

# "WATER OFF"

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



February 2010 Vol 14 No 1  
Inc/No: A16839F

## RFA ELECTS NEW PRESIDENT

*A rejuvenated Don Brennan again takes on the presidential role after stepping down six years ago.*



**Above:** Don Brennan, ponders the future direction of the RFA.

After a six year break, Don Brennan has again put his hand up to lead the RFA into a another era.

Don, a foundation member, led the Association from humble beginnings and has seen many changes over those years.

He is now ready for the new challenges ahead.

**Right:** Mike McCumisky, stands down after six years. Mike has done a magnificent job as RFA President and nursed us through some trying times particularly in finding a permanent meeting venue.

Since his retirement from the Brigade, Mike has worn many hats, including his involvement as President of the Fire Services Museum. How he juggled these roles and stayed sane is to be admired. He will still be with us, along with his wife, Barbara, (a member of our editorial staff), both are staunch supporters of the RFA. Thanks Mike, for a job well done!



## Marysville Destroyed!

With smoke haze still lingering over the town, like a sentinel, this safe stands defiantly amid the ruins of Marysville.

It seems indicative of the spirit of the residents that the horror of "Black Saturday" will not deter them from rebuilding this once beautiful tourist town.

**Page 7** of this issue, Les Gray continues his series on the February 7th. 2009 fires, with the destruction of Marysville and the impact the fires had on the state of Victoria.

**Photo; Keith Pakenham**

# “GENERAL MEETING”

Notice is hereby given that the next General Meeting will be held at the MFB Training College  
450 Burnley Street Richmond  
**1030 Hours, Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2010**

## AGENDA ITEMS.

**Minutes of last General meeting.**  
**President’s Report.**  
**Secretary/Treasurer’s Report.**  
**Guest Speaker:**  
**General Business**

**JOHN BERRY**  
**SECRETARY/TREASURER**  
**Please Note;**  
**Address all correspondence to:**  
**The Secretary,**  
**24 Lincoln Drive Lower Plenty 3093**  
**Ph. 9431 2880**

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.

**BBQ Lunch available**  
**Please join us!**

### **Non financial Members**

Members be advised if your newsletter has an expiry date of 2/1/2008 that means you have not paid your subs since 2006 therefore if no remuneration is received by the 2/1/11 your name will be automatically removed from the mailing list. If, for what ever reason any member is unable to meet this request please do not hesitate to call the secretary (confidentiality is assured)

## **OFFICE BEARERS**

**President,** Don Brennan  
**Vice President,** Ian Fowler  
**Sec./Treasurer,** John Berry

### **General Committee;**

Ian Geddes  
John Laverick  
Ken McGillivray  
John Schintler  
John Wallace

### **Auditor;**

Theo Teklenburg

### **“Water Off” Editorial Staff**

John Laverick  
Barbara McCumisky

## **Valē**

George Adams (MFB)      Harry Plant (MFB)  
Terry Beardon (MFB)      Bob Short (MFB)  
Laurie Buckingham (MFB)      John Tait (MFB)  
Bill Mitchell (MFB)      Ted Walhouse (MFB)

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

### **SICK LIST** (\* In Nursing Home)

Stan Cameron      Ernie Goodall\*  
Jim Casley\*      Clarrie Hart  
Ron Cass\*      Jack Sexton  
Huew Campbell      Alby Smith  
Ken Clinkaberry      Ron Turner  
Ben Conway  
Russ Daniels\*  
John Dorman  
Bill Franklin

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.

### **Diary Dates 2010**

February 17th      General Meeting  
March 14th      UFU Picnic, Moonee Valley  
May 19th      General Meeting  
August 18th      General Meeting  
November 17th      Annual General Meeting  
November 27th      UFU Christmas Luncheon  
Malvern Town Hall

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Welcome one and all to the year 2010. I would like on behalf of the committee and myself to offer my condolences to those members and spouses who have lost their loved ones during the past year. Our thoughts are with you.

As you can see I have been elected President of the RFA. I would like to pass on a big thank you to our outgoing president Mike McCumisky and the committee for the good job they have done over the previous years.

After our last meeting at the training college the members of Recruit course 100 and their instructors supplied and cooked lunch for our members.

Following on from this my wife and I were invited to attend their passing out parade at the Show grounds.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> November members of the RFA held a BBQ at Bunning's Hoppers Crossing. On a slow day we cleared \$470 to which we have added \$30 from our funds and presented a cheque of \$500 to the Royal Children's Hospital Burns Unit. (See page 4 for presentation photo and story). Thanks to John Berry, Ian Fowler, Kevin Heade, Charlie Maile, John Chambers and Ola & John Wallace from Geelong for their assistance on the day.

On Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2010 we have another day booked for a BBQ so if you can help please let me know. (9742 6626)

Hope to see you at our next meeting (lunch provided)

**Don Brennan**

## SECRETARY/TREASURER'S REPORT



**Welcome to 2010.** We are 10 years into the new century and it only seems like yesterday that the new millennium began, there is no doubt since they started this metric time with twenty hour days, a week just rushes by. (I wonder how many calls I get about this comment) I hope this will act as an attention grabber as we have a big year planned for all the members, the February meeting is an example of what we mean.

We have been very fortunate to entice the **President and the Secretary of the United Firefighters Union** to address a meeting of the retired firefighters on the **Retired Alumni section of the International Alliance of Firefighting Unions**. RFA members may or may not be aware that the UFU have already changed their rules to include a **Retired division**. The committee believe this is a must attend meeting for all retirees as each and every one of us will become the building blocks for the future. We have all heard of retired firies that have fallen through the cracks for one reason or another, well this is one way to insure there is a group that will help them through this most important stage of their life (the third stage). Spread the word about the meeting (there is a number of RFA members who have, for whatever reason, become non-financial; and will not know), the more that attend will insure the information on the proposal will reach all retirees.

**Another bit of good news** occurred because of **Stan Cameron's wife Jean's inquiry**, Jean rang and wanted to know why we do not have electronic remittance for our subs. My reply was I am not sure if we can, but I would check with the Firefighters Credit Cooperative **Manager Mike Enticott** who is always very helpful (the good old style manager). All members take note of the following as this will **save you money when your subs are due**, by making it easier to pay. Instead of writing out a cheque that can get lost in the mail, incur bank fees, and to also

save on the postage costs, you can now electronically remit your subscription and it is all free.

If you do it this way one most important item to include in the electronic remittance is a reference and we ask you to ensure you complete this area with your surname and initials, this will allow us to identify those that are paying by this method and enable us to issue the appropriate receipt. (Check with your bank and/or credit union how to do it if you do not know)

**ELECTRONIC REMITTANCE DETAILS ARE;  
BSB: 803-209**

**Account No: 91469**

**Account Name: Retired Firefighters Association  
Reference: (Surname and initial)**

Whilst on the subject of the **Credit Union, the branch in Chifley Drive Preston, is now closed** the old building in **Brunswick Street Fitzroy, is again open**. The President and I, amongst others, were invited to attend an organised inspection of the new extension and refurbished section; I must say the building is now a winner. The one thing that has not changed is the **great service you receive**, so all you retirees if you are looking for good old fashioned service where the customers are treated with respect and the staff remembers your name this is the place to go. You will be amazed at the benefits that come with an account with them, I am not sure what your feeling is when you ring up about an account and a machine answers you and/or you are put through to an overseas operator this, really annoys me. I can guarantee this will never happen with the Firefighters Credit Union.

**The last three months has not been a period of great rejoicing for a number of RFA families as a high number of members have been taken to a higher place. The members and committee want their loved ones to know we share their loss and each and all of them will not be forgotten.**

See you at the February meeting.

**John Berry**



## MINUTES OF R.F.A. MEETING

A.G.M. – 10.30AM – 18<sup>TH</sup> November 2009  
At Training College, Burnley

Mike McCumisky (President), John Berry (Secretary/Treasurer), Ian Geddes (Minutes).

Present: - 54 members. Apologies: As per book.

Good to see some infrequent attendees, including Basil Smith, and observer Eddie Gilbertson, ex Pontypridd (near Cardiff capitol of Wales) Fire Service.

Mike welcomed R.F.A. new members, and called for one minute's silence for deceased members.

**Secretary Report:** John Berry:

Reports of 2008 A.G.M. read out - Moved - John Howe, Seconded - Brian Jackson. – Carried.

**Treasurers Report:** John Berry.

The year '08/'09 had bigger outgoings — (\$2,000 donation to Royal Children's Hospital, \$500 to U.F.U. Social Committee for the Town Hall Christmas lunch, R.F.A. Baseball Caps (still available), computer upgrade, General expenses/functions.

At Call balance: - \$-(56.73), Fixed Term: - \$6,608.16 total - \$ 6,551.43 .Moved – Don Brennan, Seconded – Geoff Butterworth - Carried.

**Presidents Report:** Mike McCumisky:

A short report, Mike referred to past Water-Off's and wished members the best for the Christmas Season.

**Nominations for Office Bearers:**

2 Nominations received for the position of President, Mike McCumisky & Don Brennan. The President vacated the chair to the Vice President Ian Fowler to enable him to conduct the ballot. Ian requested Mike & Don to leave the meeting whilst the ballot was conducted. Result by a show of financial member's hand. Brennan, 29, McCumisky, 16 votes. The Vice President vacated the chair whilst the new President Don Brennan, took charge. **Don Brennan**

**elected President for 09/10.**

G. Butterworth moved a motion of a vote of thanks and appreciation for Mike's 4 years as President, seconded by C. Maile....carried unanimously.

Don Brennan stated that all other Office Bearer positions held during 08/09 would continue for 09/10, and thanked Mike for his past work. The chair was then handed to the guest speaker.

**Guest Speaker:** **Bob Armstrong.** Wandin, C.F.A. (member of C.F.A. for 51 years), I.F.E. graduate, fire protection / organizer, firefighter. **Topic "Bushfires and B-S"**. Referred to February 7<sup>th</sup> disastrous fires, and gave a history of bush fires going back to 1851, 1898, 1912, 1914 and 1926. 1939 – 2 million hectares (about 20% of Victoria) and 71 fatalities, 1943 – 10 firefighters killed, 1962 – 32 deceased, 1965 – 7 deceased, 1968 – 53 dwellings, 1983 – 200,000 hectares and 47 deceased (including 6 firefighter). There have been many larger bush fires, but nothing as costly as 2009.

Bob showed a rare 1939 Forest Commission's movie relating to the 1939 fires – showing not too much has changed. The meeting presented **Bob**, with a R.F.A. Baseball cap.

**Meeting finished at 12noon.**

The members adjourned to the College barbeque area to be guest of Recruit Course 100, the recruits insured the day was successful with great food, conversation and wonderful interaction between the groups.

Recruit of the Day Fowler, thanked the retirees, and Recruit Geddes (cook) showed a deft hand at the barbecue. The only one with prior family connections; was Recruit Angwin with a father and an uncle still serving. **The meeting of the different generation of firefighter and indeed the initiative by College Staff was a resounding success.**

Next Meeting – Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2010. Training College. 1030 am

## RFA Sausage Sizzle Reaps Reward for RCH



The photo left shows President Don & wife Nancy at the Children's Hospital handing over the \$500 cheque raised at the sausage sizzle put on by the RFA at Bunnings Hoppers Crossing, as mentioned in the President's report. What he failed to mention was the trials' & tribulations us peasant workers went through raising the money to enable him to have this opportunity, let me explain.

The day started off with the temperature around forty degrees in the water bag, then mid afternoon the change came with the high winds that precede the rain. I must tell you I would have loved to have had a camera. **There we are holding down the portable 3 sided gazebo to prevent it blowing away in the wind and rain and hoping like heck that it does not catch on fire as it flaps against the gas fired hot plates (and I have cleaned that up)?**

Imagine the headlines Retired Firies lose gazebo to fire in the rain. I reckon the big bloke upstairs took pity on us and stopped the wind then the rain for us. All in all it was a fun day and the Manager out at Bunnings was very happy with us and has invited us back again this year.

**John Berry.**

**RETIRED FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA  
(VICTORIAN BRANCH) REG NO A16839F**

**Statement of Income and Expenditure for year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009**

**Income**

	2009	2008
	\$	\$
<b>Opening Balance Credit Union 1<sup>st</sup> July 2008</b>	<b>9,240.63</b>	<b>8,431.18</b>
Members subscriptions	3,061.80	2,710.00
Sale of promotional items	1,122.00	33.00
Donations	-	-
Socials	360.00	610.00
Joining fee	25.00	30.00
Transfers	-	-
Interest received	<u>389.50</u>	<u>352.87</u>
	<b><u>14,198.93</u></b>	<b><u>12,167.05</u></b>

**Expenditure**

Postages and Telephone	1,018.85	983.32
Reunion Day & catering	752.06	894.00
Magazine expenses	136.94	128.31
Computer upgrades & software & internet	219.00	-
Donations	2,658.00	620.00
Promotional material	2,450.00	-
Petty cash	-	-
Stationary	-	-
AGM and meeting expenses	149.05	141.54
Sundries	208.90	117.15
Government & Credit Co-op fees & charges	<u>54.70</u>	<u>42.10</u>
	7,647.50	2,926.42
<b>Closing Balance Credit Union 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009</b>	<b><u>6,551.43</u></b>	<b><u>9,240.63</u></b>
	<b><u>14,198.93</u></b>	<b><u>12,167.05</u></b>

**Bank Reconciliation**

**Bank balance as at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009**

Main account	- (56.73)
Term deposit	<u>6,608.16</u>
	<b><u>6,551.43</u></b>

**Independent Person's Certification.**

I have examined the accounting records, including receipts, of the Retired Firefighters Association the period

1<sup>st</sup> July 2008 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009. In my opinion the Statement of performance above is correct.

Theo Teklenburg  
Retired Credit Union Manger  
Treasurer

John Berry  
Secretary/

## RFA Foundation Member Numbers Decrease

The last two months of 2009 has seen the association lose two of its foundation members to a higher calling. The members were part of the building blocks on which the RFA was built. The members I am referring to were, **Bill Mitchell 1920-2009** and foundation committee member **Harry Plant 1921-2009**.

The members and committee of the Retired Firefighters Association would like it known to both families we sympathize in your great loss.

With your indulgences I would like to take you on a trip down memory lane with our lost members. Let's start with S/Fm **Bill Mitchell**. Bill joined the MFB on the 14/6/46, not long after the second world war (I think we were still using ration cards) serving at the following stations No's 1,17,28,29,36 and finished his time at No 35 Windsor on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1980.

I was never stationed with Bill, but from all the stories I've heard, and all the information I've read since I have been involved in this 100 year research project, I found that Bill was not only a great supporter of his mates, but also the Union movement and did great humanitarian deeds through his lodge. I would have no hesitation in saying the community and the members of the MFB have a lot to be thankful for because of what he did.

I do recall the times I did come in contact with him, whether at a job or whatever, he would hang it on me (of course it was uncalled for, trust me) no, he was a top bloke with a heart of gold and will be sorely missed. Unfortunately Bill's passing was not known until after his funeral.

### **Workshops Controller Harry Plant**

Harry joined the job as an apprentice on the 19/2/37 rising to the aforementioned senior position, finishing on the 2/7/81 after 44 years of work with the service. Now I like most members of my ilk and earlier would have stories on Harry's exploits, things like how he would help you with the mechanical part of the exam, also you would see him at large conflagrations and/or whatever, arriving without being notified to insure the appliances would never let you down. Well rather than me rattle on about all his fine virtues the following will give you a better understanding of the type of person he was by giving you an insight into the famous No 57 station and what better person to do that than Jack Gallop. I know Harry and his wife Joy would rather that.

**Note:** you will not find No 57 station on any MFB records.

Wacky, sorry, I mean Mr. Gallop, will now explain the rest regarding No 57 Stn which Harry was very involved with. Its origin started back in the early 60's when I was transferred from Fitzroy to Carlton fire station. I was invited to go on a fishing trip by 2 old-timers S/Fm Cliff Hay and Jack Barker to a place called Mathoura NSW, no fishing was done. Over a few drinks with a local Council worker he suggested I apply for a lease in the forest. I was subsequently granted a lease. The next stage was to construct a shack, luckily on the same shift was Bruce Thornton an ex- carpenter who owned a trailer and was interested in building a shack for us. Peter Hollowood knew of a window at a building that was being demolished in

Collins Street and the demolishers sold it to us for a fair price, after gaining more material Bruce loaded his trailer with all the goods plus his tools and the convoy headed north. On arrival at the site first task was to lay a concrete slab, following this we ventured into town to the local sawmill for permission to fossick through the off cuts. Remembering the old saying, waste not - want not; we were able gather enough for the frame and roof timbers.

Time to return to the big smoke, many trips later construction was finished. Harry Plant, Harry Webb, and Joy's brother were to become part of the main driving force behind the project. It was through Harry more workshop personnel became interested in the shack creating the need to increase it to around 64 m2, an outside water tank was fitted, a chimney was constructed in the centre of the shack, in winter time it became a godsend.

During one of the large tea parties held in the shack, Morrie Hogan had a head count and found there were 57 personnel present from just about every section of the Brigade, in other words one big family and the shack became known as No 57 Station. Harry Plant and his brother-in-law always made sure that mateship and friendship were always the order of the day; also the local publican must always have plenty of tea on hand. The following is a closing comment by the Ant.

**Jack Gallop**

In closing I must mention, at Harry's celebration of life, Morrie Hogan and Gerry Woodlock in their joint presentation painted a picture of a time when the whole service was one family, the many retired people that were present from the brigade were taken back to an era when there was no spin. Unfortunately not one senior member of the brigade attended Harry's funeral which tends to make a mockery of his loyal 44 years service to the brigade. On a lighter note I must mention a little story Wacky told me that occurred to the late Gus Reid (Cappy a top bloke).

On one of the visits to the shack, unbeknown to Gus, during the night one of the blokes who had brought up a musical instrument decided to take advantage of the still night air. Being very considerate to the other inhabitants of the group he went out into the forest to practice. Gus, hearing all these strange noises and with his Irish background, must have thought it was the banshee after him as he said to Wacky do you hear that! The forest is haunted, they are after us! Don't go outside. My initial thought when Wacky told me the story was Bulls!!! Perhaps the tea you had that night was off?

**John Berry**

### **RECENT RETIREMENTS**

**Steve Trickey**, (MFB) 23rd November 2009  
**Fred Rogers**, (MFB) 18th December 2009

### **Pending retirements**

**Wayne Bradborn**, February 15, Deer Park Club



## FEROCIOUS FIRES THAT SHOWED NO MERCY CONTINUED!

*The November issue of "Water Off" Les Gray told us of the dreadful fires that cost so many lives and destroyed much of the Murrindindi Shire from Kilmore East to Kinglake. Les continues the story as the fires approach the township of Marysville!*

At approx. 1730 hours the winds shifted to the South West and the fires are now burning in the Marysville State Forest and are getting closer to the Marysville township. At 1800 hours the inferno raced West, (from the opposite direction most people thought it would come from) down from the hills above Marysville and engulfed the town. By 1820 Hrs. the fire front passes over and by 1830 Hrs. 90% of the township is razed to the ground. A short time later about 100 survivors made their way to the football ground at Gallipoli Park. Only 4 buildings were left standing in a town where approximately 500 people had lived.

Earlier in the day many of the residents evacuated to safety, Firefighters and Police had convinced many to leave and head North to Alexandra. In all 40 people lost their lives at Marysville and more than 500 houses were destroyed in and around the town.

About an hour or so before the fires arrived, people started to congregate on the Gallipoli oval located at the town centre. Police Officers Ken Dwight (on stand-by from Woods Point), Ian Hamil and Andrew Walker realized how potentially dangerous it was for them to be there and, after some persuading, they convinced them to evacuate. They formed about 200 people in their cars up into a convoy and at about 1815 hours, only 5 minutes before the fire arrived, Ian and Andrew led the convoy out along the Marysville-Buxton Road to Buxton and then on the Maroondah Highway to Alexandra.

This was a very risky operation as nobody knew the whereabouts of the fires or the condition of the road, whether it was involved in the fires, was it blocked by fallen trees etc.? This exercise was a close run thing, nevertheless a decision was made to evacuate (If the people had stopped on the oval many would no doubt have lost their lives). Luck was on the side of the brave and many owe their lives to Ken, Ian and Andrew. It was a very commendable effort for all concerned.

As the front burnt down South East through the Marysville State Forest it descended 84 meters into the Stevenson River Valley impacting into the Stevenson Falls causing significant vegetation loss within the falls reserve, luckily for the Hydro Turbine and the Weir they received only partial damage. These falls are another of Murrindindi Shires top tourist attractions as was Marysville.



***Smoke haze still visible after Marysville was wiped out. These photos by Keith Pakenham show the devastation of this once beautiful town.***

The fires travelled further down South East through the Yarra Ranges National Park burning out the Cumberland Memorial Reserve, around The Big Culvert, Cambarville (where 1 person died) and onto and around Cumberland Junction, located on the edge of the Big River State Forest, then burnt down South along the Warburton Road.

At the same time the fires swiftly burnt North impacting on the Lake Mountain Alpine resort with the main visitor centre escaping unscathed. (Ironically, several months later the Centre was severely damaged by fire which was deemed to be caused by an electrical fault.)

The width of the front as it burnt from Narbethong, East to Cumberland Junction was approx. 28Klms., North to Marysville, East to Lake Mountain, further North to Buxton (84 houses destroyed) then East within 8Klms of Enoch Point situated in the upper end of the Big River State Forest, further North to Taggerty (43 houses destroyed), East to Rubicon where the front tapered to approx, 15Klms. wide. North again nearly to Acheron then East to Thornton, and Snobs Creek where it further diminished in width.

*(Continued on page 8)*

*(Continued from page 7)*

The fires impacted into the Cathedral Range National Park, to the East between Buxton and Taggerty. These wild fires burnt further North out of control in the Lake Eildon National Park and in the Upper Big River State Forest until the 10<sup>th</sup> March, by the 27<sup>th</sup> April they were considered to be under control, at one stage the fires were heading towards Jamieson.

The good work carried out by the DSE bulldozing many Kilometres of fire lines around towns and other exposures helped contain them. In the meantime a drop in winds, cooler wet weather assisted by their own and C.F.A. pumpers and crews finally brought them to a halt. It would be remiss of me if I did not mention the assistance given by water bombing aircraft over all of the major fires burning in Victoria at the time.

During the course of the abovementioned fires residents living in Eildon, Jamieson, Kevington, Ten Mile, Knockwood, Gaffneys Creek, A1 Mine Settlement, Woods Point and Matlock were placed on Stand by several times owing to the advancing fires and smoke.

#### **Murrindindi Mill – Kinglake – Marysville Fire.**

Two fire fronts were burning parallel across the upper reaches of the Murrindindi Valley. One front travelled South towards the Western slopes of the Black Range and impacted on Narbethong and the other burnt South following the North side of the Yea River, by passing Toolangi as it merged with the Murrindindi Mill fire and headed South towards Healesville. (Refer Page 11 November 2009 issue "Water Off".)

These fires belong to the Kilmore East – Murrindindi Complex South, as this front travelled South towards Healesville over and around Mt. St. Leonard it by-passed the township and for the next 10 days or so as the fires burnt in the mountains around the town, they ebbed and flowed with the prevailing winds in all directions. The residents were placed on "Stand By – Alert – Activate your fire plans now" many times. Fortunately, they were spared.

These developed into two sections, the larger section covers a huge area of land. It starts in a straight line running West to East from just below Mt. Disappointment (near Whittlesea) East almost to Glenburn, South East from Christmas Hills to well below Healesville, then due East to the Warburton – Woods Point Spur Road.

Strong North West winds whipped up the forest fires East of Healesville into fierce hot fronts and they spotted over 10Klms. to Mt. Juliet in the Yarra Ranges National Park, down to Mt. Richie and onto the O'Shannassy Reservoir, then further South East almost to Reefton, then South to Mc Mahon's Creek, at the same time it spread North to its upper perimeter into the bottom end of the Big River State Forest to Cambarville and Cumberland Junction. In other words its an isolated area situated on the bottom end South of the huge area of land involved that belongs to The Kilmore East – Murrindindi Complex North fires. Do you follow? I can only just hear your answer "Yes" !!!, that's good because I've just about lost the plot completely.

On Black Saturday 7<sup>th</sup>.Feb.. The Kilmore East – Murrindindi Mill fire merged to form The Kinglake Fire Complex. Early on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup>. Feb. spot fires from the Kinglake Complex merged around Healesville to form The Maroondah – Yarra Complex, which belongs in the overall Kilmore East – Murrindindi Complex South. It seems a bit confusing like fires to the North, fires to the South, fires to the East & West, raging Inferno fires overhead!!!

I can hear you readers protesting, but believe me it cost me a few more grey hairs and many hours of research and writing and re writing copy in an attempt to report a reasonably accurate review of the actual travels of these fires which burnt over thousands of square Kilometres ("So There" on with the story). Don't worry it doesn't get any worse.

#### **The Southern Fires. Maroondah – Yarra Complex.**

Back to the fires burning in and around South of Healesville and the Maroondah Reservoir and its catchments in the Yarra Ranges National Park, they now spotted East to Doctors Creek, Westburn and in the Upper Yarra Warburton – Acheron Gap near the Upper Yarra Reservoir, North East of Warburton, burnt South East around Mt. Riddle and South to Warramate, then into the Yarra Ranges State Forest by passing the Warburton township. Warburton was under threat on several occasions and many of its residents evacuated down to Lilydale for safety.

The Southern fires spotted below Yarra Junction East to Oat Patch Spur, Britannia Creek, Powelltown, Hoddles Creek, Toorong East, Lock Valley, Tanjil Bren, South to Mt. Toorong, a small out break below Baw Baw Alpine Village, West to Upper Ferntree Gully, Belgrave and Gembrook in the Dandenong Ranges, West to Endeavour Hills and Narre Warren and as far South West to East and West of Tyers above Erica.

#### **Dandenong Ranges.**

In Upper Ferntree Gully fire damaged the rail line, burning about 2 hectares along the track. In the Southern Dandenong Ranges sparks from a power tool; ignited a bush fire around Narre Warren South (6 houses destroyed here) and at Narre Warren North 3 houses were destroyed. Fires also spotted South East around the Gembrook area.

About 2 weeks later at Belgrave and Upwey in the Lysterfield State Forest after a hot day of 32deg. with a North wind blowing, and later on in the day a cool change of wind from the South precipitated a flare up of many fires and ignited several others causing concern and after a hard fight the many C.F.A. pumpers and crews attending contained it. An Upper Ferntree Gully Tanker (only days old) was destroyed by fire.

#### **Bunyip State Park fires South East.**

Cause of ignition Arson/Lightning. The fire started on the Bunyip Ridge on the 4<sup>th</sup> Feb, originating near a walking track, by the 6<sup>th</sup>. Feb. the fire had burnt out 23 hectares, despite the efforts of D.S.E. fire fighters to establish containment lines in the park. The extreme weather conditions of Sat. 7<sup>th</sup>, the fire broke out of the park at approx. 1600 hours and by 1800 hours had burnt out 24,500 hectares of forest and farmlands, it threatened the towns of Labertouche, Tonimbuk, Drouin and Longwarry.

The fires destroyed about 12 houses in Labertouche, Tonimbuk and Drouin West in addition to various out buildings and a factory. The progress of this fire had been stopped by the afternoon of the 9<sup>th</sup>. Feb. D.S.E. fire fighters conducted back burning operations to ensure containment. Residents of areas between Pakenham and Warragul were warned about the smoke from these fires. The Bunyip fire was not under control until 15<sup>th</sup>. March.

#### **West Gippsland fires.**

Cause of ignition Arson. The West Gippsland Bush fires began in a Pine Plantation 1Km. South East of Churchill at approx 1330 hrs. on 7<sup>th</sup>. Feb. Black Saturday, within half an hour it had spread South East threatening Hazelwood, South Jeeralang and Budgeree East, by late afternoon the fire was



approaching Yarram and Woodside on the South Gippsland Coast.

The cool change came through at about 1800 hrs. and the freshening South Westerly winds quickly drove the front North East through Callignee (4 people died) and destroyed 57 of its 61 houses, then burnt on to Jeeralang Junction, and Koornalla (4 people died) to Traralgon, then South towards Gormandale and Willung South on the Hyland Highway. About 500 evacuees from the area sheltered at a refuge/relief centre established in a theatre at Traralgon.

The fires threatened the Loy Yang Power Station, particularly the open cut coalmine on the night of Feb 7<sup>th</sup>, approaching the mines burning over the overburden dump, without affecting the stations operations. Several small fires broke out in a bunker storing raw coal, they were controlled with no real damage.

On the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup>. Feb, the fire threat had eased as temperatures cooled and some rain fell, one small fire broke out to the South of the Power Station but was contained by water bombing aircraft,

By the 9<sup>th</sup> Feb. The Churchill fire complex was still burning out of control (2 People died) and many houses were destroyed. Fire fronts burnt through into the Latrobe Valley and into the Strzelecki Ranges, by late afternoon the fires had burnt out 32,860 Hectares, altogether in West Gippsland 240 houses were destroyed and 11 people died. Police have charged a person responsible for lighting the Churchill fires.

#### **Wilson's Promontory Fires.**

On the 8<sup>th</sup>. Feb. lightning sparked a fire in Wilson's Promontory National Park and by the 17<sup>th</sup>. Feb. in 9 days had burnt out 11,000 Hectares, due to the excessive fuel on the forest floor and its inaccessibility authorities decided to evacuate the Park, some campers were evacuated by boats. The fire burnt about 7Klms from the park entrance and reached Vereker Outlook but did not threaten any towns.

D.S.E. fire fighters wanted to back burn at the entrance to the park, local volunteers argued that it wasn't safe to do so, they won their argument, by the 27<sup>th</sup>. Feb. it was still burning and now had burnt out 24,150 Hectares of bush and open farmlands.

In my opinion, to contemplate a back burn on days like Black Saturday with high temperatures (45 degrees), strong winds gusting and chopping around, with large amounts of fuel on the forest floors would be a foolhardy or panic stricken decision to make. The fires could travel in directions not intended with calamitous results. Its like the devil you know is better than the devil you don't know.

Back burning is quite in order on cooler days of no winds or very little and low temperatures, a little precipitation would be ideal, but the area to be burnt off should be surrounded by prepared fire lines and adequate men and gear on hand.

#### **Central Victoria – Bendigo fires.**

Police believe the ignition source to be arson, it burnt out 5 square Klms, starting at approx. 1630 hrs. on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Feb. and burning within 2 Klms of Central Bendigo, 1 person in Long Gully died and it destroyed 60 houses, on a change of wind it headed back towards Eaglehawk and was still burning within containment lines the next day. A relief refuge centre was set up at Kangaroo Flat, Senior Citizens Centre. Residents from Long Gully, Eaglehawk, Maiden Gully, California Gully, and West Bendigo were evacuated and advised to assemble there.

#### **Central Victoria – Redesdale**

Located South East of Bendigo, ignition source unknown, the fire started 9Klms. West of the town, it burnt out 10,000 Hectares and destroyed 12 houses and various out

buildings, threatened the towns of Baynton, Glenhope and Kyneton in the South.,

#### **North East Victoria – Beechworth.**

Ignition source a single non return earth fallen power line burnt out approx 30,000 + Hectares (Beechworth 2 people died here). I am unaware of how many houses were destroyed. The fires threatened the towns of Yackandanah, Stanley, Buarong, Dederang, Kangoona South, Coral Bank, Glen Creek and Running Creek. Starting around 1800 hrs. on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Feb, 3Klms. South of Beechworth, it was driven South through a pine plantation by hot Northerly winds. The fire killed 2 people at Mudgegonga and an unknown number of houses South East of Beechworth were destroyed. Strong winds fuelled the fire during the night of the 8<sup>th</sup>. Feb.

Lightning ignited a new fire near Kergunyan at approx 1200 hrs, on 8<sup>th</sup>. Feb. A separate fire front threatened Gundowering and Eskdale, after having jumped the Kiewa River late in the night of the 9<sup>th</sup>. Feb. Fires were burning in pine plantations 8 Klms. from the town of Myrtleford at the opposite Western end of the fire area.

By the 10<sup>th</sup>. Feb. D.S.E. fire fighters had completed a 120Klm. containment line around the Beechworth fires, and it was contained, residents of Beechworth and surrounding towns were advised on the evening of the 10<sup>th</sup> Feb. to expect and increase of smoke as fire fighters would be undertaking back burning within the containment lines.

#### **North – West, Horsham – Moyston Fires.**

Ignition source – Power lines arcing. The fire started at approx. 1230 hrs. on the 7<sup>th</sup>. Feb. when strong wind's felled a power pole at Remlan, West of the city, altogether it burnt out 5,700 Hectares and destroyed 8 houses and the golf Club, then burnt to Haven, South of the city. C.F.A. Fire fighters managed to save the General Store, Town Hall and the School.

It was a difficult fire to fight as the winds changed direction three times during the day with winds gusting up to 90Klms. an hour, by 1500 hrs. more than 400 C.F.A. and D.S.E. fire fighters using 54 C.F.A. Tankers and 35 D.S.E. units as well as 2 water bombing aircraft were at work combating the fires.

By 1800 hrs. the front had burnt East and as the wind changed again it was driven North East across the Western Highway to Drung East of Horsham. With the drop in the wind, cooler conditions and rainfall the fire fighters began mopping up operations, by 2000 hrs they had the fires under control.

#### **South-West, Coleraine fires.**

Ignition source – Power lines clashing. At approx 1230 hrs. 7<sup>th</sup>. Feb, a fire started beside the Glenelg Highway 2 Klm's North West of the township, when power lines clashed and sparked, causing a fire which burnt approx. 770 Hectares, approx. 230 C.F.A. Fire Fighters using 43 tankers as well as two water bombing aircraft.

A change of wind at approx. 1400 hrs. pushed the fire North East, fortunately at the last minute it headed off narrowly missing the Coleraine township, by 1800 hrs. the fire was under control. One house and several out buildings, farmlands and stock were destroyed. One man was caught up in the blaze and he suffered burns to 50% of his body, he remained in the Alfred Hospital in a critical condition.

#### **South West Weerite – Pomborneit Fires. (East of Camperdown):-**

This fire is thought to have started by fallen power lines along the Princes Highway burning approx 1,300 Hectares and damaging the railway line between Geelong and

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

Warrnambool, approx 3,000 wooden sleepers were burnt along a 4 Klm. Section of the track. The fire destroyed several out buildings and an unquantified loss of stock etc.

**South West Brisbane Ranges: National Park fires:-**

Prior to 7<sup>th</sup>. Feb, fires were burning in the Brisbane Ranges, located between Bacchus Marsh and Staugton Vale, North West of Geelong, 3 houses were destroyed in the Anakie area and approx 7,000 hectares of bush and farmlands around the ranges were destroyed. CFA & DSE crews, pumpers and units contained the fires, which at times burnt North along the ranges in very difficult terrain.

**Western Victoria: The Grampians Fires:-**

The fires burnt around Mt. Lubra, burning out approx 87,000 Hectares, from it's source it had advanced about 25 Klms. South of Hall's Gap eventually surrounding the township. The fire had a perimeter of 140 Klms.

**South – West Victoria,**

Fires South West of Hamilton burnt out approx 1,249 Hectares, 4 farm buildings, 1 Tractor, Stock and about 40 Klms. of fencing destroyed. The fire front went South East of Heywood destroying farmlands, and fencing and killed sheep and cattle yarded in the Tyrendarra Showgrounds.

**North – West Victoria, Dargo – White Timber Spur, cause of ignition Lightning Strike:-**

Fires were still burning out of control on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup>. Feb. in the State forest 15 Klms. North-North West of Dargo. It had so far burnt out 14,000 Hectares, D.S.E. crews were continuing to construct and consolidate control lines.

I have just about covered the major fires but have in mind that there were hundreds of smaller flare-ups burning at the same time around Victoria over the duration of these fires. Had the hot high windy conditions lasted any longer than they did and the cooler rainy weather failed to arrive all these nasty little fires could have joined up and the whole of Victoria would have been under one large conflagration.

**Ignition Sources:-**

Four of the major fires on Black Saturday were apparently started by single non return earth power lines. They are less expensive to install than conventional lines to get power to isolated areas. These single wires once blown down by strong winds start sparking, igniting any flammable material in the vicinity. The huge Kilmore East – Murrindindi fires, complexes and divisions started this way as did the Beechworth and Mudgegonga fires and also another in South East Victoria.

**Fuel Reduction Burn offs:-**

Carried out in the National Parks and State Forests. Spare a thought for the crews concerned in carrying out this work, it is not as easy as one would think, consideration is always given to the weather bureau's predictions at the time. If the burns are done in the late summer when the weather is starting to cool and very little wind is blowing, its ideal but "Murphy's Law" states that "What will go wrong will go wrong". If the weather changes to be above average temperatures and the winds get up and the burn gets out of control, they can destroy properties. The crews are then criticized by one and all. Alternatively if fuel reduction burns are attempted in early autumn with seasonal rains starting at this time of the year the forest floor becomes damp and the burn off's are only 40% to 50% effective, they are now criticized again – very hard for them to win.

I must mention the Victorian State Emergency Services, Kinglake Division and their personnel's dedication to their service. As the fires burned through Kinglake at

approximately 1800 hrs on 7<sup>th</sup> Feb. it burnt down the Headquarters Station including all their vehicles and equipment. Nine of their members lost their homes, personal effects and vehicles, in some cases also their much loved pets, close friends and neighbours. For the next 2 months or so these members assisted in carrying out fuel and medication runs and helped keep roadways and drives clear of felled trees, assisted with First Aid to the injured, organised water deliveries to many properties, looked after animals and brought in food etc. Made deliveries of tents, sleeping bags and washing facilities for the homeless. Set up and ran a drop off and pick up station and got through much needed supplies. Its important to note that unit members carried out all of this work without their Headquarters and no Emergency Service Vehicles, they used their own. Their efforts over this period was much appreciated by the Kinglake survivors and they officially should be commended for their service to people in need. No emergency organisation could do more than these dedicated people.

Dr. Kevin Tolhurst who is a Senior Lecturer in Fire Ecology and Management at the Melbourne University (he also gave evidence at the Royal Commission into the fires of black Saturday) is a bushfire expert and had in many areas of these fires calculated that there were up to 50 – 60 Tonnes of fuel per hectare on the forest floor, leaves, bark, twigs limbs, logs and lots of rotted vegetation. Compost enriched soils in many areas (valleys), the heat of the fires burnt it down 400mm or more, he estimated that the amount of energy released during the fires on black Saturday around Kinglake and Marysville were equivalent to the amount of energy released by 1,500 Hiroshima sized Atomic Bombs. **This is an enormous amount of energy, absolutely mind blowing!!!!**

Humanitarian responses to the fires came quickly from Government, businesses, aid agencies and individuals including direct relief efforts as well as fund raising. Funds came in from overseas as well. In all, the bush fire appeal raised more than 372million dollars. Muriel and I are almost sick of people asking us if we have received any of this money, the answer is "No, because we saved our property". We suffered very little loss so were not entitled to any of this money, like hundreds of other people. We did not expect any either because there were so many that lost everything they had, houses, family members, friends and pets, etc.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank some of my former colleagues and friends who phoned enquiring how we were and did we need any help and others who took the time to travel up to Kinglake to see us.

**Statistics covering the Fires before and after 7<sup>th</sup>. Feb. 2009 Black Saturday.**

Sadly, 173 people died, 100 male, 73 female, 23 victims were children under 17 years.

Where they died:- 113 in homes – 27 near homes - 11 in cars - 22 other.

More than 450,000 Hectares burnt out, over 3,500 structures destroyed including 2,029 houses, 59 commercial properties (shops, hotels, service station, golf clubs) 12 community buildings including 2 Police Stations, 2 State Emergency Service Headquarters, 3 Primary Schools, 3 Creche's, 3 Churches, 1 Fire Station, 399 Machinery Sheds, 729 other farm buildings, 363 Hay Sheds, 19 dairies, 26 wool sheds and over 55 businesses destroyed.

Over 25,600 tonnes of fodder and 28,200 tonnes of stored grains, 190 hectares of standing crops, 168,00 hectares of

pasture, 735 hectares of fruit trees and vines, 7,000 hectares of plantation timber, 3,921 hectares of private bushland, over 12,000 Kms., of boundary and internal fencing destroyed or damaged, approx 211,000 tonnes of hay destroyed, over 11,000 live stock killed or injured, i.e. cattle, horses, goats, alpacas, pigs and poultry, millions of wild animals killed and many suffered from burns.

The electric supply was disrupted to 60,000 consumers, 7,000 people were displaced during the fires. 5,200 people sought first aid treatment, 800 people treated in hospital emergency wards, 180 people were admitted to Public Hospitals.

Food Aid to Relief Centres – 500,000 Kilos, Hundreds of Tonnes of bedding, clothes, footwear and other commodities i.e. toiletries, writing paper and pens, torches and batteries, you name the article it was there.

Petrol/Diesel, 18litres a day free of charge for people using water pumps, generators for refrigeration and lighting, if you didn't have a container they were also supplied. If you wanted a specific item and it was not available it would be brought in a day or so later.

The disaster relief post fires was so well organised it is a credit to all and sundry as I've previously mentioned, all people that were affected by the fires owe so much to many wonderful people and organisations.

#### **Sources of Information,**

Federal/Victorian and Local Government statistics, Herald/Sun, Age and local newspapers, speaking with and interviewing C.F.A. and D.S.E. Firefighters, Park Rangers, and private citizens from many of the fire affected areas, particularly in Murrindindi and neighbouring shires.

#### **Acknowledgements**

Sf/m George Tinkler, Sf/m Kevin Hede and his wife Trish, Ret. District Officer Norm Thomas, Ret. Ass. Chief Officer Jim Hunter and his son Commander Greg Hunter and his wife. Jim's other son Terry is also an Assistant Chief Officer. Father and one son ACFO's and the other son a Commander. Surely this must be a brigade record? Station Officer Ian Grindlay and his wife Francis, Ret. Commander George Benham, (George, thanks for the gifts). Sen. Station Officer Geoff Wickham (Geoff, thanks for your time and photography skills in promoting our business)., Senior Station Officer Mike Convery and his mate Station Officer Peter Egan (Peter's father Noel was my boss at No.3 Stn. Carlton many years ago).

Ret. Stn. Officer Hughie Campbell and his wife Francis, (Hughie only a few days out of hospital, sick as he was drove all the way from Geelong to Kinglake with an electric Generator and leads, food stuffs for us and more importantly bedding, Queen size and single blow up Li-los, Manchester and foods for the refuge/relief centre.) Friends like Hughie and Francis are very rare these days. Leading Firefighter Paul Tyrell, Thomastown Fire Station,

Claudia Gray wife of the late Jim Gray and her daughter Lyn. Claudia and Lyn visit us regularly and were very concerned for our welfare after the fires. They are lovely ladies and don't they know many tales and old fire fighter's families. They really should put their memories and times living in quarters on paper for posterity. Commander Ian Hunter. Fire Investigation and Analysis Unit called in about a week after the fire, Ret. Station Officer John Laverick and his wife Pauline.

Last but not least Muriel & I would like to thank Les & Sharon Gates, Les is cattle manager of "Habbies Howe" a 5,000 plus acres cattle raising property at Highlands between Yea and Seymour. Les was first introduced to us by Ret. Senior Fireman Richard (Dick) Bright when he operated the Yea Caravan Park. They are both very generous people, we are very fortunate indeed to have them as friends. Les is a serving C.F.A. Volunteer firefighter with over 30 years service. On Saturday 7<sup>th</sup>. Feb. he with his mates crewed the Highlands C.F.A. Tanker/pumper and they worked around the Strath Creek area and later around Flowerdale in the King Parrot Valley, It was a hard days night for them. Les receives copies of my articles and I'll take this opportunity to thank them both for what they have done for us over the last 16 years.

**L. Gray,**  
Retired Firefighter,  
Kinglake

#### **Ed's note:**

*It took many hours of research to give us this series on those disastrous fires and we thank Les and Muriel for presenting them to us.*

*After their own traumatic experience in saving their Kinglake home and business we again thank them for taking the time to give us an insight to the events on that day.*



On page 7 this issue, we showed devastating photos of the main street of Marysville just after "Black Saturday". One of the photos was of the remains of the front fence of the "Lolly Shop", a once popular tourist attraction!

I visited Marysville on 25th January this year and the fence is still there, still showing the scars of that terrible day. But, look what's happening now!

**Photo at Left:** They're back in business, working out of a container and doing quite well, as is other businesses. Some have rebuilt, others operating from temporary accommodation.

There are green tinges appearing around the town and there is a feeling of hope for the future amongst the residents.

If you have time, go visit, and support these people in their efforts to rebuild a life.

**Photo: Mark Taylor**



## BRIGADES “HIGHEST AWARD” FOR TRIO!

Had a visit from Leading Firefighter Russell Johnson recently, it was a pleasant surprise as I hadn't seen him for about 23 years. Russell had been to watch a charity football match between Marysville and Buxton for fire survivors and on his way home to Williamstown called in to see me.

We spoke of old times and during our conversation I asked him how Richard (Dick) Zapart was recovering from injuries suffered in an explosion at a factory fire in October 2007.

Russell went on to tell of their response to an exchange telephone call for a chemical fire No.15 Hall Street, Yarraville. He reiterated that, on arrival, workers told them that there was a fire in the lacquer room in a spray booth, where finished wooden products were waiting to be sprayed. (I believe the chemical involved was a Cellulose based mix which can have various highly flammable solvents combined with it.

Russell and L/F Brian O'Connell entered the factory to locate the fire and were shortly joined by L/F Dick Zapart and L/F Mark Fincher. The four firefighters advanced deeper into the factory and finally noticed a misty cloud coming from the lacquer room. They were unable to locate any fire and continued searching other areas without success. They then returned to the lacquer room where the visibility had deteriorated so much that they could not see one another.

*(Was this smoke haze from smouldering wooden furniture, possibly in combination with heat affected drums leaking decomposing solvent and pre mixed Cellulose Lacquer which then spontaneously ignited?)*

Russell could see a glow in the mist then a small flickering flame. He then saw a flash of light travelling across the ceiling, immediately they all felt intense heat. They immediately evacuated the room and then noticed that Dick was missing, he was trapped in the room after the door had somehow closed.

It was decided Brian would go outside and report Dick missing to the Officer in Charge, meanwhile Mark tried to kick the door open. Russell joined him and both men forced



**Above:** *The heroic trio wearing their valour medals. From left, Russell Johnson, Mark Fincher and Brian O'Connell.*

Photo; Sharon Walker

it open. By this time Brian had returned through the burning factory and Russell, now using a high pressure hose from a reel, directed a fog stream into the room. The three advanced into the room, searched and found Dick who, by this time, was overcome by his injuries and had collapsed to the floor.

Suffering burns to 45% of his body, uniform burnt, helmet melted and with his breathing apparatus face mask damaged, made it very hard for him to breathe. They dragged him out into the main factory area and then outside to waiting firefighters who provided life support First Aid until the arrival of the Ambulance Service who immediately took over. A short time later he was removed to the Alfred Hospital Burns Unit. The 3 rescuers uniforms were scorched by the severe heat and flames.

**There is no doubt that their actions saved Dicks life.**

Leading Firefighters Russell Johnson, Brian O'Connell and Mark Fincher for their courage and bravery received the Melbourne Fire Brigades highest honour -

**“The Valour Medal”.**

**On behalf of all retirees “Well done Hero’s”  
Les Gray**

## Smile

A man went to the Police Station wishing to speak with the burglar who had broken into his house the night before. "You'll get your chance in court." said the Desk Sergeant. "No, no no!" said the man. "I want to know how he got into the house without waking my wife. I've been trying to do that for years!"

## Ernie meets Her Majesty the Queen

Then, his Excellency Governor David De Kretser

There is no doubt members of the Retired Firefighters Association (Victorian branch) are a very special group when you consider the diversification of many of their roles in society.

One such member is Ernie Paddon. In 2009 he not only met Her Majesty he was also awarded the Commissionaire of the year award. The following will explain about his picture with the Queen.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2009 when he was given the privilege to represent the "Corps of Commissionaires" at their 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in London UK, the latter part of the report will explain his award. The Corps put on a forty six man guard-of-honour for Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Phillip in the throne room at St James Palace.

The guard was drawn from Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, Papua New Guinea and five Gurkhas. The Queen inspected the guard and addressed each member as she passed; Prince Phillip spent a lot more time talking to them, the Queen on noticing this returned to the guard (Ernie said he had not seen that of the Queen before)

When the Royal couple had left the room, the guard were rushed round to a large staircase, where they had the photo taken with their Majesties. They then went into a reception hosted by the Queen, where drinks and finger food was served. Ernie said it was a once in a lifetime event for him.

Then, lo and behold, to add to this great privilege he was told to report to Government House Melbourne, at 10am Tuesday the 24<sup>th</sup> November 2009, where he found to his surprise he was being awarded the **Commissionaire of the year award** by his Excellency the Governor David De Kretser. When finished at Government House about sixty of them attended a service at the Shrine. The area around the grave of the unknown warrior was closed off so that they could hold a short service, their Padre read the service and Ernie was asked to read Laurence Binyon's "Ode to the Fallen", which he was very honoured to do.

On behalf of the members and committee of the RFA, congratulations Ernie, on gaining such fine achievements.



*Above; Corp of Commissionaires celebrate their 150th Anniversary with the Queen and Prince Phillip at St James Palce.*

*(Ernie is eight rows back 3<sup>rd</sup> from the right).*

**(Mate if you get the chance to attend one of the meetings we will award you the honour of the tea towel of course after you have dried the dishes).**

**John Berry.**

## A LETTER FROM SILVER.

Right you clowns, stop cheering, I'm still here, you don't think a broken leg and ankle would get rid of me, do you???? I was sober too, the wife tripped me.

An allergy to "Oxy-contin" .a heavily based Morphine pain killing narcotic did not help, causing me to black out a few times until ! woke up to it. I refused to take anymore and here I am.

My reason for writing is to thank all M.F.B. members both retired and serving for their visits, cards and phone calls. Pat said she did not think I owed so much money too so many people. Really guys the Fire Brigade family is well and truly alive. I appreciate it very much.

Thank you.

I even had a visit from the Brigade Chaplain David Thompson, he is quite a guy.

This is real mateship.

Good mate, John Danby, asked after I blacked out the first time, "did I think I was dying".

I said yes, lost breath, everything spinning around. John said he believed your past and future flash before your eyes just before you go, I said no.

He said if it happens again see if you can get the Tattsлото numbers will you.

It is great to have friends. More travel in 2010,

**SILVER.**

## PERSISTANCE BEATS THE SYSTEM

Many years ago after divorcing my former wife, I contacted Southern Rural Water & asked them to remove my former's name from the account ... yes, they would, BUT at a cost of \$37.50. When I asked what the charge was for, they said it was cost recovery. I never could understand what costs they were recovering. So I let the matter drop & the annual account used to come along with both names on the account.....

Recently SRW sent a letter out trying to explain recent changes to their charges. I have an annual fee... or as I call it a tax... of \$90.60. This tax, or as they call it a licence, is to divert water to drive the Turbine, this is an annual charge & they were changing the system.

As I didn't understand their jargon, I called & asked them to explain it in simple English. Even on the telephone, they still couldn't use understandable language but being the gentleman that I am, I went along with their obscure monologue.

At the conclusion of this chatter, I had hoped that they had changed their attitude to the charge for removing a name from the account. When I enquired, again they happily said yes. They'd be only too happy to remove my formers name ... BUT ... there was a cost.

Now you need to be sitting down for the next bit ... the charge to remove a name had now grown to the outrageously monstrous charge of \$385 ... unbelievable I know.

The employee, whom I was speaking to, also had the audacity to make fun of me for being stupid & not changing it when it was the low cost of \$37.50. He thought it was quite humorous.

In calling one of the local polities, he referred the matter on to the office of the State Minister for Water ... Tim Holding the Wise. In essence, Tim's letter said that they could knock some of the cost off & reduce the charge down to a bargain basement charge of \$80!

In still feeling outraged at the charge I called the Office of the Water Ombudsman. They gathered the story & said they'd contact the Southern Rural Water Authority; the upshot of this was that a bloke from SRW called me to talk the matter over later that day. I couldn't help but joyfully imagine that this was a top-flight executive officer of SRW, forced to deal with a lowly consumer because of the Ombudsman inquiry.

Who ever he was, he wouldn't budge from the bargain basement charge. After all ... they don't receive any Government handouts & the charge reflected cost recovery. When I ask what the cost recovery was, he said, "there were two computer program changes to be made".

I then made the comment that I must be missing something, as I failed to grasp what the costs were in removing a name, even to do it twice on a computer. He then reiterated his spiel & I gathered that we were simply going to go around in circles, so I hung up & let the ombudsman's office know the outcome of the call & that the matter was still unresolved.

The Ombudsman then appointed an investigator to the matter, as is their procedure.

The next day, Chrissy eve, the Ombudsman's office called to say that SRW had agreed to drop the charges & make the change to the account.

Is the moral to this true but unbelievable story ... never let the bastards get you down ... or perhaps ... never trust the Min for Water, Tim the Wise, ... perhaps there is a Santa and he lives in the Ombudsman's office... or if you wrestle with the lions you can some times win.

Which ever ... this is a happy end to a year of rigorous activity ... not the least of which was the sad & utterly tragic ... but expected failure at Copenhagen.

**Wishing you all a year of wins with the lions!!!  
Leon & Cathy**

### Historical Fact and Ghost

Viv Hyland forwarded some interesting historical information regarding early German fire appliances and possible ghostly visits to an old MFB station. Viv raises the question, did German Scientists back in the early eighteenth century have advance knowledge regarding world oil shortage!

Why, well on the 14th September 1908 they had developed the first electrically powered platoon of fire fighting vehicles, which went into operation with the **Berlin Fire Brigade**. The platoon comprised of four vehicles with Mercedes electric chassis produced by the Austrian Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft. The vehicles were powered by a heavy-duty battery above the front axle supplying power to the hub motors on the front wheels. Unfortunately I have no knowledge if they were successful or not as Viv did not mention this fact.

Viv's other interesting item revolves around the old No. 37 St Kilda station. Now I must confess up front I do not believe in ghosts but Viv and other members of the old station believe it had one! He states that while on watchroom duty on night-shift often you would hear someone or something come down the stairs next to the watchroom only to find that there was no one there. This sometimes occurred when everyone on duty was in the watchroom; most would say "oh it is just Harry". Viv even resorted to "come in & sit down Harry" He or whatever didn't, Viv is not sure whatever and/or whoever it was, didn't because they may not have had the right name. **Believe it or not.**



## “Guess Who”



This photo is one from the late “Leo Brown Collection”. It is one of the old “B” District (Northern Zone) football teams circa 1960’s.

We are looking for the names of all in the shot. First correct answer by email or letter to the Secretary will win an old used rail pass, (now that “Myki Card” is here) in forty years time this may be worth something!

RFA members who may have played in any of the games will remember that.... “It did not matter how hard the game was, the post match MFB team building was what it was all about”.

**(No bottles in those days, just a barrel.)**



**Left: Noel Barnes** standing beside a painting of a firefighter surveying the blackened remains of a fire-ravaged Mallee, by local Mildura artist Sue Short.

As the Mildura Weekly stated it is one of the most poignant paintings to come out of the region. I believe the raffle has finished and I am not sure of the results. Noel, from the members and committee of the RFA, will you pass on to all the career and volunteer firefighters of the region our very best wishes for the New Year and we hope that this year will not be as testing as the last.

**John Berry**

### MEMBERS INTERESTED IN RECEIVING THEIR "WATER OFF" VIA EMAIL.

To those members with easy access to email and would like to have their copy sent by this system, please send your email address to our editor John Laverick. "Water Off" will be sent out in a PDF format.

John's address - - [retfire@bigpond.net.au](mailto:retfire@bigpond.net.au)

Before you send your email, click on 'tools' at top and click on 'request receipt'. This will reply to you and verify both email addresses are working correctly.

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# Firefighter's Picnic

**Sunday 14th March 2010**

**11am. till 4 pm.**

**Venue; Moonee Valley Racecourse  
(Enter from McPherson St.)**

**Retirees - Bring the Grandkids**

**Note:** For catering purposes, please ring the union office on 9419 8811 and let them know how many you are bringing along.

**BBQ sausages, hamburgers and drinks  
for the kids supplied.  
BYO salads, plates etc.  
Rides, games and prizes.  
Lots of fun for all!**

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