

# From The Chief Officer.....



Number 102

*"Our mission is to protect lives and property"*

24th December 2013

## The 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Loss Of Ten Firefighters at the Tarrawingee Fire:

I want to share with you, my words at last Sunday's memorial service for the ten firefighters who died at the Tarrawingee fire on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1943. At this time of preparation for Christmas, of family gatherings and of celebration of life, we should remember and reflect on the loss of life 70 years ago.

*"Seventy years ago, at this location, ten firefighters had their lives cut short by the Tarrawingee fire.*

*In 1943 times were tough. Many men had answered the call to arms to fight in World War 2. Fuel, equipment and manpower was in short supply. There was widespread drought across most of Victoria. At around 4:30pm on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December a fire started near the Bowser railway station. The late Ken Stewart describes fighting the outbreak in his memoirs. Ken, with his Dad and his uncle, met the fire with beaters and green boughs, but "The fire took off across the paddocks towards Tarrawingee". It got the better of them.*

*Help came in a fire tanker from Wangaratta, one of only a few in the district. A fire truck that was basic and unsophisticated by today's standards. The truck became stranded on the roadside. Straddled powerless, bellied across the table drain, men gathered to help. The fire bore down without mercy, and ten men died in what remains the greatest single loss of firefighters in the line of duty in Victoria's history.*

*None of these men were property owners. Two were at the tender age of fourteen. They were slaughter men, linesmen, teachers, tech school students and a farm manager. All had come to volunteer their help: To lend a hand to others in their time of need.*

*This loss of life had a devastating effect on the Wangaratta and District Community. Ten lives were cut short that day. Ten families, each now incomplete. Each now, with an empty chair at the table. Since 1943 they have been absent from celebrations of family achievements, Birthdays and Christmases.*

*Today we mourn these lives, snatched by this ferocious fire. We offer our comfort and support to those families, friends and colleagues, for whom life has never been the same. Their names, and the Tarrawingee fire, will forevermore be remembered through the memorial stone that stands behind me. Indeed, at the CFA memorial service in May of each year, their names are read out along with other CFA firefighters killed in the line of duty.*

*But we also reflect on the positive legacy of this tragedy: The modern, well-equipped and well trained men and women of the fire services of today. The memory of these ten firefighters lives on in the spirit of selfless service, of courage and volunteerism that pervades in this great organisation – the CFA.*

*Today we remember. We honour their sacrifice. And so, to the memory of: Kevin Dunkley, Claude Hill, Andrew Guthrie, Theodore Lea, John Marks, Joseph Ryan, Norman Robinson, Edward Seymour, Godfrey Spencer and Arthur Wellington: Your life has been run. But our memory of you has not faded. Your sacrifice was not in vain. Your spirit has inspired subsequent generations.*

*Rest in peace. Your duty is nobly done."*

***"My life is over, but it is not yet ended."***

**- Winston Churchill**