

**PART FOUR**  
**SOUTH-EAST AND**  
**THE VOLUNTEER ARMY**



**BLACK**  
**TUESDAY**

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

**MERCURY**

## Black Tuesday 1967

**FEBRUARY 7, 1967, was a day of drama, heroism and tragedy that 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 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, featuring 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.**

**Some of the images are being published for the first time, and we welcome your assistance in adding names and details to the unidentified images in these booklets.**

**Email [nie@themercury.com.au](mailto:nie@themercury.com.au), phone Damian Bester on 6230 0736 or write to Mercury Pictures of our Past, 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.

# Warrane, Howrah, Rokeby and Lauderdale

Largely overshadowed by events elsewhere, widespread destruction was also unleashed east of Hobart on Black Tuesday, writes **Roger McNeice**

**T**HE cause of the fire at Warrane was never established, although it was thought to have been started either by children playing with matches or a burn-off that got out of control.

The fire started in Flagstaff Gully on the eastern end of Warrane behind the drive-in theatre (now Eastside Lutheran College).

This was one of 44 fires deliberately lit in the Bellerive area between January 7 and February 7. It was slowly burning up the hill from the gully on the evening of February 6, and spread more rapidly due to a breeze at midnight.

It then travelled south on two fronts and crossed the Tasman Hwy, with one part burning along Pass Rd west of Tunnel Hill and destroying several buildings in Rokeby.

It then spread in the direction of Lauderdale, spotting more fires as it went. Beyond Lauderdale, it soon spread towards Cremorne.

Several buildings were destroyed in the Lauderdale and Cremorne areas. Inmates from Risdon Prison were allowed to join many of the residents fighting the fires.

Behind Geilston Bay, Nora Reid's husband fought a fire while Flagstaff Gully fire warden Fred Murfett took his equipment in his car to fight a fire at the northern end of Rosny golf course.

Other fires broke out and Mr Murfett's house was threatened, along with others nearby. He rushed home to find his wife – surrounded by smoke – hosing down the house. Luckily the fire was extinguished before it could do any harm to the house.

Fire came down the hill at the back of Bellerive and Howrah, threatening houses.

A fire in a grassed area was endangering houses in Berega and Belar streets at Howrah, but a front-end loader was used to help contain the fire.

A poultry farm owned by Bill Ryan on Pass Rd was burnt, along with several horses. He

lost everything and his family was left with only the clothes they wore.

Rokeby suffered badly during the day, with no reticulated water and very few local volunteers, although other firefighters would come to assist later in the day. Residents saw houses burn down but could do nothing to save them.

Mavis Webb told her story to Alison Alexander: "We closed the windows and the doors, and the next minute, down the valley from Mt Rumney, was this absolutely roaring fire coming down.

"We raced and put some water in the washing machine, because we were on tanks and we really didn't have much water in the tanks.

"We put some bath towels there and tore about and bashed away at the grass ... We tore around the house and kept the sparks off the house and went like dogs there for a while, until the fire had actually passed through."

Mrs Webb watched a neighbouring house and the Congregational Church burn down.

Lives were lost. Marjorie Britten was burnt to death and elderly Mrs Freeman was found dead in a gutter while trying to escape.

RSL Women's Auxiliaries state president Mrs K. Venn, left, and Clarence RSL Women's Auxiliary president Joan Head helped to prepare some of the hundreds of hot meals and snacks that were provided to volunteer firefighters in the Bellerive and Sorell districts.



Bayview House was one of several significant buildings lost to the fires at Rokeby.



Right: An aerial view of Howrah after the fire. Picture: Tasmania Police Museum



Far right: Reverend T. Cloudsdale and Mrs K. Bond unpacking one of 57 cartons of fire-relief supplies sent to St Mark's Anglican Church, Bellerive, from St Stephen's Church in Highett, Victoria.



Historic buildings were destroyed: George Stokell's Rokeby House; the Pines (the old rectory); Bay View, John Mc Ardell's School; the Congregational Church; Clarendon, the Stanfield home; the post office, other homes and Vern Reid's aeroplanes and a hangar.

Jack Van Dongen, who was working in Hobart, rushed home but was stopped at a road block in Howrah. After hearing that Rokeby was on fire, he drove straight through the road block and found his family safe at home.

The fire came closer and threatened the Van Dongen house and that of their neighbours. Jack's door mat caught alight, so he pulled it away and threw it in the fish pond. Suddenly the wind changed and blew away from them, burning the house next door.

A house opposite was saved by the quick action of a boy climbing on its roof and pouring a bucket of water over the flames. Val Johnson was at home with her baby and put him in the sink to keep cool.

Dorothy Calvert, of Belmont Lawn at Rokeby, said she had seen the smoke coming but it moved so quickly. Flames got under the front verandah and she tried to put them out with a bucket of water, but it did no good.

When husband Don Calvert finally got through, he arrived at his home to find it well ablaze. He collected family members and drove into a ploughed paddock, where they remained until the danger passed. They lost their home and more than 300 sheep and cattle.

Tollard's property at Droughty Point Rd was badly burnt as the strong winds fanned the flames through

the paddocks. The lack of water to the area contributed to the destruction.

"Just a little drop of water on Tuesday would have saved one of Tasmania's oldest homesteads, Rokeby House," reported the *Mercury* on February 9, 1967.

The historic homestead did not survive the flames. D.H. Cuthbertson told the paper: "I did not know there was a fire in the district until it appeared over the hill. Just a little drop of water would have saved it."

**“The next minute, down the valley ... was this absolutely roaring fire**

Some valuable items were carried to safety, but most of the contents were destroyed, along with the outhouses and stock.

At Lauderdale, many residents with children sought the safety of the local beach while nearby houses burnt down.

The fire was fanned towards the built-up area and the school was threatened. The principal decided to take the children to the beach, where they were looked after by staff and parents.

Some staff members stayed to fight the fire, which surrounded the school, and managed to save it.

Local residents joined the children on the beach as the town's fire brigade attempted to fight the fire with its vintage Ford engine. It was so smoky they had to lie on the sand.

The fire then travelled down the peninsula towards Cremorne, burning the Woodlands homestead.

Thirteen houses and shacks were destroyed in and around Cremorne.

At Seven Mile Beach the progress association had organised a volunteer fire brigade and had purchased a 1937 Chevrolet truck from the Hobart Airport.

Fire captain Greg Parssey was a firefighter at the airport and had trained a number of teenage boys and local men and women.

When the fire struck, most of the members were away at work or school, but Mr Parssey had a day off. He went out by himself with the fire truck, putting out spot fires.

One of the fire crew, Ian Blom, 15, was at Clarence High School and saw houses exploding in flames in the fire on the hills near Bellerive. After the school authorities heard that Seven Mile Beach was safe they allowed the bus to take the children home.

They found Seven Mile Beach untouched and Ian and a couple of boys got out the fire engine – he knew how to drive it – and headed towards Acton. The fire was coming across a paddock so they tackled it and stopped it before it went any further.

**Read more in *Flames of Fear*, by Roger McNeice.**

# Campania, Colebrook, Richmond and Sorell

## Roger McNeice

**A** GRASS fire was burning at the corner of Victoria and Gunning streets in Richmond prior to Black Tuesday.

Volunteers were unable to prevent it from extending to the local racecourse, which suffered damage as a result.

On February 7 the fire revived and soon jumped the Coal River, travelling very fast in a southeasterly direction towards Penna and Sorell, completely out of control and resulting in the Penna area catching fire about 11.15am.

One arm of the fire spread to Midway Point and the other to the northwestern side of Sorell where, at noon, it joined the spreading fire from Campana. It eventually burnt itself out east of Sorell. Other fires burnt through Orielton and small farming areas.

The fire that devastated Colebrook appeared to have been started by shooters boiling a billy in the early hours of the morning, on private property on the eastern side of the Midland Hwy at its junction with the Colebrook Rd just north of Melton Mowbray.

The Chambers Inquiry report stated the fire burnt along both sides of the Colebrook Rd and "thus no person was able to get to the fire front in time to prevent it moving on to Colebrook".

By 11.30am the fire was burning fiercely and, according to the Chambers Inquiry, was jumping 6-9m at the time.

From the top of Mt Mercer it ignited the whole of the valley to the northwest of Colebrook.

The wind was high and the fire extended on a 3km front for more than 26km. Two deaths occurred as a result of the fast-moving fire, and a number of homes were destroyed.

The fire turned east, continuing to destroy farms and bush, and resulted in another two deaths.

"This fire has flogged me," Colebrook grazier Reg Reynolds told the *Mercury* at the time.

Mr Reynolds was one of the biggest graziers in the district and ran large sheep and cattle properties adjoining his brother's property in Colebrook.

He lost 1800 Polwarth ewes and Polwarth-cross ewes. The majority of his cattle survived, but he had the unenviable task of shooting many because of udder burns.

"It was the wind," he said. "If you had 1000 men here they could not have done anything. My father was born here, and so was I, and there was never anything like this before."



The heartbreak experienced by so many Tasmanians on Black Tuesday was graphically portrayed in this image of Peter and Shirley Gard standing opposite the blazing remnants of their home at Station Lane in central Sorell.

Mr Reynolds' wife saved their home, but their woolshed and three sheds full of hay were destroyed.

About 1.30pm, schoolchildren at Colebrook were placed in two cars, driven by Ralph Clark and Mrs Rupert Clark, and taken to the riverbank through open paddocks and then to a ploughed field, where they lay on the ground face down to escape the dense smoke and intense heat.

Wet bags were placed over them for protection and the children remained in the field for more than four hours until collected by their parents.

Sixteen-year-old Eileen Daniels was dressed only in a swimsuit while she helped to fight a house fire in Colebrook, and then moved several vehicles out of harm's way, despite having no previous driving experience.

Mr J.R. Morrisby, who lived near

Orielton, reported that 14 homes nearby were destroyed.

"At first we used a water cart behind a tractor and then we dragged a plough backwards and forwards across the burning grass near our house and close to our sheds," Mr Morrisby said.

"Other sheds on the property went up. One of the buildings was built by convicts and was full of hay ... the fire was definitely fireballing ahead. All our pastures have gone ... we buried about 300 sheep."

There were fires in the Richmond area in the two weeks before Black Tuesday, including a large grassfire on Howett's property at Grass Tree Hill, which was tackled by the Richmond Rural Fire Brigade.

The 1967 bushfires were a major test for the brigade. Accounts vary as to the actions taken, but the brigade performed

as best as it could under the circumstances.

Two houses, one in Parremore St and one in St John's Circle, were lost. It was reported that at one stage more than 1000 men fought the fires in the Coal River Valley.

Volunteer firefighters from Richmond had been called out about 9am on Black Tuesday to help tackle a grass fire at Campana.

The Richmond Fire Brigade prevented the fire from burning through the lowlands to Cambridge.

It was one of the state's few volunteer brigades with a firefighting vehicle – an old Blitz purchased by farmer Bill Casimaty for \$600. He kept it on his own property as he had no authority buy it.

A crew of firefighters was sent from the Hobart Airport to Penna, where it



One side of the road was wiped out in Colebrook. Picture: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery



The scene at Penna, near where two volunteer firefighters died. Picture: Rex Maddock



Far left: Midway Point after the fires. Picture: Tasmania Police Museum



Left: The charred eastern side of the Sorell township



Brothers Martin, 7, and Raymond Hen, 12, rummaging in what was once their uncle's workshop at the Bellevue Dairy at Sorell.



Still on duty in spite of the chaos around him, this Sorell sheep dog herded his small flock into a previously burned corner and held them there while the fire sped away from them.

tackled the flames. Tony Shackloth, a member of the crew, remembers the heat and winds as intense.

Two volunteer firemen, Manfred Phillip Weil and Geoffrey Crocker Davis, were burnt to death while defending a homestead at Penna.

Both men lived at Sorell but went to assist in trying to stop the fire reaching the homestead. The building was destroyed.

The scene at the Lovell homestead when police and an ambulance called late in the afternoon to recover the bodies was one of desolation.

Smouldering ash filled the air. Not a blade of grass remained. The charred, almost unrecognisable bodies lay 100m from the still-burning homestead.

The situation at Sorell became chaotic as many people were made

homeless and roads were cut by fallen telegraph poles and thousands of sheep were burnt to death.

The Gard family lost its house in the middle of town and Mercury photographer Rex Thompson's front-

were practically helpless. One in five houses in the Shark Point area was destroyed.

Volunteers from the Midway Point fire brigade fought a desperate fight in an attempt to save several houses in

dash for the relative safety of the causeway, and as the elephants trod restlessly on the back of trucks, the circus drivers left the vans to fight the blazes.

The road to Dodges Ferry was impassable and a solid sheet of flame blocked the road from Sorell.

Further down on the Tasman Peninsula, fires reached Safety Cove, Highcroft and Stormlea, Saltwater River and Premaydena.

Two houses on the outskirts of Port Arthur were destroyed but others were saved by volunteer firefighters.

At Campania, police constable Dennis Butcher had the terrible task of shooting more than 5000 sheep that had been badly burnt during the fires.

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

**“My father was born here, and so was I, and there was never anything like this before**

page image of the scene was reproduced around the world and became one of the best-known and most evocative images of the disaster.

With communications cut, the police

Bryant St, but nothing could be done.

Near the causeway, closer to Sorell, a circus sheltered from the fires. It had been camped on the Sorell oval but, as the fires came closer, the circus made a

# A town transformed

Although not yet born in 1967, Southern Midlands Council deputy mayor Alex Green knows all too well how Black Tuesday changed Colebrook, writes Patrick Gee

“IT’S the benchmark. The event that people rate every other fire by, and it’s also one of those landmark events where people say ‘that happened before 1967 or after ‘67’ because it transformed these communities,” Mr Green said.

The small town of Colebrook was severely damaged in the fires, with loss of property, livestock and human lives.

Mr Green’s father was at school in Hobart on the seventh, but made his way back to Colebrook to fight the fire.

Unable to get through to their family farm, he helped battle the flames at the historic Colebrook House.

The farm manager and a few others were able to save the house, the shearing shed and the chicken coop on the Green family farm, but the old barns and stables all went, along with most of the fences.

“From people I’ve spoken to over the years, like Dr Fergus Mitchell, who was

a country doctor who’s been here for years and years, he was firmly of the view that Colebrook, in particular, never recovered from the fires,” Mr Green said.

Many Colebrook residents were so severely traumatised they try to completely avoid being reminded of that tragic day.

Some residents opted to leave town on the day of a bushfire preparedness program in December 2016 as they knew the sight of the fire service vehicles would trigger unwanted memories to flood back.

“The government helped with some housing being rebuilt after the fire, but then they walked away,” Mr Green said.

“It’s not just buildings that need to be rebuilt. You need to make sure that the people have support.

“Having said that, the community is very strong and resilient – they work very hard.”

Mr Green said the Red Cross had played a pivotal role in the recovery efforts in the area. “Further down the valley, the Red Cross built units for elderly people who lost homes in the fires and didn’t want to rebuild their homes on the farms,” he said.

As the memories of 1967 still weigh heavily on the minds of locals, Colebrook has again been listed as high risk this summer.



Cartons of books were among the donations that flooded in after the Colebrook school burned down.



Below and right: Colebrook publican Clarrie Griffiths, known to all as Knocker, had set up a temporary pub in the local medical centre within a week of the loss of the Railway Hotel.



Hydro workers were drawn from all over the state to assist with the restoration of power supplies in fire-hit areas. Ian Boulter, left, Peter Moukas and Ignatius Harevitsidis, all from Tarrareah, were helping at Richmond.

# Flames took everything



Above and below: Mrs Beulah Snare stayed on duty at the Colebrook telephone exchange until fire cut all lines. Five minutes later the building was in flames. She was soon back on duty in temporary accommodation, handling the mail and the phones.



**Athlene Graeme will never forget the scorching heat of February 7, 1967, writes Patrick Gee**

**T**HE fans were on and Athlene had pulled the curtains at her Colebrook home to make it cooler for her children. She had just put her 13-month-old daughter to bed when the phone rang. It was her friend Pat, who said there was a fire near her house and could Athlene get her and her three children.

"I said 'I've just put my daughter into bed' and she said 'oh, you'll only be five minutes,'" Athlene said.

"But I was a mother that even if I was going to take the other children for a walk, I would not go until the baby had woken up from her sleep."

So Athlene took her daughter from her cot and left the house to rescue her friend. As they were returning from Pat's home, Athlene saw something which would change her life.

"I said 'look Pat, my house is burning.' Colebrook was alight. I could see drums flying through the air, big balls of fire flying through. I look at my daughter now and think how lucky I was that I got her out of her cot and put her in the car."

Unable to contact anyone to say they were okay, or to find out if her friends and relatives were alive and well, having lost the house all they could do was

sit and wait by the side of the road to be found. Fifty years on, Athlene still struggles to find words to describe the scene, or the terror she felt.

"The flames were just like great big waves and when they crashed, there were balls of fire," she said.

"We didn't know if anyone had been burnt or anything because a lot of the boys were in town playing cricket. My brother-in-law jumped in a water tank. He was burnt severely. I didn't know where any of his sisters were, I didn't know where any of the cricketers were."

But as horrific as the day was, the full effects didn't hit home until the following days. "The next day was 10 times worse, knowing we didn't have anything left," she recalls. "We had friends that took us to their place but we had nothing. Not a thing."

Athlene recalls the upsetting sight of the animals that were killed or badly injured, including sheep, cows and kangaroos.

"You couldn't believe how it had left the houses, from the recreation ground to the hall and from the hall down to the English church – it took the shop, the hotel and everything to there," she said.

"None of the houses in that part were saved. The school was burnt. They took all the children down to the plough paddock or the dam or somewhere.

"Now I stand at my window and think, all that grass, it's this long, and that's what it was in February (1967). It's only got to dry off and for someone to go up and light a fire and exactly the same thing could happen.

"I see smoke now and I'm just in pieces. If it wasn't for Darren from 'Rural Alive and Well' ... he used to ring me and tell me 'Athlene, please don't panic, the fire's nowhere near you.'

"You had to go through it to realise what it was like," Athlene said.

**For advice or support contact Rural Alive and Well on 1300 4357 6283 or Lifeline on 13 11 14.**



The public telephone box was in demand after the bushfire disaster.



# **NOW AND THEN**

## **COLEBROOK**





Digital composite image of the ruins of the Railway Hotel, Colebrook. Created by Matt Thompson from an original 1967 image from the Mercury Historical Archive Collection

# Life for victims was never the same again

Memories of the 1967 fires that devastated Tasmania may have dimmed with time, but the disaster was life-changing for many of the victims, writes **Ross Gates**

**M**Y MOTHER and father-in-law were two of the thousands of Tasmanians whose life was never the same after that February 7, Black Tuesday.

Syd and Myrtle Charlton owned a 40-acre apple orchard at Middleton in the Channel, and in one devastating day they lost everything they had worked for as the fire swept over the property, wiping out the orchards, three houses and a cool store.

Syd was also the Middleton Fire Brigade officer equipped with a knapsack sprayer – that was about the sum total of his equipment – and he was racing around the district helping neighbours threatened by the fire, unaware his own home and wife were in grave danger.

As the flames roared down a valley towards their home, Mrs Charlton was forced to jump into blackberry bushes to

escape, but a woman helped pull her to safety. At the beach a few hundred metres away she sheltered with other Middleton residents. They were the lucky ones. Sixty four Tasmanians lost their lives and hundreds of others were injured, physically and psychologically.

It made headlines around the world. One US newspaper reported that the fires were so bad Tasmanians had to be evacuated by submarine!

After living in a caravan for 12 months, the Charltons decided they were at a stage in their lives where replanting the orchards was not feasible, so they moved to the Hobart suburb of Lenah Valley, where they opened a florist shop, which still operates today. Mr and Mrs Charlton have passed on, but family members remember the trauma caused by the fires.

About 1400 homes were razed over southern Tasmania. Whole communities were wiped out, including Fern Tree, Middleton and Snug.

In an interview with *Mercury* reporter John Briggs on the 30th anniversary of the fires, Mr Charlton said they were lucky to have the support of family and friends.

A social worker at the time, Margaret Wilkinson, said hardly a building stood between Middleton and Cygnet where it was

possible to look after people. Shops and church halls had all gone in the fire.

The most memorable thing was the intensity of the fire that was fanned by very hot northerly winds. When the flames got into the tops of gum trees they seemingly ate the oxygen as they leapt at an incredible rate from one tree to the next. The firestorm moved so quickly it leapt over some tinder dry weatherboard homes while brick dwellings seemed to explode as the flames hit them.

As a 17-year-old volunteer I went to the Hobart Fire Brigade in Argyle St mid-morning and was assigned to a truck with other volunteers. There was an eerie feeling as we raced through a deserted city centre where the smoke haze turned the traffic lights to strange hues of red, orange and green.

We ended up at Taroona, where a fire had attacked a residential area. But with little more than wet sacks there was not much that could be done to save houses.

Amid the blinding smoke and flames were the anguished cries of people who watched their homes burn.

Later in the day, we were sent to West

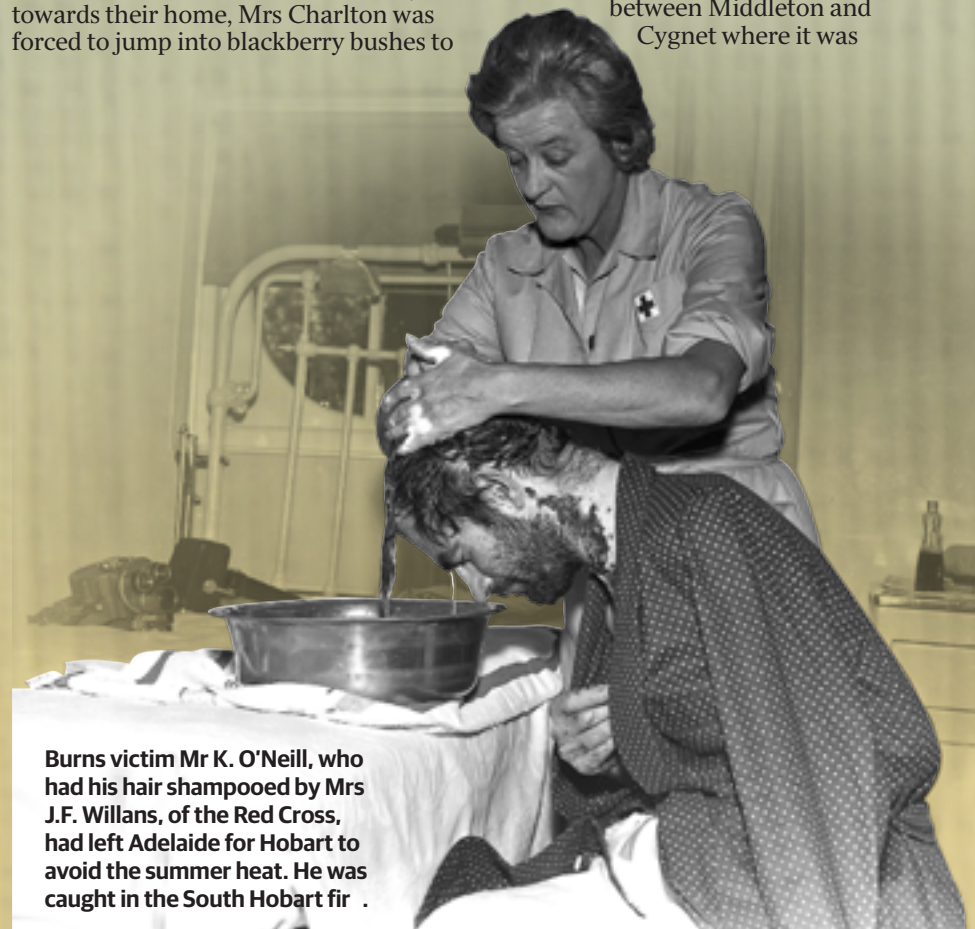
Hobart, where the fire had reached the top end of Forest Rd. Residents were busy evacuating and I remember a piano being carried from a house. When it was placed on the road it started to roll downhill, with the now volunteer furniture removalists in hot pursuit. Few appreciated the funny side at the time.

There was relief when a water tanker turned up, but the accompanying pump could not be hooked up because the fittings did not match. It was typical of the situation on Black Tuesday when there were plenty of willing hands but little equipment to make a difference.

Back at the fire station, first-aid workers were busy treating volunteers for minor burns and problems with smoke inhalation. The woman with the eye drops was in big demand.

The beer in the pub over the road was welcome after a day that had brought so much death and destruction.

For people who went through Black Tuesday, the most reassuring sight today is the well-equipped and well-trained firefighters on the frontline who, in similar conditions to 1967, make such a big difference.



The Royal Hobart Hospital reported that some of the Black Tuesday burns victims owed their lives to the Red Cross Blood Transfusion Service.



A Red Cross worker delivering blood supplies to the Royal Hobart Hospital.

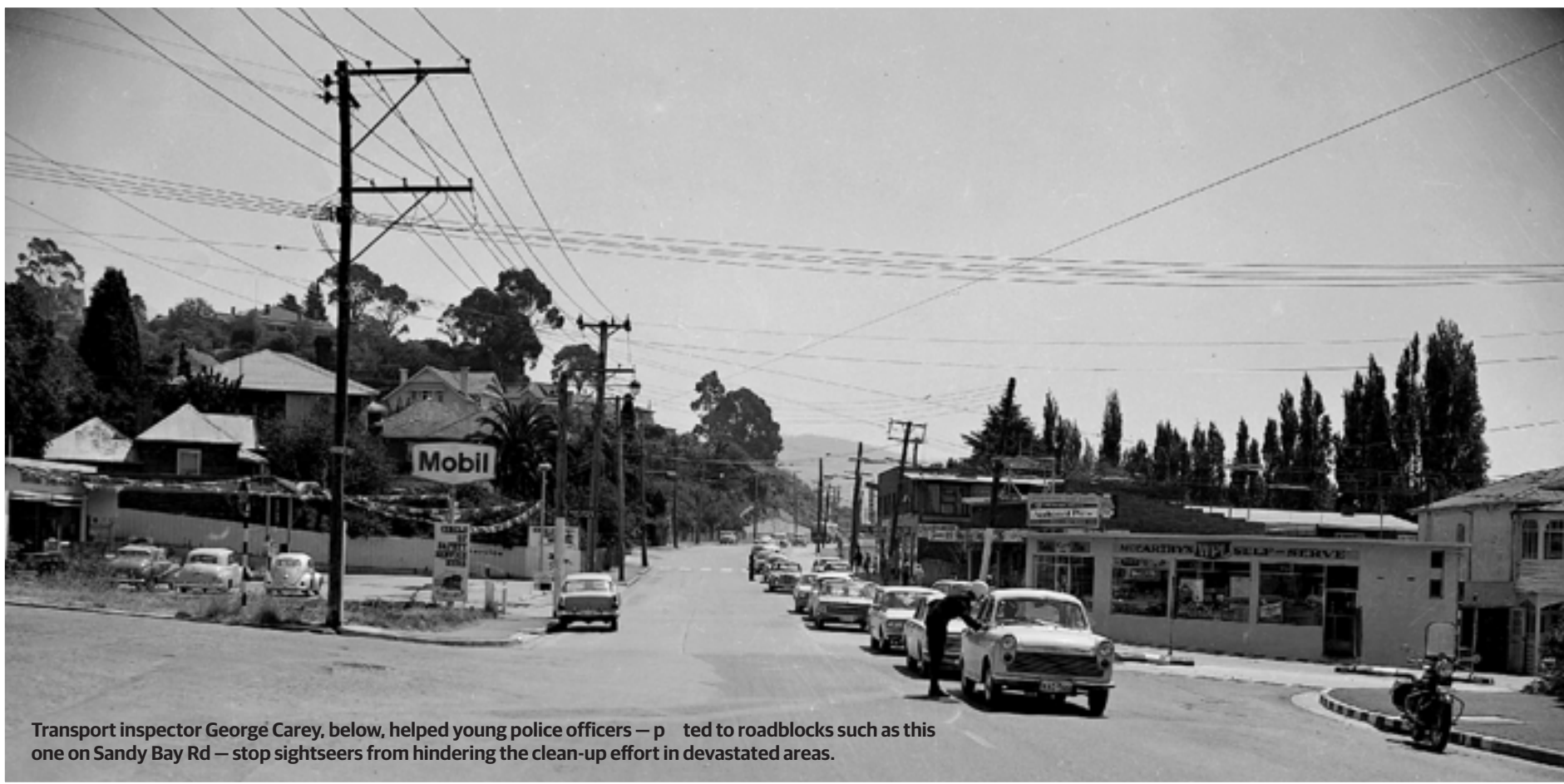


Permission was given for the supply of beer to hospitalised bushfire victims. Ian Young, of North Bruny, who was burnt while trying to outrun the bushfire on a tractor, received his ration from Red Cross worker Mrs D. Hughes.



Above and right: Junior Red Cross members aided the relief effort while older volunteers escorted patients in and out of hospital.





Transport inspector George Carey, below, helped young police officers — p... to roadblocks such as this one on Sandy Bay Rd — stop sightseers from hindering the clean-up effort in devastated areas.

# Emotions run high

**As a seven year old in 1967, Peter Carey had just moved up to Grade 3 at Glenorchy Primary School**

**I**T WASN'T long into the afternoon of February 7 when the sky blackened with smoke. The students of Grade 3 Green, just like the rest of the school, were thrown into a state of acute anxiety by the appearance of a wall of flame stretching right across the northern side of Continental Rd.

Principal Leo Fahey soon gave the order to evacuate and our teacher, Miss Campbell — on a one-year working holiday from the UK — simply told us to go home. The walk to my Eady St family home was only about 20 minutes from the school and, apart from some minor smoke inhalation while walking up Kensington St, I was now safe.

My sister Lyn, a prefect at Cosgrove High School, arrived home soon after, perplexed about what was going on.

She not only recalls lab technician Eddie Sauer moving between the laboratories in the science block urging students to close the windows to minimise smoke entering the building, but also witnessing many hysterical students turning up at the office of principal Jack Pullen and desperately seeking permission to leave.

My brother Bob was an army reservist (then known as the CMF) attached to the 47th Transport Division and, aged just 19, was immediately called from his civilian job at the Motor

Registry of the then Transport Commission, to report to Dowsing Point, from where he and his peers despatched their fleet of International Mark 3 and Mark 5 operational vehicles, without immediately knowing exactly what their brief was to be. Although we heard nothing from him for several days, we later learned his unit had done a great job in the aftermath of the tragedy, carting stock feed from the few unaffected areas through to locations where it was desperately needed.

My father George probably had the biggest reason for thinking his time was up, just one day short of his 20th wedding anniversary.

As a transport inspector, he was in the Channel region near Snug, travelling north towards Hobart, when it soon became obvious the situation was dire.

While contemplating the best option, either continuing on or turning back, a burning tree fell across the road behind him, leaving him with only one option.

With smoke too thick to see the road in front of him, and very much contrary

to the best modern advice, he opened the driver's side door of his HR Holden and used the road's white dividing line as his only navigation tool.

He did finally make it back to his Transport Commission office and his comment about a "massive fire down there" drew the rapid retort

"Down there? It's everywhere!"

His role didn't end there.

This was a time when the uniformed officers with the Transport Commission were also sworn police officers, with warrants issued by the Commissioner of Police, and wore virtually the same uniform.

In George's 20-plus years of service, this was the only time the Police Commissioner exercised his emergency power to commandeer Transport Commission officers to add to the police effort.

George's brief was to supervise several young constables at a roadblock on Sandy Bay Rd near Long Beach. Prior to the construction of the Southern Outlet, it was then the only northern approach to the Channel region via Tarooma.

Up until his death in 1982, George was willing to reflect and share his

experience of that day. Despite having witnessed the horrors of World War II in the Pacific just over 20 years earlier, he never forgot how confronting his 1967 experience was.

It wasn't just the profound experience of seeing how a bottle of soft drink just sitting on the immensely hot road surface could boil over, but to see grown men in such emotionally desperate mindsets begging to be allowed to go through to check on the fate of their families.

Confronting stories emerged of people perishing as they tried in vain to outrun the firefronts, or taking refuge in corrugated iron water tanks, under the false impression they were safe.

We have learned a lot of valuable lessons, too. The Tasmania Fire Service has evolved into a very effective and professional operational unit with heightened scientific understanding of the elements of fire risk and behaviour, and with well trained and disciplined career professionals and volunteers with well thought-out contingency plans.

We all salute members of our emergency services who so often put their lives on the line in times of crisis.

On the 50th anniversary of Black Tuesday, let's also acknowledge the southern-based uniformed sworn officers from the Transport Commission who were called upon to digress from their normal roles to assist on that day: transport officers Joe Cooper, Arnold Drewitt, Ron Millington and Ken Gunton; road safety officers Ron Saunders and Tom Storey; and motor vehicle inspectors George Carey, Ted Wisken and Merv Webster.



# The volunteer army



Ambulance volunteers operated from mobile units and fixed positions in areas of most need.

Left: A St John Ambulance volunteer at work in one of the relief centres.

Below: These men responded to a call for volunteers to assemble at the Bellerive police station, and were soon on their way to fight fires at Levendale. Special Constable W. Page was taking the roll.



Jennifer Webster from Victoria and Mrs R.K. Fry from South Australia helped to operate the Red Cross Missing Persons Bureau in Hobart. Miss Webster's family at Rokeby lost part of their property in the fires.



The Salvation Army supplied food and drink to exhausted volunteers fighting the fires.



# Danger in the north

## Patrick Gee

**W**HILE the devastating fires of Black Tuesday were sweeping Tasmania's south, the north was also ablaze, with thousands of hectares of forest, farmland and scrub destroyed.

Eleven fires were reported in the Launceston area until late into the night of February 7, 1967, and extra men were called in to assist.

The fiercest blaze was said to have started in the Weldborough area, where it raged along both sides of the Tasman Hwy, stopping traffic.

The Weldborough flames burnt through 600ha and came within 1.5km of the township.

Described as "very dangerous" by forestry workers, the blaze brought down trees and power lines, and damaged a bulldozer, before being contained the following day.

After many hours battling the flames, firefighters suffered from a lack of water until a water cart was sent from George Town to keep them going.

At Lefroy, the old council chambers were burnt to the ground by a fire which was believed to have been started by children and fanned by gale force northerly winds.

Large fires also burned in Cressy, Deloraine, Campbell Town and St Marys. The Campbell Town blaze started around a local mill and threatened a house. Volunteers were able to save the house, but old

cars parked in a nearby paddock were destroyed.

The flames then threatened to turn towards Campbell Town, but were brought under control by late that night.

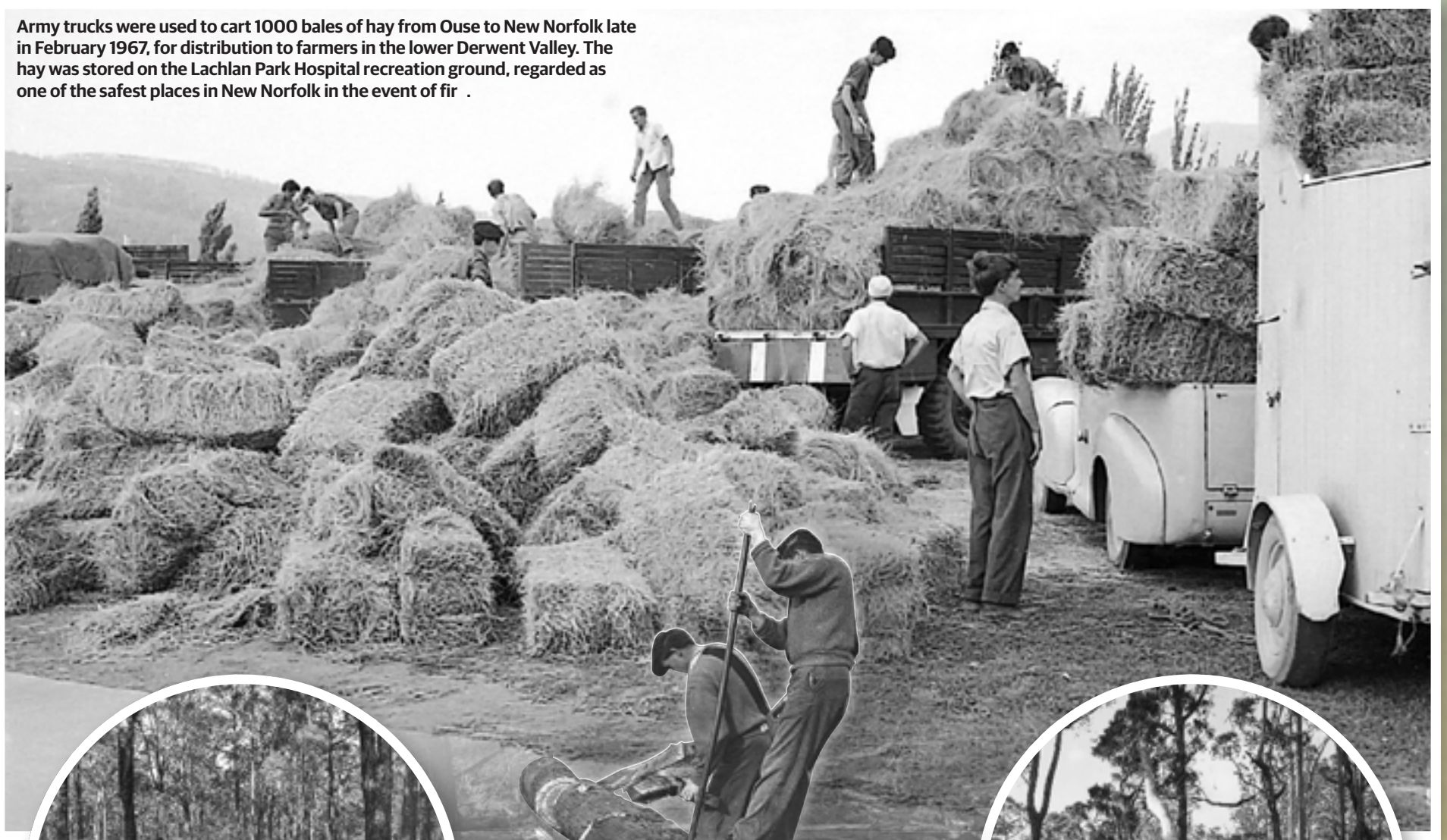
Another blaze at Deloraine had been burning since the weekend and had swept through valuable timbered land.

Three men were questioned by police regarding the St Marys fire, which came close to houses.

Throughout the day, homes and townships were threatened, but none were destroyed as volunteers turned away the flames.

A number of fires burned through the night and a team of forestry workers were sent to fight the flames at first light the following day.

Army trucks were used to cart 1000 bales of hay from Ouse to New Norfolk late in February 1967, for distribution to farmers in the lower Derwent Valley. The hay was stored on the Lachlan Park Hospital recreation ground, regarded as one of the safest places in New Norfolk in the event of fire .



Minimum security prisoners from the Hayes Jail Farm were still helping the recovery effort several months after the fire danger had passed, felling trees and splitting them into fence posts for fire-hit farmers. Many inmates from the Risdon and Hayes jails had their sentences reduced as a result of their work on bushfire relief .



Above and below: More than 20 tonnes of fodder for starving cattle and sheep was donated by hundreds of suburban residents at the first weekend of "Operation Grass Clippings" in May 1967. Contributions were received at Hobart and Chigwell and sent to Kingston and Sorell.



A truckload of fence posts made by men from the Hayes Jail Farm for farms in the south.



*In memory of those who lost their lives as a result of the bushfires of Black Tuesday, February 7, 1967.*

- |                                  |                              |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| ALLEN, Dulcie Marguerite, 70.    | HALL, Kathleen May, 84.      |
| ALLANBY, Alma Ann, 82.           | HARRIS, Frank Blake, 73.     |
| ALLANBY, Aubyn Llewellyn, 82.    | HAYTON, Edith Rubina, 77.    |
| ATKINS, William Raymond, 65.     | HODDER, Mervyn.              |
| BARWICK, Ada Mary, 85.           | JACKSON, Donald Eric, 30.    |
| BOLTON, George Albert, 31.       | KOGLIN, Merton Herman, 73.   |
| BOLTON, Louise, 70.              | LARGE, William Albert, 69.   |
| BOYER, Elsie Churchill, 75.      | LAZENBY, Owen George.        |
| BRITTEN, Mary Ann Frances, 62.   | LEE, John Francis, 35.       |
| BUGG, Alex, 35.                  | LYDEN, James, 79.            |
| BURDON, Beatrice Doris, 69.      | McCULLUM, Marjorie Jane, 56. |
| CAIRNS, Eileen Sybil, 68.        | McLAUGHLIN, Ivy May, 42.     |
| CAIRNS, William Samuel, 68.      | MANSFIELD, John Fleming, 61. |
| CAWTHRAY, Lillian Elizabeth, 61. | MUNRO, Jean Mabel, 63.       |
| CORDWELL, Leslie David, 60.      | NANCE, Mervyn Charles, 64.   |
| COSTELLO, Alice Margaret, 67.    | PALMER, John Herbert, 66.    |
| CRANE, Leslie Clyde, 64.         | PETRENKO, Ona, 65.           |
| DAVIS, Geoffrey Crocker, 62.     | PORTER, Samuel Douglas, 69.  |
| DENNE, Vivian Darcy, 45.         | REEVES, Alice Maud, 77.      |
| DICKER, David Edward, 85.        | ROSS, Nancy Maud, 60.        |
| DICKER, Elsie Kathleen.          | SALTER, Edith Isobel, 75.    |
| DONAGHY, Donald George, 29.      | STANLEY, Mary, 49.           |
| EVANS, Amy, 80.                  | TATE, Mervyn Joseph, 51.     |
| FLYNN, John Joseph, 46.          | TURVEY, Dorothy Ivy.         |
| FOREMAN, Lucy Anne, 82.          | TUTTLE, Kathleen, 45.        |
| FREEMAN, Ann Themer, 88.         | TUTTLE, William Patrick, 60. |
| FREEMAN, Lavinia Shanks, 56.     | WARE, Minnie May, 73.        |
| GIBBS, Jean, 60.                 | WEIL, Manfred Phillip, 39.   |
| GILL, George Edward, 65.         | WEIR, Helen Francis, 27.     |
| GOODWIN, Harold Augustus, 51.    | WELDON, Thomas, 72.          |
| GOODWIN, William Henry, 23.      | WILLIAMS, Ronald Henry, 38.  |
| GORMAN, Kenneth Hilary, 50.      | WRIGHT, Dorothy, 50.         |

# Campfire Safety



**SOAK IT. STIR IT. SOAK IT AGAIN.**  
Make sure your campfire is out.

Use water to make sure your fire is completely extinguished. Do not use soil.

Fires can still smoulder under soil and can stay hot for more than eight hours.

[fire.tas.gov.au](http://fire.tas.gov.au)



Tasmania Fire Service

# Are YOU Bushfire-Ready?

Check [fire.tas.gov.au/brn](http://fire.tas.gov.au/brn) for a bushfire-ready event near you

1800 000 699



Tasmanian Government



Tasmania Fire Service

Know **YOUR** bushfire risk. Make a plan.



Tasmania Fire Service

## Community Protection Planning



### Community Bushfire Mitigation Plans

Reducing your community bushfire risk



### Community Bushfire Response Plans

Better protection for your community



### Community Bushfire Protection Plans

Including Nearby Safer Places

## Get your local Community Bushfire Protection Plan

A simple plan for community members containing bushfire safety options and bushfire information.

[fire.tas.gov.au](http://fire.tas.gov.au)



Tasmania Fire Service

## Fighting Fire with Fire



Tasmania's strategic Fuel Reduction Program reduces bushfire risk on public and private land.

When the weather conditions allow, TFS, PWS and FT conduct planned burns right across Tasmania.

For more information go to [fire.tas.gov.au](http://fire.tas.gov.au) or telephone **1800 000 699**.

## Fuel Reduction – Reducing Fuels for Safer Communities

In partnership with:



Forestry Tasmania  
GROWING OUR FUTURE



Tasmanian Government