

MINERS REST, CFA FAREWELL AN ICON

Miners Rest Fire Brigade icon Tom Ford passed away recently following a period of ill health. Tom was highly respected in not only his beloved brigade but all circles of CFA.

He officially joined the brigade in 1949 although Tom himself said he was attending fires for many years before that. It wasn't long before his leadership qualities and operational capabilities saw him elected to office and he became 1st Lieutenant from 1951 to 1961.

After 10 years learning the 'ropes' Tom was elected to office as Captain and became a strong and highly capable leader of Miner Rest Brigade, and was recognised across District 15 and beyond for his leadership. He served with distinction as Captain from 1961 to 1993.

Tom was the delegate to Ballarat Group for 32 years (1961 to 1993) as well as delegate to Region 15 Victorian Rural Fire Brigades Association for many years. In 2018 he was presented with a 70 year service medal and had received life membership of both Miners Rest Brigade and CFA many years earlier.

Tom was also very active

within Ballarat Group and served as a DGO for a total of 13 years. He stood aside from active operational roles and took on the role of Group Communications Officer from 2001 to 2011, but was always interested in having a look around fires in the Group area.

He was most active on the Committee of District 15 VFBV and formerly VRFBA for many years serving a term as President in 1973. He was also part of the Region/District Championships Committee from 1955 to 2016 including 10 years as Trackmaster. Life membership of the District 15 Council was conferred upon him in 1992.

Tom was an innovator, motivator and mentor to many in the fire service, being involved in the Brigade, Group, Region/District and CFA. He had an input into the histories of all of these.

Over Tom's 70 years with CFA, he held positions of high responsibility for 60 of them and such was honoured with many deserving awards such as the Queen's Long Service and Good Conduct Medal in 1981, the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) in 1993, the Order of Australia



Medal (OAM) for services to his community in 2009 and the Gold Star Award for services to VRFBA and VFBV.

In 2015 Tom compiled a 75 year history of the Miners Rest Fire Brigade.

The local community, Miners Rest Brigade, Ballarat Group, District 15 VFBV Council and CFA are all grateful for the service of Tom Ford and his outstanding contribution that will never be forgotten.

A Forest Fuel Management conundrum

by FIREMAN SAM

It was refreshing for me to see that a reader has taken the time to respond to my December musings about contributing factors to the devastating consequences of major fires. I sometimes wonder whether my articles are making people think about the issues that I choose to write about. There does not seem to be the passion and fervour out there that was the driving force of the early leaders of CFA.

Let me assure Peter Flinn that my finger pointing at planners and developers was not intended to ignore or detract from the vital part that land management agencies play in management of fuel levels. The role of high fuel levels in major conflagrations has been known for years, as has the fact that there have been many occasions where fuel reduced areas have aided the containment of running fires.

I have always believed in the old adage that prevention is better than cure. First used in relation to health matters but a statement equally as important with regard to fire. I have always viewed fire prevention as more important than fire suppression. That is perhaps why I have shared the frustrating experience with other dedicated brigade representatives at Fire Prevention Committees as we tried to cajole Fire Prevention Officers and land management agencies to do a better and more effective job.

My column was intended to draw attention to the fact that land managers and suppression agencies are not the only people that should share the blame or be held responsible for losses. Those who approve inappropriate developments and growth in high fire risk areas despite the lessons of history should also have their decisions scrutinised and questioned.

It must be a bit exasperating for the policy makers because these diverse pressures mean they are in a 'no win' situation. Some want to take precautionary and preventative actions to reduce the threat; others see any intervention such as fuel reduction as a threat to the natural environment.

Human nature can be very strange sometimes. It is little wonder that collectively we cannot agree on what really is the most effective way to manage fire safety issues for residential developments in places where people can

enjoy the pleasant, green bushland, when we know that each summer it will be a dangerous, life-threatening environment.

Perhaps this conundrum just underlines that we mere mortals really haven't been able to come to terms with the complexities of nature.

Descriptions of the forest environment by old timber industry workers emphasise the almost total absence of understorey and the relative freedom of movement through the forest as they walked to their work locations. Photographs taken during the 20s and 30s tend to support these descriptions. This was an era when fires in non-populated areas were often allowed to burn until extinguished by rain just as they were prior to European settlement.

Practical considerations were probably the reason for this. There were few access roads or tracks and very few motor vehicles and mobile machinery to mount any significant firefight. Only those fires that threatened townships or populated areas were actively fought.

Black Friday 1939 was probably the event that changed this approach and began to influence the nature and fuel structure of our forests. One of the recommendations was that the best protection against fire was regular light burning of undergrowth at times other than summer.

The Forests Commission had existed since 1918. There were no defined boundaries and the management structure was based on how far foresters could travel by bike or horse from their offices. They got to know their patch intimately. Astute foresters quickly realised they needed to complement their knowledge of forestry with the knowledge of weather and topography held by the locals. Using this combined knowledge, it was common for the local district forester or an experienced forest overseer to drop a match and light-up the bush in late autumn or even winter as they headed home from work. The fire would be allowed to slowly burn down the north facing slopes in the evening until the overnight dew or a wet gully caused it to go out. Not a sophisticated approach but a very effective one unhampered by bureaucratic processes. Note that this practice closely reflected that of our indigenous predecessors.

The Forests Commission remained largely unchanged until 1983 when government decided that creation of a Department of Conservation Forests and Lands (CFL) would be an effective way to address and manage the competing interests of the emerging conservation movement and the timber industry. The Department has had several name and structural changes since, none of which have apparently helped to reach a consensus position about management of forests generally and of fire management in particular.

I am hopeful that the growing interest in trying to replicate the fuel management practices used by our indige-

nous predecessors might help the Department make some progress. The fact that agencies in the USA are also showing interest in the fire management practices of their indigenous peoples suggests that there is increasing recognition that our European attitudes to fire and our management practices have contributed to the forest fire problems that now confront us.

Is it possible that a return to the use of some of these older practices might help to generate a consensus that traditional indigenous fuel reduction burning techniques are actually a positive for the forest environment and for the safety of the community?

This year is the 80th anniversary of Judge Stretton's Royal Commission into the 1939 fires. There have been recommendations from several other inquiries and of course, the 2009 Royal Commission, and still we search for the right approach!

The media coverage of the extensive fires in the forests and conservation areas in the SW of Tasmania highlight the issue and the confusion in the general community.

Those who might be considered to be champions of the environment have been critical of what they claim are inadequate responses and efforts by the Tasmanian Fire agencies. They are likely to be the same people who have consistently resisted any human intervention in the area because of its pristine state and high natural value and beauty. Consequently, the minimal intervention means that there are few access roads and minimal fire management works. The insertion of firefighting personnel into such an environment has inherently higher safety risks and considerations.

Now, it seems that those who opposed human intervention are suddenly in favour of it because they believe that this fire ignited by a natural phenomenon, lightning, is 'destroying' the forest. I would take a guess that what is happening to the forest has happened in the past only humans, well white people, were not around to see it. Nature started this fire and nature will extinguish it, then the whole regrowth cycle will start again as it probably has for thousands of years before.

Their logic seems to be that humans can (or is it must) intervene when we perceive that something is going wrong according to our beliefs and values, such as a whale stranding on a beach, but we can't or shouldn't do anything when we perceive that everything in nature is ticketyboo and any human action would be an interference.

With such illogical thought processes held by some people it is not surprising that we haven't been able to arrive at a consensus about how to manage fire safety and forest fuel levels despite all the experience and knowledge gained over the years.

Perhaps the opportunities offered by the renewed interest in indigenous practices might help us to reach a conclusion.

Recognition for Kevin's service



Narre Warren North Fire Brigade Life Member Kevin Ridd recently received his National Medal second clasp.

Kevin has been a member of Narre Warren North Fire Brigade since 1973. In 2014 he stepped down from firefighting duties and changed to a non-operational member.

In 2013, Kevin received the National Emergency Medal for his participation in the 2009 Victorian Black Saturday fires.

In addition, Kevin has accepted the 45 year service medal; he is an honorary Life Member of CFA and a Life Member of Narre Warren North Fire Brigade.

The brigade has an award named after Kevin, called The Kevin Ridd Award. This award is presented to either a brigade or a member of the general public that has contributed to the community significantly over a period of time.

The Berwick Opportunity Shop was the last to receive The Kevin Ridd Award.

As quoted recently in the local paper Kevin would not have been involved in CFA if it weren't for his late cousin, his wife Jenny and his three children. "If I didn't have Jenny's support, I wouldn't have been able to be involved. She was there for me when I needed her."

The Ash Wednesday fires surrounded their family home and Kevin was out of work for two weeks. "When I was fighting fires on Ash Wednesday, she took our caravan down to Narre Warren North Fire Station to give those who were on changeover duty a place to rest."

Born and bred in Stawell his cousin, Ken Ridd was Captain of Stawell Fire Brigade.

Unfortunately, Ken passed away on his way home from a CFA meeting.

Kevin was President of the brigade for 10 years, Apparatus Officer for a total of 13 years between 1975 and 1993 and Lieutenant from 1981 till 1986.

In congratulating Kevin on receipt of his National Medal Second Clasp, Captain Mark Dobrich commented that "Kevin has been a significant contributor to Narre Warren North Fire Brigade, the community and to CFA for more

than 45 years. His service is genuinely appreciated and this award in acknowledgement is well deserved.

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INVITING APPLICANTS FOR CFA BOARD

The CFA legislation recognises that it is important that the CFA Board has strong volunteer expertise, knowledge and an understanding of CFA volunteers. To support this, CFA legislation provides for four of the CFA Board's Members to be appointed from a panel of names submitted by **Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria**, two being representatives from brigades predominantly serving urban communities and two being representatives from brigades predominantly serving rural communities.

The terms of CFA Board Members Hazel Clothier, Lynda Hamilton, Peter Shaw and Tim Young expire 19th July 2019, triggering the need for VFBV to seek applications for a panel of names to be nominated for the next term commencing 20th July 2019.

VFBV is seeking applications for volunteers interested in filling one of the four VFBV nominated positions on the CFA Board.

CFA volunteers who believe they have the skills, experience and capacity to make a contribution to the Board of the CFA, are invited to apply for nomination to the CFA Board. In addition to volunteer experience and knowledge, selection will have regard to any of the following: knowledge of, or experience in, commercial, technical, operational, legal or financial matters; or expertise in fire or emergency management, land management or any other field relevant to the performance of the functions of the CFA.

From applications received and following interviews, VFBV will submit a panel of names to the Minister for Police & Emergency Services.

The CFA Board meets on a monthly basis and also operates a committee system which could require a commitment of one half day per month. Attendance at official functions is also expected. The appointment to the CFA Board would be for a period of up to three years; the retiring members are eligible for re-appointment.

Remuneration for a member of the CFA Board is circa \$17k pa.

A Role Statement is available on the VFBV website or available from the VFBV office. For other relevant information, interested volunteers should contact VFBV – contact details below.

Applications including a current resume must be emailed or faxed to VFBV by COB on Friday 24th May 2019 to: Email: j.laing@vfbv.com.au or Fax 03 9886 1618.



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