

From the Archives

Like members of many other volunteer organisations, the men and women who have served in Mt Riverview's Volunteer Bushfire Brigade since its formation have had higher priorities than chronicling their activities.

Formal records are few and far between, but what does exist provides some flavour of how volunteer fire fighting has evolved over the years. The equipment and practices may have changed, but the commitment continues.

Out of the Ashes

In many ways the Mount Riverview Volunteer Bushfire Brigade was born out of the ashes of disaster. Our brigade was founded on Thursday, 12th December, 1968, at a public meeting held at the home of Mr and Mrs J Geason, 33 Emu Plains Road, Mt Riverview.

That meeting was held with the heat barely out of disastrous fires which had ravaged the lower mountains in November, 1968. A fire which began weeks earlier in inaccessible country in the Grose Valley spotted over to Faulconbridge on November 20, and roared down the mountains, defying all efforts to subdue it.

From Faulconbridge to Emu Plains that blaze left a blackened landscape, dotted with houses reduced to ashes and trees resembling burnt matches. It has since been described as the worst bushfire event to strike the East Coast of Australia since European settlement.

The size of the disaster led local residents to express concern that the Mt Riverview area could not be adequately served by the stretched resources of the Blaxland Volunteer Bushfire Brigade.

A New Brigade

At the meeting held within a month of the fire a Mr Peter Sheehan moved that "A bushfire brigade be formed, to be known as the Mount Riverview Volunteer Bushfire Brigade." The motion was seconded by Mr Peter Green and carried unanimously.

The meeting elected Alan Costelow as the brigade's first Captain, with Cec Lonard, John Parker and Jim Auld as Deputies. There were approximately 20 inaugural members, with the nucleus being former members of the Blaxland Brigade, who lived in the Mt Riverview area.

In January 1969 a subsequent meeting drew up and adopted a formal constitution and correspondence was received from the mayor of Blue Mountains City Council, congratulating the brigade on its formation.

The fledgling organisation's third meeting was held at Mt Riverview Community Hall on 4th February 1969, with Blue Mountains City Council's Fire Control Officer, Bernard Darling in attendance.

The new Brigade held its first training night on 17th February 1969 with instruction by Cec Lonard on standpipe procedures and talks by inaugural Captain, Alan Costelow, on safety and Jim Campbell and Jim Auld on knapsack use.

At this stage the Brigade had no official fire fighting vehicle, so members responded to their first fire (at Blackheath) in member Les Saint's Austin A40 utility. Other early training sessions were held using Warrimoo Bushfire Brigade's tanker.

Public Meeting held Thursday, December 12th 1968.
at 33 Emu Plains Road Mt Riverview.

NAME	ADDRESS	SIGNATURE
STEVE LAWLESS	3 EMU PLAINS ROAD.	<i>Steve Lawless</i>
LES SAINT	88 EMU PLAINS RD.	<i>Les Saint</i>
H. Bulka	10 Plains View Cres	<i>H. Bulka</i>
R. SMITH	9 EMU PLAINS RD.	<i>R. Smith</i>
J GRASON	33 EMU PLAINS RD.	
A G COSTELOW	38 GRANDVIEW DRIVE	<i>A G Costelow</i>
R. JOHNSON	37 SUNLAND CRES.	<i>R. Johnson</i>
F. HIGGINS.	47 EMU PLAINS RD	<i>F. Higgins</i>
C. LONARD	210 RUSDEN RD	<i>C. Lonard</i>
A. Spears	10 Scenic Crescent.	<i>A. Spears</i>
R. Audley	27 Emu Plains Rd.	<i>R. Audley</i>
D. PERKINS	34 DAWN CRES BEAVING	<i>D. Perkins</i>
G. Capranis	16 Coleridge Ave. Mt. Riverview	<i>G. Capranis</i>
G. Brown	2 OUTLOOK AVE MT. RIVERVIEW	<i>G. Brown</i>
Shield	37 Dawn Cres Mt Riverview	<i>Shield</i>
M Adams	4 Summit St Mt Riverview	<i>M Adams</i>
THOMAS	23 Sunland Crescent	<i>J. J. Thomas</i>
P. GREEN	39	<i>P. Green</i>
R. Lyman	39 Emu Plains Rd.	<i>R. Lyman</i>
Chandler	19 Outlook Av	<i>Chandler</i>

The small band of residents recorded above provided the impetus
for the formation of the Mount Riverview brigade.

Building the Station

But this was a highly motivated group and progress was being made quickly. On April 1st 1969 Dr Michael Tonks became Honorary Medical Officer for the Brigade and a Building Committee was formed. Members also decided at that same meeting that the Brigade's colours would be black and gold stripes.

By May 1969 the Brigade had acquired its first tanker – believed to be a Chevrolet short wheelbase Blitz purchased from Mount Tomah for \$200.

That led to the next item on a growing to-do list....finding a site and constructing a fire station! Until then premises at 18 Bunbinla Avenue, owned by a Mrs Shapcott, served as the base for Brigade operations.

MEMBERS ATTENDING LAND CLEARING SAT. 29/3/69

NAME (PLEASE PRINT)		
J. IMBER	184 Rusden Rd.	[Signature]
G. CAPSANIS	16 CALVER AV.	[Signature]
H. TREBY	38 DAWN CRESCENT	[Signature]
J. FISHER	36 DAWN CRESCENT	[Signature]
SE PARKER	14 EMU PLAINS RD	[Signature]
K. ADAMS	4 SUMMIT ST	[Signature]
J. AULD	37 DAWN CRES	[Signature]
J. HAMPSON	17 MOORE ST	[Signature]
F. HIGGINS	EMU PLAINS RD	[Signature]
G. R. LYNN	39 EMU PLAINS RD	[Signature]
[unclear]	39 Grandview Drive	[Signature]
A. CAMPBELL	284 Bunbinla Ave	[Signature]
E. Leonard	210 Rusden Rd	[Signature]

1ST TREE FELLED

Note the citation next to three names in the list above. Some things are definitely worth recording.

A site was found for the new station on Rusden Road and the building was ready for occupation by August 1970, although it was not officially opened (by local State member, Ron Mulock MLA) until May 1971. It has since been extended twice.

In 1978 separate storeroom facilities were added and in 1981 larger kitchen and administration areas were provided, together with a meeting / crew common room area.

The Right Stuff

Today's members of the brigade take it for granted that their Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) will be provided to them without cost by the Rural Fire Service, but that wasn't always the case.

Until recent years, members were expected to provide just about all of their own "kit". A document from 1985 provides the list of items which members were expected to purchase from the brigade.

It included "wide brim helmet, yellow overalls and smoke goggles". In addition, members were expected to privately purchase their own "boots and gaiters or high legged boots, belt, water bottle and babies nappy or towelling material for use as a face mask."

If that sounds rather basic, another document gives an inventory of the first equipment issued to the brigade in time for the 1969 fire season. It lists:

5 personal first aid kits

4 water bags

1 battery charger

1 two gallon tin of Fire Red Paint

1 hurricane lamp 1 electric lantern

1 salt tablet

1 pair Vistamax goggles

2 100' x 1" canvas hose 10 knapsacks (polythene)

1 first aid kit 10 McLeod tools

1 bolt cutter

1 drip torch

10 helmets

1 pair wire cutters

An Active Membership

By the start of the 1970 fire season some of the initial enthusiasm for the brigade had subsided, but there were still 18 active members, enough to provide a crew of 12 for the Chevrolet Blitz and a crew of six for the Bedford which had also been acquired.

For many years the brigade maintained an incident journal – superseded now by more formal RFS reporting requirements. The following are excerpts taken directly from the original journal. The names may or may not be familiar, but the words give good insights, as well as a chuckle or two.

An early start

20 December 1969: Brigade called out at 12.45am to a fire at Hazelbrook area. Crew Three started to report to station in Bunbinla Avenue at 1am. Tender and crew of 9 was instructed by the fire controller to move off at 1.45am. Station Officer R.H Campbell notified ladies auxiliary at 1.50am to prepare food for 9 personnel to leave here 6am.

Camping out

25 March 1973: The first of the driving courses were started today with four people on the course. ...went to Mt Hay, where the brigade stayed overnight.

Equipment notes

1 September 1973: Hazard reduction burn in Blackheath Mt Boyce area to assist other brigades. Mt Riverview brigade cut trails. IMPORTANT: Better cooking and ration facilities are required. Also a more improved method of storage of equipment. Scrub cutter should be carried, especially in West Sector area. Truck needs urgent attention re front end. Wobble comes around 45mph.

A plea for brakes and pens

4 September 1973: Brakes must be fixed on the Rover. This is no good! Please leave pens in this office. I can't write with my finger.

But I thought you had checked

11 September 1973: I took Bob Bicknell out for driver training along Castlereagh Road and Hawkesbury Road. We ran out of petrol as we started coming up Hawkesbury Road. The truck was filled and took \$8.30 of petrol. J Boulter Deputy Captain.

Fire close to home

18 November 1973: Brigade called out at 1425hrs to a fire in Olympic Parade and in the Elizabeth Avenue area. Eight to ten brigades attended. Area burnt out approximately two square miles on western slopes from Dixon Road, Blaxland Tip, Warrimoo to back of gully at Mt Riverview Public School. Approximately 25 members attended.

Things that go bump in the night

19 December 1976: Crew of five left station for Katoomba Airfield at 1730hrs. Flown to Mt Cloudmaker to cut a rakehoe trail down the face to Thunder Creek during the night. Grant Holmes fell and injured right hip, right leg and forehead. Roger Vanamois suffered bruising to right shin and left big toe caused by falling rocks. J Dent bruised left knee similarly. Returned to shed 1100hrs, Monday, 20 December.

Lookout!

14 October 1977: Fire at Elizabeth Lookout. Fire quite severe in intensity. Crew 1 lost fire on two occasions. Right reel hose burnt in fire.

Ouch

1 June 1979: Les Saint injured to right temple at 2030hrs. Slow eye reaction. No other signs except local tenderness. – A. Spears, First Aid Officer.

Wayne, Wayne, Wayne

21 September 1980: Tanker and Rover attended field day at St. Columba's College. Wayne Hancock injured right knee in tanker event.

22 September 1980: Wayne Hancock attended Dr Blair and had four days off work from knee injury.

18 October 1980: Tanker and crew attended Hornsby Field Day. Wayne Hancock injured right knee again. D Clift witnessed the accident.

On the nose

25 May 1982: Control requested investigation of smoke in the vicinity of Sunland Crescent. Went to the sewerage works with Glenbrook Board tanker to find the sewerage works had been burning off grass and had left the area, with sewerage residue still lightly smoking. Board cut lock on gate and we put out the fire.

They must have known it would happen

19 September 1982: Anti-tetanus injections provided to members through Blue Mountains City Council.

24 October 1982: Brigade attended Mt Ku Ring Gai Field Day. Member Jim Noble cut both thumbs on 44 gallon drum used in hose and hydrant event. Wound was dressed on site.

Watch yourhead!

29 October 1988: Training trip to Narrow Neck Tower. Very high wind – 70km/h at tower. Rosalind Holland - when climbing the ladder, the wind blew the bottom trap door shut, hitting her on the head. Sat in Rover for a while. A Spears, First Aid Officer.

If you can add to this history of the brigade, please contact us.