

**PART FIVE  
AFTERMATH  
AND RECOVERY**



**BLACK  
TUESDAY**

**50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

**MERCURY**

## Black Tuesday 1967

**FEBRUARY 7, 1967, was a day of drama, heroism and tragedy that quickly came to be known as Black Tuesday.**

**The most deadly bushfires Tasmania has ever experienced blackened a swath of the island state, leaving 64 people dead, 900 injured and more than 7000 people homeless.**

**Some 110 separate fire fronts burnt through 260,000 hectares of southern Tasmania within the space of five hours.**

**Nearly 1300 homes and more than 1700 other buildings were destroyed, and the damage bill amounted to \$40 million - nearly half a billion dollars today.**

**One of Australia's worst natural disasters, Black Tuesday became the yardstick for every other Tasmanian bushfire, as well as the standard by which threatening bushfire seasons are judged.**

**To mark the 50th anniversary, the Mercury presents this five-part magazine series, with archival images, retrospective articles and interviews with people who lived through the disaster.**

**Special thanks to Roger McNeice, the Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Tasmania Fire Service, Geoff Harrison, Rex Maddock, Jim Marwood, the late Marjory and Colin Woolford, and the family of the late Don Stephens for their assistance.**

**Thanks also to all at the Mercury for their assistance with this series over many months. Cover design was by Mark Stansall and the internal layout and design by Lisa Chant and Mike Roberts.**

**Any readers able to add names or other details to unidentified images in these booklets can email [nie@themercury.com.au](mailto:nie@themercury.com.au), phone 6230 0736 or write to Level 1, 2 Salamanca Square, Hobart 7000.**

*Damian Bester*  
**SERIES EDITOR**

### LET'S HEAR FROM YOU

Over five days we will be presenting a selection of photos from the Mercury Historical Archive Collection, as well as contributed photos illustrating the Black Tuesday bushfire disaster.

During this time we invite you to send in your own photos from the day, for possible inclusion in the *Sunday Tasmanian* at the end of this series.

Please send your high-resolution scans to [nie@themercury.com.au](mailto:nie@themercury.com.au) or visit the Mercury office in Hobart to have your photos scanned while you wait. Please include your contact details and a description of the contents of each photo.

# The recovery begins

## Roger McNeice

**S**OON after the fires, government and volunteer organisations swung into action in what can be called the recovery period.

Snug Park was set up by the Kingborough Commission (the council) to temporarily house those who lost their homes in the Channel areas. This was a magnificent achievement by Commission manager Max Doyle and his staff, including engineer Peter Spratt. Many of the homeless also found temporary accommodation at the army barracks at Brighton.

In his book *Bushfire Disaster - An Australian Community in Crisis*, Professor R. L. Wettenhall wrote that police supervised the clean-up campaign in the devastated areas, with attention being paid to eliminating two obvious sources of danger.

"Thousands of brick chimneys standing like forlorn sentinels in a wasted battlefield, themselves seriously weakened and likely to fall in a gust of wind or as the result of children's pranks, had to be knocked down," Prof Wettenhall wrote.

"Also, countless loose, twisted and blackened sheets of galvanised iron, a commonly-used roofing material, were lying about, each of them liable to be lifted and to cut and damage in any fresh wind, and they had to be removed.

"Many owners of destroyed homes acted on their own initiative, beginning almost immediately to clear away the rubble. Volunteers assisted in this activity also. By the weekend after the firestorm, the streets were alive with bulldozers and trucks involved with these operations, as well as with the vehicles and equipment of teams of men engaged in restoring power and telephone facilities."

Churches held memorial services, the newspapers focused on recovery, and the government concentrated on rehousing the families affected by the fire, announcing new housing programs.

The Governor's Fire Relief Fund produced excellent results, with funds also flowing from the Federal Government. Primary producers got special loans and various voluntary groups chipped in.

Churches including the Salvation Army distributed huge amounts of donated goods to fire victims. Service clubs such as Apex and Lions took an active part in fundraising and victim support.

The extent of the outstanding conduct of Peter Spratt, Max Doyle and David Grace in Kingborough has never been fully recognised.

These three men helped save Kingborough from

further destruction and formed a bond lasting 50 years.

After the fire, Spratt and Doyle started to plan the recovery. One problem was the roads had to be cleared to allow access for emergency relief.

Due to the blockages, it was taking Commission staff five hours to travel to Gordon at the southern extremity of the municipality. With chainsaws donated by Webster's in Hobart, workers were soon clearing the roads of fallen trees and power poles.

Other actions included extinguishing other fires, bulldozing tracks around burnt bridges and repairing broken water connections.

Mr Doyle set about seeking resources to provide temporary housing to those in need and, to everyone's amazement, sourced 300 caravans from all around Tasmania and interstate. Within a few days a complete village was set up, along with a large prefabricated army building to use as a social centre.

Toilet and laundry facilities were quickly installed by army teams and employees of the fire-ravaged carbide works nearby.

Soon homeless residents were occupying the facilities. The speed at which it was established was amazing.

Huts from the Hydro-Electric Commission construction camps in the Central Highlands were also located at the new village. Alan Grimsey was appointed manager.

Not everyone in the post-disaster bureaucracy agreed with establishment of the park, as Brighton Army Camp was viewed as the obvious centre to house those in need.

However, facilities at Snug were intended for longer-term occupation than the army camp.

Communications were a problem as the Kingborough Commission had the area's only major means of communication. Within two days, Mr Doyle had arranged for radios in all commission vehicles.

Max Doyle and Peter Spratt worked tirelessly with builders and community organisations to help restore some kind of normality in the municipality.

Petrol tankers of water were organised to be taken to the farmers. At Woodbridge, a large part of the local oval was dug out and lined with plastic to serve as a temporary reservoir. The plastic lining was so heavy it took 40 people to lift it into position.

There is no doubt the community benefited from the skills of these three people and staff members. Max Doyle summed it up in an interview: "I was so proud of my staff and of the way the community worked together during and after the disaster."

The State Government had also acted quickly, establishing a co-ordinating body for recovery.

For 21-year-old public servant Warren Reed, the first



**Citizens Military Force Private (Army Reservist) Lorraine Whittaker, of Moonah, reading to children evacuated to the Brighton Army Camp, from left, Margaret Miller, 10, of South Hobart, Ursula Kasch, 8, of Fern Tree, and Raelee Fewkes, 4, from Lenah Valley.**



The Wilkinsons from Strickland Ave were one of the last families to leave the emergency accommodation at Brighton Army Camp in late April 1967, moving to a temporary home at Warrane while waiting for their own to be rebuilt. With Mrs M.J. Wilkinson were her children Naomi, 8, Sharon, 10, and Norman, 6.

“There was one thing they (Tasmanians) consistently dispensed with ease and dexterity, and that was compassion

days and weeks were spent accompanying teams scouring burnt-out areas for unreported casualties and to assess the full extent of the devastation.

“We met many people in the Channel area who had lost their homes, businesses and farms, but who had luckily survived,” Mr Reed says.

“It was from them that we heard about houses and other buildings literally exploding in front of them.

“After these early weeks visiting devastated areas, I worked with Central Control at its interviewing centre in (Hobart) Town Hall, assessing people who had lost property and livelihoods for government assistance.

“The months with Central Control were an unforgettable experience, and a steep learning curve.

“My fellow Tasmanians in that body were of all ages and backgrounds, sizes and shapes, but there was one thing they consistently dispensed with ease and dexterity, and that was compassion – sincere, practical and free of bureaucratic nonsense.”

After two days of carting stock feed from his farm at Ouse to aid burnt-out relatives at Woodbridge, Reg Chopping was asked by the Commissioner of Police to co-ordinate fodder relief for the whole of the burnt-out farming area in Southern Tasmania.

“Reg was more than happy to volunteer,” recalls son



A crate of underwear from Bonds was one of the many donations received soon after the bushfire emergency.

Lindley. “Donations of hay were being trucked into the burnt-out areas, but some order was needed for the fair distribution to the hundreds of desperate farmers to feed their starving stock.

“At this time the burnt-out area actually supplied more than 50 per cent of Hobart’s milk supply. Reg co-ordinated, with the help of others, the distribution of the available fodder fairly and evenly through various regional depots.

“This worked well while donations of hay were forthcoming. More than 200,000 bales of hay had been donated free to fire victims by farmers who were not burnt out, but the supply of hay from the North, North-East and North-West had begun to dwindle to a trickle around the 4th of April.”

A public meeting at Margate on March 16 elected a voluntary committee of Reg Chopping, Les Gabriel,



Thousands of bales of hay were transported by rail and road from all parts of the state. Inmates from Risdon Prison helped to load and unload the fodder at Kings Pier.

Michael Hodgman MLC, Vern Rae, Tom Wilson and Bill Bylett to further assist with collection and distribution of hay in Kingborough.

To encourage further contributions, it was decided to reimburse farmers for the cost of baling and carting hay to storage.

On many Saturdays a transfer station was set up on the Queens Domain for the people of Hobart and surrounding areas to bring in their lawn clippings for collection by stock owners to take out to their animals. Even waste and second-grade apples were used.

“Because the autumn rains did not come as usual, the fodder relief had to be continued for all of the autumn and all of the winter, until some spring growth started,” Lindley Chopping recalled.

**Read more about the recovery in *Flames of Fear*, by Roger McNeice, published by Wellington Bridge Press**



The Parramatta Tank Works donated six 3700-litre water tanks and sent a team of technical officers to aid in reconstruction work.

# The cavalry arrives

Relief supplies of every imaginable kind started rolling in to Hobart within days of the disaster - by land, sea and air. Much of the heavy lifting was done by the Army, Royal Australian Air Force and the Sydney-Hobart vehicular ferry *Empress of Australia*. Prime Minister Harold Holt arrived within two days to inspect the damage and lend support, followed by Governor-General Lord Casey, newly-elected Federal Opposition Leader Gough Whitlam, and the Duke of Edinburgh.



Prime Minister Harold Holt and Tasmanian Premier Eric Reece among the ruins of the Fern Tree Hotel. Picture: Geoff Harrison



Air Force Hercules freighters ferried tonnes of equipment into Hobart, including emergency electricity generators, mattresses, pillows and firefighting gear.



Caravans were shipped to Hobart for emergency accommodation for the homeless. Many were still in use a year later.



A truck and trailer sent by the Sydney City Council arrived on the *Empress of Australia* less than a week after the fires.



Federal Opposition Leader Gough Whitlam, second from right, flew in to Hobart to inspect the damage and lend support.



Tasmanian-trained nurses Dorothy Cato, Marita Pigden and Victoria Lyons took leave from St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne, to volunteer in Hobart at their own expense.



Red Cross worker Phyl Damon was instructed to remain in Tasmania to take charge of relief work after flying in to check on the safety of her own family.

# Cheques roll in

Collinsvale Progress Association secretary Rod Barnard received \$76 from Andrew Malcolm, 10, on behalf of his fellow students at Rosetta Primary School.

Money started pouring in to the Governor's Fire Relief Fund as soon as it opened the day following Black Tuesday. More than \$100,000 was received in the first hour, and the tally had reached \$1 million within 10 days. By the end of the month it was nearly \$3 million - that's about \$36 million today. Donations were acknowledged in the *Mercury*, along with many cheque presentation photos, in the weeks that followed.

Mr F.C. Rice accepted \$250 from Mr and Mrs S.L. Rothschild, of New York, on behalf of a group of American tourists.



Elizabethan Trust Opera Company *Tosca* performers Reginald Byers, Alex Major and Maureen Howard presented a night's takings at the Theatre Royal to Lord Mayor Basil Osborne.



Mrs L.J. Ikin, left, Mrs P. Walker and Mrs T. Walker at a Sandy Bay fundraiser for the Governor's Fire Relief Fund.





Country Women's Association state secretary Miss E. Perkins, left, and president Mrs J.S. Putnam received the South Australian branches' second donation from Lady Bastyan, wife of the Governor of South Australia.



More than \$1500 in cash was presented by Mr J. Fawcett, left, to Hobart Lord Mayor Basil Osborne during the Retravision conference at Wrest Point.



More than \$6000 was received from the City of Nunawading, Victoria, presented by its mayor, Cr G. Walsh, with students Trudy Prins, 11, left, David Scott, 10, from Nunawading, Christine Curtin, 11, Rina Paas, 10, Susan Ranger, 10, and Glenorchy junior councillor Frank Cadone, at Springfield Gardens Primary School.



**NOW AND THEN**

**SNUG PRIMARY SCHOOL**





Digital composite image of Snug Primary School. Created by Matt Thompson from an original 1967 image from the Mercury Historical Archive Collection.

# Prince Philip visits

Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, had a four-hour inspection of bushfire-ravaged southern Tasmania just before the one-month anniversary of Black Tuesday. Described as a "protocol-wrecking tour", the 10-car convoy made its way from Hobart to the Channel, with frequent stops for the Duke to meet the people - and to have a beer at the Longley Hotel. The Queen's husband said the area of devastation was wider than he had expected.



The Duke received a bowl of pears from Margate farmer Ray Stanton.



Prince Philip arrived at Hobart Airport aboard an RAAF Vickers Viscount.



Prince Philip talks with Mrs June Dean and Major A. McCarthy while walking through the temporary village at Snug Park.



Prince Philip was mobbed every time he stepped out of his car during his four-hour tour of fire-affected areas of southern Tasmania, especially at Snug.

Chatting with Mr and Mrs Maurice Lynch on the outskirts of Snug.



The Prince having a chat with people at the Kingston shopping centre.



The day before the first anniversary of Black Tuesday, firefighters were tackling a scrub fire at Glenorchy.



Street brothers John, Leonard and Stanley building their new shop and residence at Fern Tree in early 1968.



Snug poultry farmer Charles Pitt keeping an eye on his new incubator a year after losing everything.



The happy task of stocking the kitchen cupboards in a brand new home 12 months after the fires.

# One year on

**Twelve months after a wide area of southern Tasmania was devastated by the most costly and tragic bushfires the state had ever experienced, Tasmania was a much more fire-conscious place. Councils statewide had conducted extensive clean-up programs to reduce the risk of fire and a major reorganisation of the island's fire-fighting resources was under way.**



Leon Gorrige moved into his new home just shy of one year after losing everything at his Sandfly orchard.



Mrs Nellie Keating and her family were able to move into a new house at Snug in June 1967.



The temporary Fern Tree Store and Post Office where the shopkeeping Street family lived in caravans for a year while keeping their business open.



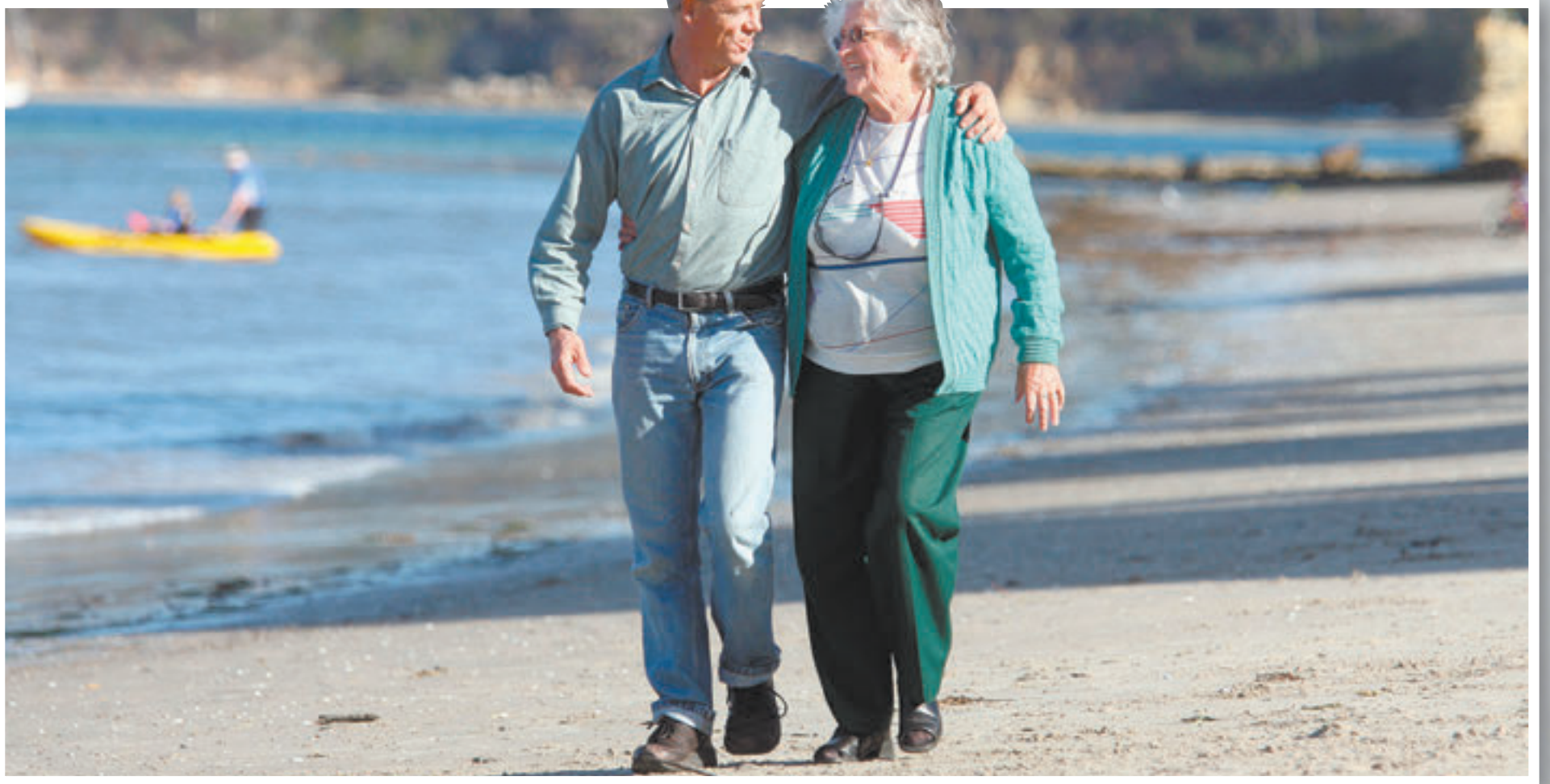
A row of newly-built houses at Snug, which was the worst-hit town on Black Tuesday.



The replacement Fern Tree Fire Station on Summerleas Rd was taking shape in the early weeks of 1968.



The hundreds of tonnes of rubble from the fires dumped in a quarry near Kettering included water tanks, roofing iron, car bodies, refrigerators and more.



Josie Watson with son Andrew Watson walking along Snug Beach in 2007. It had been their family's place of refuge during the bushfire emergency 40 years earlier.



Mr and Mrs Sayer lost everything in the fires. They were photographed for the *Mercury's* 10th anniversary coverage in 1977.

# Anniversaries

**Seared into the collective consciousness of our state, few anniversaries of Black Tuesday pass by unnoticed. The major milestones have provided opportunities for survivors to share their stories and thank those who helped in their hour of need.**

Opening day at the new memorial to the 1967 bushfire victims in February 2007. Two more names will be added to the monument at Snug this year.





Ian, Mark and Pauline Honeyman lost their house at Fern Tree, just four months after moving in. A photo of Pauline and baby Mark made its way around the world.



Michael Gard's parents appeared on the front page of the *Mercury* with their Sorell home burning behind them. He was pictured outside the replacement house 21 years later.



Phyllis Norton at the original bushfire memorial at the foreshore reserve, Snug, in 2006.



Twenty years on, Beryl and Rex Moody looked through a box of photos saved before their Sandfly house was destroyed.



**EMERGENCY  
VOLUNTEERING**

## Help when it's needed most – register today with Volunteering Tasmania to help in future disaster recovery efforts.

During disasters, only trained emergency service workers will be able to enter the disaster zone to help people.

However, recovery efforts will begin when it's safe. At that time community organisations may need additional volunteers to support affected communities to recover.

**EV CREW** is a system that safely and effectively helps communities during the recovery phase. It is a key way for people to volunteer for emergency recovery tasks in Tasmania. It matches volunteers with co-ordinating organisations that need extra hands.

**Register or update your details today at [bit.ly/EVCREW\\_Register](http://bit.ly/EVCREW_Register)**

For those without internet access, please call Volunteering Tasmania on 6231 5550 or freecall 1800 677 895.

### Want to help?

Register your details today, Volunteering Tasmania will contact you if there is a way your specific skills, location and availability can be matched to a request from organisations working in disaster recovery.

It may be several days or even weeks after the disaster occurs when your help is most needed by the affected community.

Please be patient and know that by standing by to help, you are doing a great thing for your fellow Tasmanians. You can update your availability any time.

### Have you already registered for EV CREW?

Please log in to update your availability and contact details in case you may be needed in future disaster recovery efforts.



EV CREW in Tasmania is managed by the state's Peak body: Volunteering Tasmania. Volunteering Tasmania is supported by the State Government.

Find out more about Volunteering Tasmania here: [www.volunteeringtas.org.au](http://www.volunteeringtas.org.au)

If you want to volunteer during a disaster with emergency service organisations, like Tasmania Fire Service (TFS), State Emergency Services (SES), Ambulance Tasmania and St John Ambulance, don't wait for the crisis. The time to join is now so you can learn new skills before disasters occur. Sign up to these organisations and more through Join, Learn and Be Ready, [www.emergencyvolunteers.tas.gov.au](http://www.emergencyvolunteers.tas.gov.au)