”  
Editorial Staff**  
John Laverick  
Barbara McCumisky

## **Valē**

Tony Amarant (MFB)  
“Don” Jensen (MFB)  
Bob Wells (MFB)-

We offer our condolences to the families of these members who have gone on to a higher duty.

## **SICK LIST**

Stan Cameron	Clarrie Hart
Jim Casley	Ron Kennedy
Ron Cass	John McLoone
Bruce Gee	Alf Powell
Ernie Goodall	Graeme Simpson
Terry Harman	Kevin Sullivan

We wish these members a speedy recovery

**Note:** If you know of any member who may be ill please notify a committee member. We endeavour to keep you informed, but can only do this with your help.

<b>Diary Dates 2007</b>	
February 21st	General Meeting
March 18th	Reunion MFB Training College
May 7th	Geelong Reunion
May 16th	General Meeting
August 15th	General Meeting
November 10th	UFU Luncheon Malvern T/Hall
November 21st	Annual General Meeting
November 25th	UFU Picnic M/Valley Racecourse
November 26th	Geelong Reunion

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All articles accepted for publication by the editor are done so in good faith and no responsibility is accepted for any inaccuracies that may occur.  
Signed; J. Laverick. (The views expressed by the editor of this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Victorian branch of the RFA)

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Welcome again to the RFA in 2007. Barbara and I wish you all a happy and healthy year ahead. To those on the sick list, we wish you a speedy recovery.

My thanks to our Committee members, their assistance and advice is welcome and appreciated, along with the continued support from the members.

The AGM was well attended. As there was only one nomination received for a committee position (Ian Geddes) and one committee member retiring (Bob McNeil), no ballot or voting was required to be held. The other committee members have agreed to continue their service as representatives on behalf of the members. Our thanks to Bob for his eleven years of service to the RFA and we welcome Ian on board.

Our sincere thanks go to the UFU Social Committee and helpers, who as usual, worked tirelessly to give us that wonderful lunch at the Malvern Town Hall, an event that we all look forward to with much enthusiasm.

I would like to thank our committee members for their assistance in the catering area at the UFU Picnic. (Page 11)

The annual RFA Spit Roast lunch is to be held at the MFESB Training College in the engine room on Sunday March 18, 2007. See page 15 for more details.

I look forward to catching up with you all very soon. In the meantime, take care and stay safe.

**Regards, Mike**



## SECRETARY/TREASURER'S REPORT

Our next Meeting on Wednesday 21st February, 2007 will be held at the Brunswick R.M.I.T. 25 Dawson St, Brunswick, directly opposite the Police Complex and just over the

Upfield Railway Line. A map of the R.M.I.T. is included on page 4 this issue of "Water Off". This Complex was made available to us by R.F.A. Member, John Hudson, who is Emergency Co-coordinator for R.M.I.T.

The advantages over Optus Oval are - ground floor complex and free parking (again thanks to John Hudson) close to tram and train (Jewel Station at rear of campus) and a cafeteria directly opposite meeting room, this means Members who have trouble with stairs can attend. Students have to pay \$1.50 for five hours parking, but, Gary Burley, Site Co-coordinator who polices the complex will issue visitor passes to R.F.A. Members.

Optus Oval was a good venue, but with no lifts, members sometimes had to climb two flights of stairs, parking was a nightmare and as Carlton Football Club is in dire financial difficulties, they would have to eventually charge for rooms. The downside is, no pokies at R.M.I.T., but there are four hotels with pokies in close proximity. Gary Burley would like us to use entrance close to railway line and park in that area (see map).

If you know of any member who has a disability, please tell them so they can attend our meetings.

Ian Geddes nominated for the R.F.A. Committee, so I contacted Bob McNeil who has been on the Committee for eleven years and told him of Ian's application, Bob said "he would think his position over and would let me know". Twenty four hours later, Bob rang me and said he would stand down, but would continue to help assemble

"Water Off". Ian was duly elected and Bob was thanked by a big round of applause by all attending. We need people to nominate for all positions to take the load off current officials.

Peter Akers, C.E.O. has announced his retirement, he will leave on 30.03.07. The Board is looking for a suitable replacement. As Peter had a further 3-1/2 years to go, it is a bit of a surprise. I have written to Peter thanking him for all the help he has given the R.F.A. and wished him well on his retirement. At our A.G.M. our guest speaker was the C.F.O. Tony Murphy. Tony was held up at a meeting, but rang to say, he would attend. Luckily, Mick from the Bistro did not need the room in a hurry, it gave Tony time to give his lecture. Points he made were new fire tunics to combat heat exhaustion, new Foam Generators, three tonnes of water carried on Mark 5 Pumpers. The advantage of fibre optics, new turnout procedures, digital radios, so firefighters can communicate with each other and other services, new fire stations being built to suit either gender. New Training College not to be opened till January or February 2007 due to contamination in soil. He answered all the questions put to him and was given a resounding applause.

At our next meeting the U.F.U. would like to tell us about the Peer Support Program to help current and past M.F.B. personnel.

### TREASURER'S REPORT

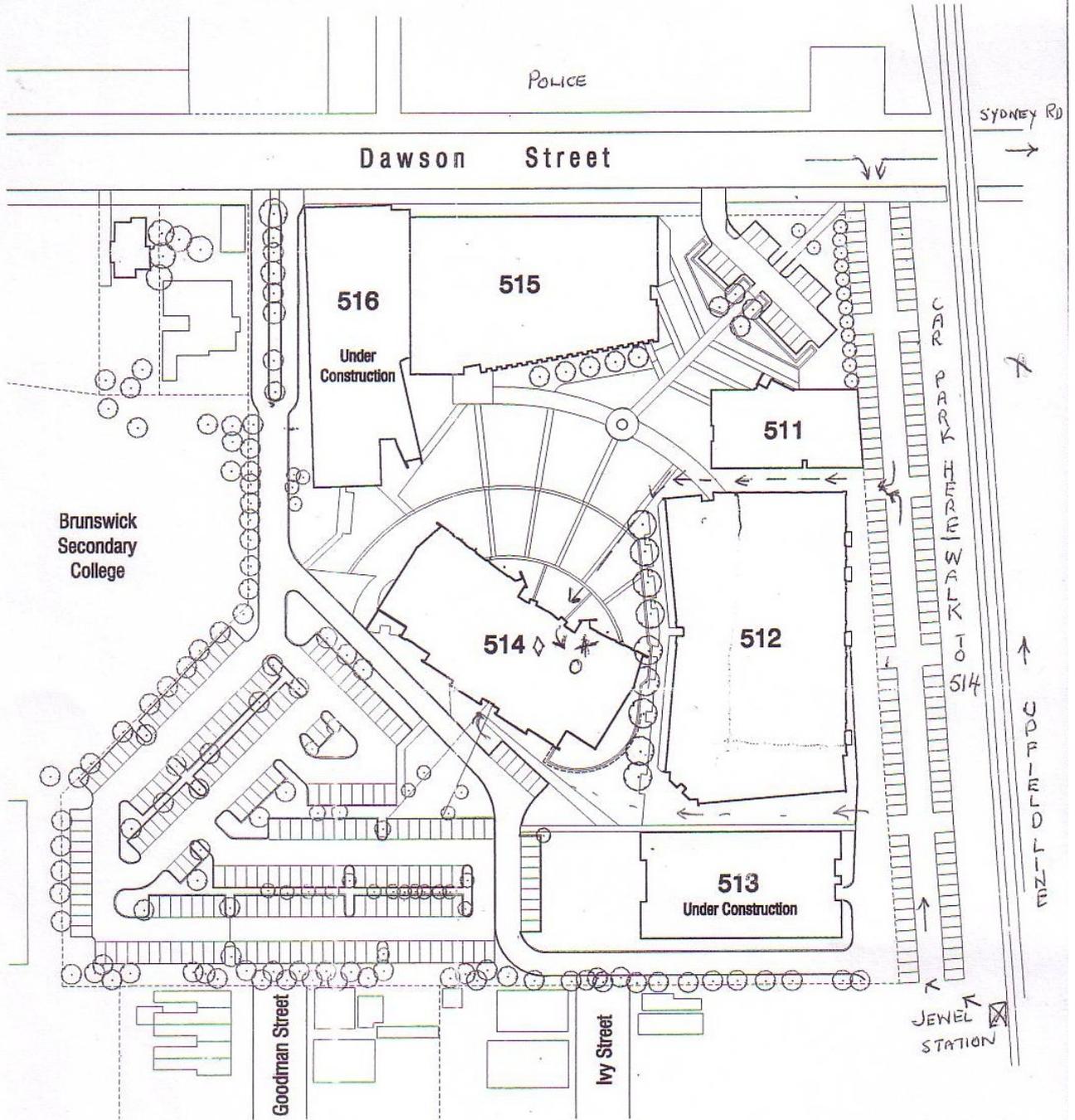
As of November 2006

Access Account	\$2420.57
Term Deposit	\$4733.60

**JOHN BROWN**

**SECRETARY/TREASURER**

*For members who wish to travel by public transport, take the No 19 North Coburg tram from Elizabeth Street City and get off at the Brunswick Town Hall. Walk west along Dawson Street. Train travelers catch the Upfield train and get off at Jewel Station.*



LEGEND

C5	511	25 Dawson Street
E4	512	
E4	513	
D3	514	
B3	515	
B3	516	

- X MEETING ROOM
- ◇ CAFETERIA.
- OBTAIN VISITOR CAR PASS FROM GARY BURLEY.



SCALE in metres



## From the Past

**Chief Fire Officer Mr. W. T. Aldridge handing a Bravery Citation to Senior Fireman Ken Coller, 35, of Kerferd Street North Essendon, in ceremony at Eastern Hill Fire Headquarters yesterday.**

A guard of honor of 30 uniformed firemen watched the presentation.

The citation was in recognition of Senior Fireman Coller's action at a scrub fire along Annandale Road Tullamarine last December, when he dashed back 140 yards to rescue a man whose car had stalled.

Unknown to him, the man - a farmer who had been helping fight the fire - had already escaped. Senior Fireman Coller later received hospital treatment for burns he received while searching for the man.

Mr. Aldridge told the gathering: "It is actions like this that cause our Brigade to be held in such very high esteem."

*(Article and photo sent in by John Cannon)*



## Editorial

The above story tells of an incident, during the late 50's, where a firefighter made a spontaneous decision to risk his life in order to save another and was justifiably recognized for it.

Our November 2006 issue of "Water Off" featured a story of a firefighter who performed an act of bravery to save a life. All on scene including the police and subsequently the Coroner acknowledged the fact that the firefighter concerned placed himself in extreme danger in order to save a life.

We have been made aware of a similar incident, in the same era, of a firefighter, again, spontaneously placing

his life on the line, being recommended for an award by the Royal Humane Society as a result.

Neither of these now retired firefighters received acknowledgement of their deeds from senior officers, not even a phone call from the District Officer to say, "Well done", even though the incidents were well publicised in the media of the day.

Both these men were offered Royal Humane Society awards but the Senior Officer's of the time refused the nomination. The reasoning? - **These men were just doing their job!**

Maybe so. But the question still stands - "Why bravery citations for some and not others?" - Is it too late to rectify this injustice?

## How to Stay Young by George Carlin

1. Throw out non-essential numbers. This includes age, weight and height. Let the doctors worry about them. This is why you pay them.

2. Keep only cheerful friends. The grouches pull you down.

3. Keep learning. Learn more about the computer, crafts, gardening, whatever. Never let the brain idle. "An idle mind is the devil's workshop." And the devil's name is Alzheimer's.

4. Enjoy simple things.

5. Laugh often, long and loud. Laugh until you gasp for breath.

6. The tears happen. Endure, grieve and move on. The only person who is with you your entire life is yourself. Be ALIVE while you are alive.

7. Surround yourself with what you love, whether it is family, pets, keepsakes, music, plants, hobbies, whatever. Your home is your refuge.

8. Cherish your health.

If it's good, preserve it. If it's unstable, improve it. If it is beyond what you can improve, get help.

9. Tell the people you love that you love them, at every opportunity.

**AND ALWAYS REMEMBER:**

Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.

## Will Power

**You've cleaned up all those financial issues you've been putting off until you have time. But have you sorted out perhaps the most important part of your finances - making sure that everything is taken care of, the way you want it, in the event of your death?**

It may surprise you that many people don't have a Will in place and die intestate (ie without a Will). This no doubt causes family and friends extra grief and hassle as they try to sort things out - and not necessarily the way you would have wanted them to.

First things first - make a Will. If you have a Will in place already and have not looked at it for some time, take the time now to review it - especially if you have recently married or separated from your spouse or partner, have had children or purchased a significant asset. Make sure a copy of your Will is with your lawyer or your executor and they know where the original is.

Then review your beneficiary arrangements for any life insurance policies as well as any superannuation policies.

Superannuation is becoming an increasingly attractive savings option. Nominating a beneficiary to receive your super money is not compulsory but it can be a good idea. Under most superannuation funds, the trustees have absolute discretion to decide who should receive your superannuation money and in what proportions, but they may take into account your wishes. To update your beneficiary details contact your superannuation fund. They will usually require your instructions in writing.

Understanding who receives your superannuation money in the event of your death is important. You should discuss this information with your Financial Adviser so your individual circumstances may be taken into account in the most tax effective way.

## Darwin Awards

*Named in honor of Charles Darwin, the father of evolution, Darwin Awards commemorate those who improve our gene pool by removing themselves from it.*

**17 April 2006, England)**

There's always someone who thinks good advice doesn't apply to him. For example, if a doctor advises that the one thing you must not do is go near a flame, as you are going to be covered with a flammable material, most people would take this advice onboard, and not strike a match until the flammable material has been removed.

However, Phillip, 60, knew better than his doctor. Philip was in the hospital to treat a skin disease, said treatment consisting of being smeared in paraffin-based cream. Philip was warned that the cream would ignite, so he definitely should NOT smoke. But he just couldn't live without that cigarette.

Smoking was not permitted anywhere on the ward, but Phillip took this setback in stride, and sneaked out onto a fire escape. Once he was hidden, he lit up... inhaled... and peace descended as he got his nicotine fix. Things

went downhill only after he finished his cigarette, at the moment he ground out the butt with his heel.

The paraffin cream had been absorbed by his clothing. As his heel touched the butt, fumes from his pyjamas ignited. The resulting inferno "cremated" his skin condition, and left first-degree burns on much of his body. Despite excellent treatment, he died in intensive care.

Moral!

If a doctor tells you not to smoke, there's a very good reason.

## Sailor Davies

That tough ex sailor, Ron Davies, is back on his feet after a heavy fall. You can't keep a good man down for long.  
Feel proud Ron!!!

## GEELONG REUNION

**Dates For Your Diary**  
**Monday 7th May**  
**Monday 26th November**



**Shell Club**  
**Bacchus Marsh Rd.**  
**Corio**

**Contact: Bill Icke 5244 1822**  
**John Wallace 5278 4734**

## The Gallipoli/London Anzac Run out. Sponsorship withdrawn.

You may recall I spoke at our August RFA meeting of the proposed Gallipoli/London Anzac Run.

Unfortunately, our supporter has failed to sign the dotted line for the sponsorship. The run will now take place in 2008.

So all of you blokes that put your hand up for an emergency helper/driver can stop your sit-ups in bed, climbing the 6 stairs instead of the lift and of course, the horizontal exercise, and any other fitness program. It aint' going to happen in 2007, but get ready for next year.

**F. C. Kerr**

### Guarding your retirement assets

*By Jeffrey Lucy, ASIC Chairman*

This year, the baby boomers among us (including me) start to turn 60. Many will retire or, at least, make plans for retirement. Many more will take advantage of the Federal Government's recent changes to the taxation of retirement savings whereby those over 60 can withdraw their super as a lump sum, tax free.

Indeed, retirees today have more relative wealth at their disposal than ever before. That's a good thing, as retirees are now expected to live longer.

The downside, of course, is that it also makes retirees a target for fraudsters who see them as vulnerable and easy to exploit.

This means retirees need to carefully plan how to invest those savings to ensure that their investments last at least 25 years, the average projected retirement age in Australia. It goes without saying just how important it is to invest safely because, if retirees lose their life savings, they cannot replace this money through salary earnings.

Many retirees today are demanding high-yield returns. They are no longer looking for growth alone but for high returns to continue living with high levels of income. However, people must ensure they don't risk their life savings in the pursuit of high income. Typically, the higher the rate of return, the higher the risk.

It is this drive that lured many retirees to invest their life savings into 12 per cent returns in the Westpoint Group. They thought that was a fair return for the risk they were carrying, until they discovered that secured lenders demanded a 20 per cent minimum return, with penalty interest when default clauses kicked in.

Some retirees will be encouraged to set up their own self-managed super fund (SMSF). It's important to remember that running a SMSF requires some basic investment knowledge and an understanding of the need for a balanced portfolio and asset diversification. Without this knowledge, SMSF trustees and fund members put their investments at risk from fraud, high fees and charges, and inappropriate investment advice.

To protect your retirement funds, the principal aim should be to protect your accumulated savings from capital loss while earning the best return, considering your financial capacity to take on risk. You will need regular income, but bear in mind that a 12 per cent return is more than twice the interest rate a bank will offer, and should indicate that the risk is also twice as high.

Be aware that you may be the target of high pressure selling from both within and outside Australia. Ensure your investment decisions are made in your own time, without any pressure, and after taking appropriate professional advice.

Don't be tempted to leverage any of your assets in retirement. Leveraging means borrowing, and that means added risk as well as a debt that must be serviced from your retirement savings. Generally, it is not a good mix. You would need to be in the exceptional financial position of being able to withstand significant loss.

In addition, anyone who insists you can access your super before turning 55 is almost definitely giving false information and putting you at risk of significant tax assessments and penalties.

Retirement is a time to enjoy the rewards of a lifetime working – but it comes with important responsibilities.

# WOOL STORE FIRE

January 13, 1960

*A short story of this fire - some facts - some reminiscences of times gone by, experienced by Firemen in the 1960's*

I was stationed at No. 47, Station - Western District on night shift (2300 to 0700 hours at the time). This night shift was better than average, only one call for the night. We were having a good sleep.

Sleeping on the job was not allowed officially, but our District Officer, Garney Campbell was a fair man, he and his Station Officers turned a blind eye to this. After muster and the detailed work was carried out, from 2400 hours onwards we sneaked our stretchers and bedding into the station from the boots of our cars and made up our beds in the Locker Room - Small Gear Room - Billiard Room - all depended where the snorers slept.

We were not permitted to park our cars on the Station premises (at No. 47 Stn. There was ample parking for all in the yard at rear). We parked our cars on either side of Droop Street, to make it worse there are two tram lines running down the middle, making it hazardous for parking. During the years I was stationed there we had many break ins and side swipes by hit and run motorists.

As I have mentioned above the only call received was an exchange telephone call at about 0530 hours (at this time of the morning we were in a deep sleep) The bells and lights came on simultaneously with a loud continuous shrill ringing of the bell's, this sounding in a small room was a brutal shock to the system. Awakened like this made the heart jump and race, straining the very nerves. It took some time for the brain and body to co-ordinate normally. It took many men years to become accustomed to this, some never did. Quickly jumping out of bed, mostly in a "Zombie" like state, putting one foot into our top boot and then the other, (prior to retiring we placed our top boots with our trouser leg's tucked into them near the side of our stretcher) pulling up our trousers and belting up as we ran to the engine room straight to our allocated turn out uniform pegs, and putting on our tunic, belt axe, key and helmet, then climbing into the Hose Carriage. All the time listening to the Watchroom duty man announcing the turn our details over the intercom system. "Hose Carriage Only - Hose Carriage Only - Turn out - Turn out - for an Exchange Telephone Call for a fire - Wool Stores - Somerville Road - West Footscray. This message was repeated until we cleared the station. I was wondering what sort of fire we would encounter on arrival, travelling in an open Morris Hose carriage, with the chill morning air rushing past soon awakened us completely.

The crew consisted of District Officer Garney Campbell, Sub Station Officer Lindsay Murray, Fireman Frank Mc Coll (the driver) and myself. Frank turned right from Droop Street, into Geelong Road, proceeding West finally turned right into Somerville Road. It was then that

we saw a little smoke drifting across the road, I was thinking this does not look like a big fire, a little later we saw one of the many stores in the complex was on fire at its South end.

We stopped at the main gate, Lindsay quickly cut the padlock, we entered, immediately "Getting to Work", one feed into the pump and two deliveries out. Lindsay ran one and I the other, Frank running the feed out and looking after the pump. Mr Campbell summing up the situation and sending word back, other word back was sent as the fire progressed, calling on additional men and appliances.

There was a gusty South Westerly wind blowing at about 15 to 20 knots. 20 minutes later the store was well alight, threatening the store opposite. About this time there were 24 Officers & Firemen from six stations in the District on scene and at work. About 30 minutes later the second store was also well alight.

The stores were about 200ft. x 100ft. and spaced about 50 feet apart with roadways between them, they were constructed of concrete floors, steel frame walls with wooden battens attached, corrugated fibro cement sheeting as cladding, wooden steel trussed rafters purlins to which was fixed corrugated fibro cement roof sheeting. There were 3 rows of reinforced concrete piers running parallel along the stores inside with even

spacings supporting the roof trusses and weight of the roof.

Within the next 30 minutes the fire had spread to 2 other stores - We now had 4 stores involved in fire. About this time the Chief Officer, W.T. Aldridge arrived on scene along with back up men and appliances from Central District, quickly getting to work.

It was the first time I had seen the Chief Officer in his turn out uniform. He wore a black tunic with a single row of chrome buttons, white collar, big bold chrome metal Epauettes on his shoulders with a number of silver bands running around each arm almost up to his elbows, complete with chrome helmet, black highly polished top boots. In my mind he looked magnificent - a man of authority. It made me think how small a fish I was in the big pond, also thinking that the next moment could be my last. He was not a well man at the time; he was to pass away three years later from cancer.

Mr. Aldridge must have called on the Deputy Chief Officer, John Paterson. On arrival I noticed in contrast to Mr. Aldridge his uniform looked shabby, well used, smoke and water stained, the silver on his tunic was tarnished, but his chrome helmet was well polished, he had a big pair of rubber boots on.

By this time with the radiating heat and direct flame

***I was thinking -  
"What the  
bloody hell am  
I doing in this  
job? Should  
have stuck to  
carpentering"***

impinging on them, 2 more stores were on fire, now making 6 stores involved. The roofing and walls collapsed on the previous 4, causing flames and sparks sixty feet in the air, blinding acrid smoke and blistering heat reduced visibility to only a few feet.

I did not know at the time what a good firefighter Mr. Paterson was, he quickly summed up the situation and along with Mr. Campbell and other junior officers organised for 8 hose lines 4 to each of the 2 recently caught stores. The Station Officers briefly explained that Mr. Paterson wanted the lines run out on the protected side of the stores and that we were going to fight the fire from inside. I thought this man is going to get us killed, I could imagine it, headlines in the next days papers - "Firefighters burnt to death - trapped inside Wool Stores". I was not too sure that I wanted to enter them, by this time their outer walls were well alight. I was thinking "What the bloody hell am I doing in this job? Should have stuck to carpentering".

Mr. Paterson led us into one of these stores and when he was satisfied that it was under control he then checked out the other where Mr. Campbell had led his men into.

Surprise, surprise when we made openings through the walls and entered with our charged lines, it was noticeably better inside than out. In the building that I was in the smoke had come down to about 4 feet from the floor, it was possible to duck down from time to time under the smoke and get a good lung full of breathable air.

We advanced to within about 50 feet of the burning walls, saturating them and the nearby contents with water. Once the water took effect the smoke increased making it difficult to breathe - very hard not to panic, drop the branch and run back outside. Our senior peers taught us that in a situation like this, place your mouth over the canvas hose and suck water cooled air out of the hose. (It was difficult, but it worked almost every time). This was the secret at smoke filled fires - particularly house fires; outsiders watching from the street would marvel "How can those firemen stick in there?" They did not realise we were on the floor directing our jets onto the fire under the smoke and heat level and of course when it came to the worst - sucking air through the wet canvas hose.

By this time we had saved these 2 stores with little structural and contents damage.

The stores contained bales of wool, cotton, paper and other commerce. The flames roared unchecked through the 4 stores for more than 3 hours before we could control them.

Those days the District Stations Hose Carriage carried only 1 - Salvus ½ hour Oxygen Breathing Apparatus. 2 Proto 2 hour Oxygen sets were stored in a cupboard in the engine room at the District station. On turn out if it was thought they may be required they were placed on the back seat of the Hose Carriage, the two men in the back sitting either side of them.

The heat was so great that a factory wall running the full length of the boundary on the down wind (East Side) 200 feet or so from the burning stores had its entire reinforced wire glass walls melted. This factory was very fortunate not to be involved in the conflagration.

I was later amazed to see how many men and appliances were in attendance.

There was no problem with water supplies, big mains, high pressure hydrants in Somerville Road, and adequate hydrants in nearby streets and private mains and millcocks around the wool stores complex and the adjacent stores across the road. The stores were covered by Sprinkler Systems.

Police struggled to control the crowds watching the fire and stopping motorists from driving over the hoses, this went on for a few days after, as the mopping up was being done, as hoses were needed to supply Trailer and Ground Monitors along with hand lines to cool down the burning mass. When this was done Somerville Road was cleared of the many hoses allowing traffic along and we reverted to the private mains system around the stores.

It took approximately a month to clean up the acres of smouldering wool, cotton, paper etc. and the salvage of same, and the rubble transported to various tips.

If only we had had Mark 3 Pumpers, Snorkels, and Tele Boom's. The fire would have been contained to the 2 original store. Alas this technology was years away at this time. Fortunately the buildings and contents were insured. The estimated damage costs was 2 million pounds.

Deputy Chief Officer Paterson, when being interviewed said "The cause of the fire would probably never be known due to the fact that the store where the fire started was totally consumed and any evidence destroyed with it."

Chief Officer Aldridge was taken from the fire ground to the Eye & Ear Hospital, East Melbourne to have a foreign body removed from an eye. Fireman Frank Mc Coll was caught between two stores, when a gust of wind engulfed him in flames. He was taken to the Western General Hospital, Footscray for treatment, suffering severe burns to his face. As a result he was off duty for many weeks. Other firemen were treated for smoke inhalation and slight burns at the scene.

I would like to pay tribute to the old time Officers and Firemen for their dedication and courage in the way they fought potentially dangerous fires and incidents in the 1950's & 60's, and for many years before. No standard operational procedures, using antiquated appliances and equipment. Most of our appliances and gear at this time were Museum pieces in most parts of the world.

Recruits spent 6 weeks or less (depending on the shortage of manpower at the time) at No. 1 Station, taught only the very basic fire fighting skills. We learnt quickly once stationed out in the districts at fires, the more experienced firemen would keep an eye on us and pass on their knowledge learnt the hard way, the saying "It took a ton of water, a ton of guts to put out large fires" was true, that was all they had going for them. **But times of change were fast approaching.**

We had a saying in Western District "Out West where it all happens", a great district to learn the skills of firemanship very quickly.

**Les Gray**  
District Officer – Retired

## A BLAST FROM THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

*An insight into Fred Kerr's hobby and how his involvement with the Fire Museum have come together to create one of the biggest collections of fire memorabilia in the world. Now there is a danger that future changes could severely effect this standing.*

### **From the Past**

*An article from The Waverley Gazette June 4th 1980*

Most hobbies are time-consuming and many are expensive. Fred Kerr's hobby is no exception and he doesn't dare think what it will cost him to transport his beloved old fire engines up to Queensland.

The Kerr family, of Diamond Avenue, Glen Waverley, is moving to Queensland this month and Fred's two fire engines are getting the VIP treatment to ensure they arrive safely along with the rest of the family.

Fred, who was with the Melbourne Fire Department for 24 years before his retirement, is the proud owner of a 1914 Hotchkiss and a 1942 International fire engine, plus assorted fire station memorabilia.

The Hotchkiss is very rare and was fully restored when Fred got it. He believes there are only 13 like it left in the world.

When they were brought out from France by the MFB, they had sedan bodies. A utility body was put on the back, a 200 gallon per minute rotary pump was added, a hose and ladder put on top and it was called a fire engine. These proved very efficient and served Melbourne for many years.

The International is half way to being restored. This sort of engine was used in Melbourne between 1942-1970.

### **The story from Fred**

My wife and I and 3 children, (Matthew, my eldest son, stayed in special care in Melbourne) moved to 5 acres about 25 Klm north of Brisbane which had one big attraction, a very large shed for the fire engines.

Within 12 months it became apparent that the move was not a successful one. Marie and I agreed to part and this eventually happened in 1986 with my return to Melbourne.

Whilst in Queensland my collection grew with 2 extra fire engines, 3 trailer pumps and many items of memorabilia. My point in saying this is that when the time come to return my fire engines etc.

to Melbourne it was going to take more than one semi trailer. They remained on blocks in my "Big Shed" until 1997, when, very luckily, the Fire Museum occupied 4 sheds at the old Newport railway workshops, Champion Rd. Newport and I was very graciously allowed to renovate and repair one for my use.

It took time to prepare for such a large move.

After packing all of the memorabilia, tools, books, welders etc. into 55 tea chests I built a ramp in the paddock for the semi trailer to back into so the appliances could be winched on board.

A carrier had to be found and fortunately my years in the transport business paid dividends and a mate agreed to do 3 loads to Melbourne for \$1100 a trip.

My collection has grown at the moment to 5 fire engines, 2 trucks, 1 prime mover, 3 trailer pumps and many, many tools, books, memorabilia etc.

Our fire engine, the Hotchkiss, is fully restored and three are very close to completion. The trucks will have to wait their turn.

### **Now a plea for help for the Fire Museum.**

Some of you have seen our very large display of fire engines etc. at Newport and would no doubt appreciate the time and effort that this has consumed. Only today (29-1-2007) the board of the Museum have found out that with a change of administration in VicTrack (Vic. Govt. owners) the new manager may have less tolerance for our presence on their property. This means we may lose all or half of the use of the sheds.

We have about 90 fire engines and a very large collection of tools, memorabilia etc. So, even if half of our space is taken this presents a huge problem for the Museum.

### **How can you help?**

As you drive around the suburbs and the country please keep your eyes and ears open for any big, large, huge sheds or buildings.

**"It's the way we have in the Fire Brigade"**

**F. C. Kerr**



*The Beloved Hotchkiss with Fred at the wheel. There's still plenty more miles in both of them.*

# Annual U.F.U. Picnic

## Sunday, 26th November 2006

Moonee Valley Racecourse was again the venue for the annual U.F.U. Picnic. Not so well attended this year, which was disappointing for the hard working U.F.U. Social Committee. However, those who did attend enjoyed the day with plenty of rides, competitions, raffles and a very popular animal farm.

The RFA was well represented with committee members assisting around the BBQ. We also managed some photo's courtesy of Jean Brown and Carol Millstead



**Santa Arrives;**  
Above and left: Santa was besieged with little and not so little kids hoping for a quick word and some last orders before the big event.



**"Mary Poppins"** (right) was there as well. In the guise of Jack Etherton, Mary took the best seat in the house and soaked in the atmosphere as well as a few "lemonades."

**Below:** RFA stalwarts Don and Nancy Brennan worked tirelessly as they usually do. All smiles after they were presented with a trophy for the hardest working team on the day



**Left:** Keeping the BBQ warm and the drinks cold. John Brown, Ken Heddle (also drove Santa's sleigh) and John Laverick

**Smile**  
Two old friends lost their long-time drinking mate to alcoholism. At the funeral, as they passed by the open casket, one remarked to the other, "Gee, Bluey sure looks good, doesn't he?"  
The other replied, "Well, he ought to; he hasn't had a drink in 3 days."

**LEGLESS!**  
Towards the end of a recruit course for the Fire Brigade, students were required to take a CPR course. The classes used the well known mannequin victim, Rescue Anne, to practice. Rescue Anne was legless to allow for storage in a carrying case. The class went off in groups to practice. As instructed, one of the students gently shook the doll and asked, "Are you all right?" He then put his ear over the mannequin's mouth to listen for breathing. Suddenly he turned to the instructor and exclaimed, "She says she can't feel her legs!"

## KREAGER'S LAST RIDE

Now gather round you firemen, if you can spare a mo'  
I'll tell you of the bike race, and of me tale of woe  
I thought I'd enter bike race, one fine and sunny day  
And show you how to ride a bike, the Emil Kreagar way.  
I trained in secret out on alarms, for I was very keen  
And there's nought to match a training ride, on a M.F.B. machine  
I stood up on the pedals, the bike I did make fly.  
My head it point to the ground, my back side to the sky.  
To show you blokes how good I was, the cycle hard I push  
I'm game as this Ned Kelly bloke, or the buzzard from the bush  
And when at home each evening, I still trained very hard  
I rode my daughter's tricycle, round and round the yard.  
The day of race it had come, I had one thought in mind  
How to beat your Conlin chap, and leave far behind  
I started off second man, I think me, they'l never catch  
For I am very, very good, I should have been off scratch.  
The chap fall off ahead of me, 'By Cli" I thought that hurt  
But then off my bike I fall too, and I'm beside him in the dirt  
So now I give my bike away, tho Fn not a bloke to whine  
I stay at home and press the grape and make grappa and the wine.

### PEAK

Non-de-plume

Elwyn, Ashley, Kitchener Powell (Alf)

Emil Kreager (a Hungarian by birth) was a F/m stationed at No. 44 Station (Sunshine). He left the job to grow oranges and grapes with his brothers in South Australia.

Conlin, Barry Conlin F/m. also Stationed at No. 44 Station,

## The Middle Wife

By an Anonymous 2nd grade teacher.

I've been teaching now for about fifteen years. I have two kids myself, but the best birth story I know is the one I saw in my own second-grade classroom a few years back. When I was a kid, I loved show-and-tell. So I always have a few sessions with my students. It helps them get over shyness and usually, show-and-tell is pretty tame. Kids bring in pet turtles, model airplanes, pictures of fish they catch, stuff like that. And I never, ever place any boundaries or limitations on them. If they want to lug it in to school and talk about it, they're welcome.

Well, one day this little girl, Erica, a very bright, very outgoing kid, takes her turn and waddles up to the front of the class with a pillow stuffed under her sweater.

She holds up a snapshot of an infant. "This is Luke, my baby brother, and I'm going to tell you about his birthday. First, Mom and Dad made him as a symbol of their love, and then Dad put a seed in my Mom's stomach, and Luke grew in there. He ate for nine months through an umbrella cord."

She's standing there with her hands on the pillow, and I'm trying not to laugh and wishing I had my camcorder with me. The kids are watching her in amazement.

"Then, about two Saturdays ago, my Mom starts saying and going, 'Oh, oh, oh, oh!' " Erica puts a hand behind her back and groans. "She walked around the house for, like an hour, 'Oh, oh, oh!'" Now this kid is doing a hysterical duck walk and groaning.

"My Dad called the middle wife. She delivers babies, but she doesn't have a sign on the car like the Domino's man. They got my Mom to lie down in bed like this." Then Erica lies down with her back against the wall.

"And then, pop! My Mom had this bag of water she kept in there in case he got thirsty, and it just blew up and spilled all over the bed, like psshheew!" This kid has her legs spread and with her little hands are miming water flowing away. It was too much!

"Then the middle wife starts saying 'push, push,' and 'breathe, breathe.' They started counting, but never even got past ten. Then, all of a sudden, out comes my brother. He was covered in yucky stuff, they all said it was from Mom's play-centre!, so there must be a lot of stuff inside there."

Then Erica stood up, took a big theatrical bow and returned to her seat.

I'm sure I applauded the loudest. Ever since then, if it's show-and-tell day, I

bring my camcorder, just in case another Erica comes along.

"New York is a great town, though. If you're here and want a one of a kind souvenir be sure to take home the police sketch of your assailant." --Dave Letterman



### Me and My Mate!

The above photograph was taken in the early 1940's??? He is one of our better known retired fireies. The young fellow, with his arm around his girl, (just being neighbourly he claims) later joined the Fire Brigade, knocked about as a firefighter eventually rising to the rank of D.O.

After retirement he kept his fire service affiliations by involving himself with the Fire Services Museum and supporting many of the Fire service Sporting Clubs. He is also a regular contributor to "Water Off". The young lady shown supplied the photo.

## WHO ARE THEY?

These two photographs depict two people who joined the MFB and eventually rose to the rank of District Officer

Have a guess at who they are and we will publish their identities in the May edition of "Water Off".

*(The prize for correctly guessing will be a camping holiday for two on Coode Island. Conditions apply.)*



This firefighter's photo was taken just after his promotion to D.O. in 1962, at the age of 36 years

## A VERY MOBILE HOME



The way they do things in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada.

Photographed by Bill Bates during his travels, a pumper towing a house (or a very fancy caravan) for fire prevention/safety demonstrations at schools and community events.

One assumes, by it's pristine state, they don't set fire to it.

The question that begs to be asked - What happens if they're sent on to a job with that on the back?

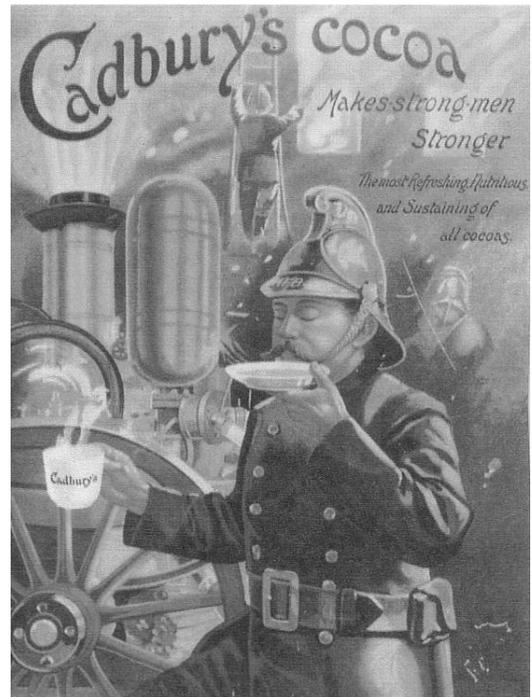
# LETTERS

## “Guna & Shuda”

Receiving the “Water Off” brings back many memories with all the happenings from the past.

Have enclosed photo of the day I retired with mate Jim Cooper who had 33 years service to 19-10-84 and was named “Guna” by his family. Jim was stationed at Port Melbourne, Box Hill and Nunawading.

I had 30 years service retiring on 30-8-85. I was stationed at Box Hill, Eastern Hill and Surrey Hills. I was named “Shuda” by family.



I've also included a copy of a card (Above)I picked up at a second hand dealer's shop. Note the MFB on helmet peak.

**Jack McGuinness**

## WHO WAS THIS FIRIE?

This Firie always dreamt about a “**Heroic Rescue**” that never happened. Then, when at a house fire that had just been extinguished, a very worried little old lady was taken inside to show her the damage to her house. The little old lady fainted, so the Firie, in the best M.F.B. tradition, placed her over his shoulder and proceeded outside. Unfortunately on the way out he hit her head on the doorway. On her recovery, she rubbed a very sore head, and stated "I have a terrible headache."

Our Firie never said a word.

## Musical Mutt!

Before I retired and stationed at No. 11 station, an amusing incident happened when Jim Thompson was relieving at No. 11.

Neighbour, Ray Lennie, had a dog and every time Jim tried to practice his music, the dog started howling to such an extent that Jim had to give it away.

He said that he could not compete with the opposition who had no musical training.

**Jim Holmes**

## Brigade Drivers

“Tich” Renwood was detailed to drive No 1 Stn's Hose Carriage. (Back in the fifties a Fireman detailed to drive a fire appliance received 6 pence (5 cents) a day).

Crossing Swanston Street, whilst proceeding to a call down Collins Street, “Tich” very nearly collided with a tram.

Upon return to station, Mr. Bill Aldridge, (Third Officer at the time) who was on the appliance, sent for “Tich to see him in his office.

“That would be the worst piece of driving I've ever seen”, blasted “Uncle Bill”.

“Tich” being “Tich” replied, “What do you expect for 6 pence a day sir, Stirling Moss?”

Still a young fireman I attended a fire in St Kilda. Mr. Bramwell, D.O., instructed me to return to 27 Stn. In the Comb' Ladder, as I had to go on watchroom duty. As I was not a Brigade driver at the time, Mr. Clements, our S.O. had to drive. I sat in the front seat Mr. Clements got behind the wheel. Before driving off, “Old Wal” glared at me and said, “Now you watch me Bates, every time I go to change gears, you ring the bell”. (Those were the days of “Crash Gear Boxes”).

**Bill Bates**

# REUNION DAY LUNCHEON

## Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2007

**Our annual reunion day Spit Roast Luncheon will be held at the  
MFESB Training College**

**in the Engine room in the lower yard at 11.30 Hours**

**BYO drinks  
Tea and Coffee will be supplied**

**Cost: \$15.00 per guest, members free.**

Parking will be available in the top yard and also in the lower yard for those with reduced mobility. As the top gate will be closed, please turn right off Victoria Street into Flockhart Street, then right into Shamrock Street down to the wire gate into the lower training yard.

**Looking forward to seeing you there.  
Acceptance form below.**

---

### **Reunion Day at MFESB Training College**

**Acceptance Form**

**Members Free; Guests = \$15.00 per head  
R.S.V.P. by Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2007**

Please return this slip to;

**Mike McCumisky**

**26 Roslyn Street**

**Burwood Vic 3125**

**Phone 9808 1659**

Name.....  
(please print)

Your Telephone No.....

Guest / Spouse Name.....

I / We will be attending the Reunion at the MFESB Training College  
619 Victoria Street, Abbotsford  
at 11.30 hours on

**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> March 2007**

**Please find enclosed Cheque / Money order for the sum of \$.....**

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