



# ACT FIRE & RESCUE

100 years of service  
to the ACT community



# C O N T E N T S

Foreword	<b>1</b>
Establishing a capability	<b>3</b>
Chief Officer Percival (Percy) Douglas	<b>13</b>
Transition years	<b>18</b>
Chief Officer Charlie Holdom QFSM	<b>19</b>
Acting Chief Officers 1964-1974	<b>24</b>
NSW Board of Fire Commissioners	<b>25</b>
ACT Fire Brigade	<b>27</b>
Station growth and organisational change	<b>31</b>
ACT Fire & Rescue	<b>36</b>
Capability	<b>36</b>
Current strength	<b>38</b>
Vehicle and equipment advances	<b>40</b>
Why yellow fire trucks?	<b>44</b>
Vehicles in 2013	<b>45</b>
ACT Fire Brigade Commissioners	<b>49</b>
Commissioner Jack Mundy QFSM 1974-1980	<b>49</b>
Commissioner Don Williamson GFireE 1980-1984	<b>50</b>
Commissioner Bill Kerr QFSM AFSM FIFireE 1984-1992	<b>51</b>
Commissioner Jim Dance MIFireE 1992-2000	<b>54</b>
Commissioner Ian Bennett 2000-2004	<b>56</b>

ACT Fire Brigade Chief Officers	<b>58</b>
Chief Officer David Prince AFSM 2004-2007	<b>58</b>
Chief Officer Brian Parry AFSM 2007-2009	<b>59</b>
Chief Officer Conrad Barr AFSM 2009-2010	<b>60</b>
Chief Officer Paul Swain AFSM 2010-2011	<b>61</b>
Chief Officer Paul Swain AFSM 2011-Present	<b>62</b>
The future	<b>64</b>
Station Upgrade and Relocation Program (SURP)	<b>64</b>



# F O R E W O R D

Every year the ACT community face devastating losses caused by fire and injuries to loved ones caused by motor vehicle and other accidents. Destructive bushfires and fires in critical infrastructure have significant impact on people, the economy and the environment.

Over the past 100 years ACT Fire & Rescue (ACTF&R) have been tasked with the protection and preservation of life, property and the environment in the ACT, a task that we have accomplished professionally regardless of time of day, day of the year and in all sorts of weather.

Fires of significance include the 2003 bushfires, the Mitchell chemical fire in 2011 and fires in major buildings throughout the capital. Other fires of significance have been the thousands of house fires we have responded to and the lives we have saved when responding to people's homes.

The Fire Service works in partnership with other agencies to deliver a range of services to the ACT community in what are at times very challenging situations, including all types of rescues, hazardous materials mitigation, storm response and emergency medical assistance.

ACTF&R sets high performance standards and expectations, it will continue to adapt in order for the organisation to be receptive to the type of response challenges faced by the community in the future.

Over the past 100 years there have been changes in technology, vehicles, training and almost everything else. What hasn't changed are some of the characters that make up the Brigade and our commitment to serving the community.

I hope you enjoy reading a snapshot of the past 100 years in this booklet.

Thank you to the volunteers from the Fire Brigade Historical Society for your efforts in producing this booklet.

Thank you to all of our Firefighters past and present who have provided such dedicated service to the people of the ACT over the past 100 years, usually done so with a smile and a touch of larrikinism.

Firefighters are special people and ACTF&R has a proud history of doing the best we can regardless of circumstances.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Swain', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Paul Swain AFSM

**Chief Officer**

## ESTABLISHING A CAPABILITY

The establishment of a Canberra Fire Brigade coincided with Australian Federation and the search for a National Capital. The decision to locate the Nation's Capital was made by the Commonwealth Parliament in 1908 and the declaration of the Australian Capital Territory was made in 1911.

Along with the development of the Australian Capital Territory was the need for services to protect and support the growing Territory and its occupants. The provision of a Fire Brigade was amongst the myriad of capabilities that needed to be created.

Papers sourced from the National Archives of Australia detail a report from the Brigade to the Commonwealth Department of the Interior highlighting that “*Fire Prevention and Fire Protection activities were commenced at Canberra in June 1913*”.

In 1913, a firefighting machine was purchased by the Federal Capital Territory and delivered to Mr. Brilliant, Officer in Charge of all works in the Federal Capital Territory.

This equipment was then provided to Inspector James Brackenreg who was the Inspector of Lands, Home and Territories Department. Mr. Brackenreg was given the services of the men listed below for the purposes of fire prevention work.

- Mr. Ryan
- Mr. McIntosh
- Mr. Murty, and
- Mr. Maloney

This group was tasked with preparing fire breaks by back burning around;

- The Brickyards
- ‘Yarralumla’ Homestead and Woolshed
- Red Hill Camp.

This activity was undertaken to train men and secure valuable property. The firefighting machine was then to be placed at the 11 Mile Camp and was to respond to fires in case of outbreak.

200 fire beaters were also purchased and located at 18 strategic locations around the Territory in case of fire outbreak.

The caretaker of the Observatory was tasked with constantly being on the lookout for fire, and was to telephone the Central Administrator and give warning should a fire occur.

All men owning horses or bicycles were advised that upon the outbreak of fire, they were to proceed rapidly to the fire, and for their services rendered they would be paid time and a half.

This entire organization was to be under the immediate control and direction of Mr. Brilliant.

On 19 June 1914 Percy Douglas was tasked with providing fire safety reports for buildings in the Canberra area.

On 19 August 1914 the Canberra volunteer Fire Brigade was inaugurated and a set of rules established, placing the Brigade under the control of the Canberra Fire Board. The object of the Brigade was to *“protect public and private property in and about Canberra from damage by fire, also the rescue of salvage”*.

The Fire Brigade was required to consist of the Chief Officer, Deputy Chief Officer, Foreman and 25 active members.

On 24 August 1914 the Canberra Fire Board was formally established and held its first meeting. The Board consisted of the following members:

- Mr. HM Holland
- Mr. HC Connell
- Mr. FA Pigginn

On 27 August 1914, Mr. PF Douglas was appointed as Chief Officer by the Board.

On 16 February 1915, approval was given to Chief Officer Percy Douglas to take one 24 hour day off duty each week.

On 6 July 1915 it was reported to the Board that there were 20 active members of the Brigade, and that a fire alarm bell had been installed at the station.

On 10 November 1915, Chief Officer Percy Douglas took occupation of the fire station and street alarms had been installed and connected to the station. It is assumed that this station was in the Acton area, operating from a building near the Acton Guest House on the Molonglo River, possibly in Liversidge St, but these facts are yet to be confirmed.

On 12 November 1915, Mr. George Wilson was placed in charge of the horse at the station. It was also noted that the horse and engine was not to be made available to the Bush Fire Association as it was for the protection of buildings in Canberra.

On 25 November 1915, a letter was distributed to all Canberra residents informing them that the fire alarms had been installed and commissioned, and in the event of a fire they were to use the alarms to raise the Fire Brigade.

On 11 January 1916, Mr. G Wilson was appointed as Deputy Chief Officer of the Canberra Fire Brigade by the Fire Brigade Board.

The Brigade was disbanded during World War I, only to be re-established in the 1920's operating from a building at the rear of the old Power House in Kingston.

Information on the initial strength of the Canberra Fire Brigade varies depending upon which source is referenced. Some sources suggest that it consisted of six volunteer members and a horse-drawn pump. Others suggest there was Chief Officer Percy Douglas, two volunteers and a horse-drawn pump. The only consistent reference has been to the horse-drawn pump!

Documents in the National Archives indicate that an allowance was paid for the use of a horse and sulky, however a memorandum to the Accountant in the Lands and Survey Branch records that the allowance ceased on 10<sup>th</sup> November 1922, the assumption being that this is when the horse drawn hose pump was withdrawn from active service.

In a letter from Chief Officer Douglas to the District Surveyor in 1916, the strength of the Brigade was recorded as:

• Fire stations	1
• Waterous piston pumping engine	1
• Hand hose reel	1
• Houses	1
• Canvas hose	2280 feet
• Hand Chemical extinguishers	50
• Fire buckets	91
• Delivery branches	20
• Water pressure gauge	1
• Testing couplings and hose	1
• Fire axes and belt	2
• Hose boxes	17
• Telephone alarms	5
• Uniforms	1
• Fireman's helmets	1
• Hydrants	9

Occurrence books that record activities and fire calls attended by the Brigade from 1914 to 1924 have not been tracked down yet. However it is noted in the minutes of the Canberra Fire Board that the occurrence books had to be tabled weekly by the Chief Officer for the Board to review.

Canberra Fire Brigades first recorded fire call in the 1924 occurrence book states:

*August 1924 Sunday 10*

*7.55 PM. Fire Alarm. Turn out to chimney fire at Yarralumla House. The full Brigade turned out, smartly, and in thirteen minutes we were on the job.*

*The three chems used were not very effective, so we had to get the hose to work. 10.10 PM everything safe, we returned to station.*

In November 1922 the Canberra Fire Brigade took delivery of a Ford motor vehicle which was used as a Fire Brigade Inspection Car. In 1923 records indicate that this vehicle was very expensive to run and another Ford motor vehicle was taken delivery of in July 1923.

In April 1925 the second vehicle broke down on the way to a fire at Parliament House resulting in damage to the value of £20. This incident started a series of letters seeking a new Fire Brigade Inspection Car that would carry a CO2 extinguisher, a Pyrene (chemical) extinguisher and two lengths of hose, modelled on a vehicle used in Melbourne.

Correspondence in relation to this vehicle is currently held in the National Archives and contains 97 pages of correspondence between the Commissioner of the Federal Capital Commission and the Chief Lands Officer, the Chief Engineer and Controller of Stores from the Federal Capital Territory Branch.

In June 1925 approval was granted by the Commissioner of the Federal Capital Commission to purchase an Armstrong Siddeley vehicle from Auto Car Industries in Melbourne at a cost to the Commonwealth of £465. Mr JTM Goodwin, Chief Lands Officer then requested Mr J Dudley, Secretary of the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board to task Chief Officer Lee of the Melbourne Fire Brigades (MFB) to oversee the construction, a task he readily accepted.

There are also a number of letters held at the National Archives between Chief Officer Douglas and Chief Lands Officer clarifying the terms of private use and the extent that the Chief Officer can drive the vehicle when not attending fires, including an admonishment to the Chief Officer from the Commissioner in relation to private use of the vehicle.

In 1924 the Brigade received its first motor powered fire engine which was a converted Hotchkiss chassis and it operated throughout the 1930's as a combined fire engine and ambulance. In the period 1925 to 1932, five permanent officers were appointed and a further two appliances were purchased.



1924 Hotchkiss & Chiefs Car circa. 1928

Occurrence book one records the arrival of uniforms for the firefighters. The entry reads:

*June 1924 Monday 23*

*Uniforms arrived from Melbourne. Six firemen issued with 1 cap, 1 tunic and 1 pair trousers.*

The roster for that week lists the following members:

- Chief Fire Officer PF Douglas; and
- Firemen:- W. Maloney, J. Skelton, G. May, W. Boyd, D. Brown and B. Crowe.

Staffing numbers were also difficult to ascertain in the Canberra Fire Brigades early years. The electoral rolls have been used to find an indication of numbers and while not definitive, it gives an indication of Brigade strength. The following list details the number of people who recorded their occupation as firemen, cadet firemen, firefighter or Chief Fire Officer in the following years;

- 1916– Six;
- 1917– Five;
- 1928– Nine;
- 1935– Six;
- 1943– Ten;
- 1949– Ten;
- 1955– Nineteen;
- 1959– Twenty eight; and
- 1967– Sixty eight.

During the 1920's and 1930's it was reported that consideration was given to the establishment of a Fire Brigade Headquarters in the City Centre (Civic), with support from the Canberra Chamber of Commerce for this initiative. These discussions have waxed and waned for over 70 years with numerous Chief Officers advocating for a central station concept in the Civic area, with none seeing the concept become a reality.

On 13 November 1933, a memo was sent to the Chief Officer reminding him that Canberra firefighters are not entitled to take sick leave with pay.

In 1935 the Brigade formally assumed the additional role of the Ambulance Service. This combined service moved to the Forrest Fire Station site in 1939. It was from this location that Canberra Fire Brigade protected the ACT Community until the addition of the Ainslie station in 1962.

On Saturday March 12 1938, an article appeared in *The Canberra Times* celebrating the Canberra Fire Brigade since its reestablishment. It was reported that at this time the strength of the Brigade was;

- 2 Officers;
- 8 other ranks;
- 1 Dennis fire engine capable of pumping 350 gallons per minute;
- 1 Sunbeam fire appliance; and
- 1 Albion grass fire fighting engine.

It was also reported that since 1923, the Brigade had attended 340 calls, 97 of which were building fires.

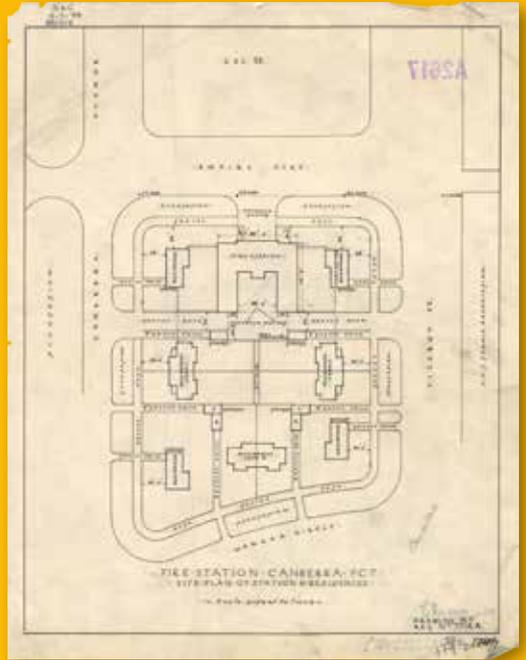
The Canberra Fire Brigade has a long and proud history of helping our neighbours. The following information is sourced from the Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service and details assistance provide to them from the Canberra Fire Brigade during World War II.

*The Chief Fire Officer of New South Wales and staff at the Department of the Interior agreed that the Chief Fire Officer's position should not be filled on a permanent basis because the officer concerned might 'stagnate'. Instead, it was decided that officers of the Canberra Fire Brigade fill the position on a three-year rotational basis. The person selected as the first permanent Chief Officer of the Darwin Brigade was E.G. Bailey, then of Canberra.*

*Chief Officer Bailey arrived on 31 October 1941 and assumed command that same day.*



Canberra Fire Brigade Training at the rear of Yarralumla (now Government House) c1920s



Original Plans for Forrest Fire Station

*On 19 February 1942, the Japanese launched the first of many air raids against Darwin. The Northern Territory Fire Service thus served under enemy fire, the only capital city Australian Fire Service to do so.*

*In April 1942, the military authorities assumed responsibility for fire fighting, commandeering the civilian fire fighting appliances. The 'partly paid' firemen were, according to one report, 'absorbed into the forces'. Bailey and O'Brien returned to Canberra and New South Wales respectively after the general evacuation of civilians from the town of Darwin.*

On 1 February 1943, Miss M Beggs was appointed to the Brigade as a part time watchroom attendant and is recognised as our first female employee.

In September 1946, *The Canberra Times* reported that the hours of work for Fire and Ambulance members was to be reduced from 112 hours per week to 84, with an additional increase in staffing by eight.

Following a major fire in the Sydney Building in December 1950, calls were once again made to establish a second station on the north of the Molonglo River, and that two separate bodies were required to manage the Fire Brigade and Ambulance Service.

Editorial comment in *The Canberra Times* during this period focussed on the need for a surge capacity should more than one fire occur at the same time, and highlighted that the supposed strength of the Brigade of 22 was actually a strength of 14, 7 of whom are available at any given time.

This period of establishment was consistent for one thing, and that was that Chief Officer Percy Douglas was at the helm throughout.



Chief Officer Percy Douglas

## CHIEF OFFICER PERCIVAL (PERCY) DOUGLAS

Chief Officer Percy Douglas led the Canberra Fire Brigade between 1914 and 1952. He is still the Territory's longest serving Chief Officer.

Mr Douglas came to Canberra from the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade's Board with the mission to establish a fire service for the National Capital.

Mr Douglas's tenure with the Canberra Fire Brigade was interrupted when he temporarily resigned from the fire services in October 1916 and enlisted and proceeded on active service. Mr Douglas served with the 36<sup>th</sup> Heavy Artillery group as a gunner. He served in France and Belgium from May 1917 and returned to Australia in May 1919 before being discharged and returning to Canberra to resume duties in August 1919.

Mr Douglas resumed the position of Chief Officer and in early 1920 the telephone number attached to his residence was 'Canberra 1'.

Mr Douglas is credited with establishing the Women's Fire and Ambulance auxiliary, which at its peak had 30 active volunteers and provided invaluable support to the Canberra Fire Brigade.

Mr Douglas is widely recognised in Canberra for establishing community and sporting activities for the early ACT Community. He was one of the first Presidents of the Canberra Returned Soldiers Club and also founded the Canberra Branch of St. Johns Ambulance Association, an association that led to the amalgamated fire and ambulance service in Canberra.

His sporting activities included the ACT Cricket Association, Canberra Swimming Club, the Kingston Tennis Club, Canberra Rugby League, Acton race course establishment, Ainslie Tennis Club and Ainslie Cricket Club, Canberra Amateur Boxing and he regularly led gymnastics classes for all ages.



1914 Canberra Fire Brigade football team

In 1926 he established the Canberra Fire Brigade Recreation Club, was a founding member of the Canberra Club and assisted in the establishment of the Manuka swimming pool.

Not a great deal has been written about life as a firefighter working with Chief Officer Douglas at this time, but in an oral history provided to the Canberra Fire Museum, the late Mr Clem Hamilton described life as the child of a firefighter who lived in the fire station precincts in the 1920's and 1930's.

Mr Hamilton's father, Archibald (Archie) Hamilton was a Senior Firefighter with the Canberra Fire Brigade from 1926 until 1944. He recalls living in Giles Street Kingston and the fire trucks being stationed in a tin shed at the back of the old powerhouse in Kingston.

Fire calls in those days came in on a party line telephone that rang with two short rings and then one long ring. Upon the receipt of a fire call, firefighters left their houses and mustered on the corner of Giles and Gosse Streets where they were picked up by the fire engine.

Mr Hamilton remembers fire points or break glasses being spread around Canberra for use by members of the public who did not have access to telephones. He also recalls driving around Canberra testing the fire points with his father and driving to such exotic locations as Molonglo (now Fyshwick) and Tharwa. He recalls the Molonglo site as it was the site of an internment camp for German immigrants during World War I.

Mr Hamilton had fond memories of the Sunday Cricket games at the Powerhouse between the Police and Firefighters, who played for the McDougal Cup, and Sunday night entertainment at the Services Club, (renamed the Canberra Services Club). During World War II these entertainment nights were hosted by the Canberra Fire Brigade in support of overseas servicemen based in Canberra as part of the war effort.

Archie Hamilton suffered a workplace injury that resulted in him losing a part of his leg. Archie had his pay reduced to that of firefighter following an administrative

review into his capabilities. As a result of complications from his injury he passed away on 4 October 1944.

Clem Hamilton recalls that an administrative decision was made and his family was moved out of the Fire Brigade accommodation after his father's death, but the level of support provided by the firefighter to his family left a lasting and positive mark on him as a person.

In 1937, correspondence from Mr PA Gourgaud, Assistant Secretary of the Department of the Interior, which was noted as being approved on 29 July 1937 by the Minister for the Interior, related to the establishment of a Fire Brigade Employees Superannuation Scheme. This correspondence recommended that the retirement age of the Chief Officer should be 65 years and Officers and men should be 60 years.

The correspondence also lists the establishment of the Brigade as follows:

- P Douglas;
- W Maloney;
- A Hamilton;
- A Maugher;
- H Stephenson;
- A Bennett;
- E Bailey;
- C Lomax;
- T Hynes; and
- J Baker.

Canberra could not staff a fire service during the World War I due to manpower shortages and this was a situation Chief Officer Douglas was apparently not keen to see replicated during World War II. In July 1942 he pleaded with the Department of the Interior not to call up any of his 12 permanent staff members for active service due to the impact this would have on the level of fire protection

in Canberra. This did not stop firefighters wanting to serve and a number enlisted for military service.

On 23 March 1944, Canberra Firefighter Edwin William ‘Bluey’ Fleming (RAAF service number 432634) lost his life in a training accident while preparing to protect our nation in World War II.

Bluey Fleming commenced his career with the Canberra Fire Brigade at 08.30 on July 7 1941, having been employed as a cadet fireman. His appointment is noted in a minute paper for the Executive Council on July 16 1941 which was forwarded to the Governor-General for approval.

Bluey Fleming was one of 15 applicants for the position of cadet fireman, and he was appointed along with Mr E C Hiland and Mr T F Hopkinson on an annual pay range between £86 and £216 depending on age.

Two applicants were excluded from the process and it was noted by Mr H R Waterman, Acting Assistant Secretary of the Canberra Services Branch that *“It would be undesirable to appoint father and sons in the same organisation for disciplinary reasons”*.

The suburbs of Turner and O’Connor benefited from the support of Chief Officer Douglas when he introduced volunteer hose units into those suburbs in June 1949. The units were the predecessor of today’s Community Fire Units.

At his farewell dinner on Saturday 2 February 1952, Percy Douglas was remembered for instilling the traditions of the Melbourne Fire Brigades within the Canberra Fire Brigade and was applauded for the Brigades reputation for *“never having failed to put a fire out”*, a tradition that continues today.

Mr Douglas oversaw the extinguishment of a number of large fires during his tenure. The incidents include:

- Eastlakes fire in January 1928;
- Causeway Dairy Fire in September 1935
- Building fire at the shop fitting works of TW Robins in Oaks Estate in September 1937; and

- Kingston sawmill fire in January 1942.

In recognition of his legacy to Canberra, the Perce Douglas Memorial Playing Fields in Nicholls and Percy Douglas Lane in Kingston are named in his honour.

Chief Officer Douglas passed away at home listening to ANZAC day ceremonies on the radio on 25 April 1955.

## T R A N S I T I O N   Y E A R S

Following the retirement of Chief Officer Douglas, the *The Canberra Times* reported that with the Chief Officer position vacant, it was time to investigate a national fire service as the enemy of fire is no different to the enemy faced in wartime. The article suggested that Canberra could become the model upon which the States could model their Fire Services.

There was also a call for dialogue with NSW to appoint a Chief Officer who could integrate operations between Canberra Fire Brigade and the surrounding areas of NSW.

Just two days after the retirement of Chief Officer Douglas on 4 February 1952, Canberra firefighters battled major fires which destroyed parts of the Mt Stromlo observatory and then moved into the suburbs, threatening the Governor Generals residence at Yarralumla. These major wildfires were eventually stopped at the intersection of Mugga Way and Flinders Way, however outbreaks continued on into New South Wales.

On the 6 February 1952, *The Canberra Times* called for a coronial inquiry into these fires.

In January 1953, two Senior Officers from NSW arrived in Canberra to take temporary charge of the Canberra Fire Brigade and the ACT rural fire fighting service. One of these Officers, Inspector Charlie Holdom would become our second Chief Officer.



**Chief Officer Charlie Holdom**

## C H I E F   O F F I C E R C H A R L I E   H O L D O M   Q F S M

**C**harles Patrick Holdom was an Inspector from the NSW Fire Brigades and acting Chief Officer from his arrival on loan from NSW in 1953 until his appointment in 1958.

Chief Officer Holdom oversaw a period of extensive change and growth in the Brigade which included the establishment of 'B' Platoon on 4 Friday April 1958. This was the most extensive increase in staffing levels to the Brigade since its inception in the early 1920's.

The splitting of the Ambulance service from the Fire Brigade had been a discussion point since 1953. The change that was announced on 1 July 1955 finally occurred on 12 October 1955. The Ambulance Service was moved under the control of the Canberra Community Hospital and Mr Alfred Grant being appointed Ambulance Superintendent.

On Friday, 4 April 1958, the NSW Board of Fire Commissioners took over the Canberra Fire Brigade and the responsibility for fire protection in the ACT. This change in administrative arrangements saw an increase in the strength of the Brigade and also saw the historical support provided by Melbourne Fire Brigade swing towards the NSW Fire Brigades.

One rationale for the move to NSW was that an independent and isolated Brigade could not be expected to have the facilities or the scope for training and opportunity for promotion that it would have as part of a bigger service

The Canberra Fire Brigade had three Station Officers and 15 firefighters prior to takeover. Four of these staff members were transferred to the special service division to recharge extinguishers, look after hoses and maintain electrical equipment. Four Station Officers and 13 firefighters transferred from NSW bringing the strength of the Canberra Fire Brigade to:

- 1 Chief Officer;
- 4 Station Officers;
- 26 Firemen;
- 4 Special Servicemen;
- 3 Fire Appliances;
- 2 Water Tankers; and
- 1 Trailer pump.

Mr W J Lind, Assistant Secretary from the Department of the Interior was quoted at the time as saying *“Canberra is becoming the Hub of the Commonwealth... We have valuable buildings and they have valuable contents...All these things will place a great strain on services such as the Fire Brigade”*

Chief Officer Holdom was well known for his sage Fire Safety advice for Canberra and this advice was reported and quoted often. He was also responsible for the planning and fire safety preparations for the Royal Visit in 1954. During his tenure fire protection systems increased from one thermal alarm system to over 140



F12 motor Display at Treasury Building 23 April 1957



Changeover of Brass helmet to Plastic Forrest Fire Station circa 1968

systems. Chief Officer Holdom described himself as “*the watchdog of efficient fire precautions and means of escape*”

Chief Officer Holdom assisted in the establishment of a Fire Brigade at Tharwa to support that growing isolated community. He was also part of the negotiations that established the built up area of Canberra, to better define areas of control, following the outbreak of fire.

In October 1956 he led the call for a third platoon to be established in Canberra. In March 1962 he oversaw the opening of Ainslie Fire Station. This alleviated the problem of the Molonglo River possibly severing Fire Service delivery to the north of Canberra but did not quite address the issue of a centrally located fire station which had been around since the early 1920's.

In 1957, the Fire Brigades Ordinance was gazetted, bringing into effect legislation that provided the basis for the powers and functions of the Chief Officer. These powers were exercised by Chief Officer Holdom in practice at a variety of drills to demonstrate the capability of the Canberra Fire Brigade.

In July 1963 Chief Officer Holdom witnessed the introduction of the 000 telephone system into Canberra.

Chief Officer Holdom oversaw some major fires and incidents during his time with the Brigade. These included:

- 1952 severe bushfires in Canberra area;
- 1953 Melbourne Building fire;
- 1953 Explosion and fire at Molonglo Wood Plant;
- 1954 Hotel Canberra fire;
- 1956 Tyre fire Braddon;
- 1957 Fatal Plane Crash Duntroon; and
- 1967 National Library fire.

Industrial action also became a part of the Canberra Fire Brigade landscape during the 1960s as requests for pay and conditions went unanswered. In June

1960, Chief Officer Holdom recalled former firefighters to man the station due a walkout by firefighters.

Probably the most significant change that Chief Officer Holdom oversaw was the retirement of the brass fireman's helmet and the introduction of the revolutionary plastic helmet in May 1964.

For his service to the ACT community, Chief Officer Holdom was awarded the Queens Fire Service Medal in 1961, one of only 99 Australians ever to receive this honour.

Chief Officer Holdom retired in July 1964 and continued to live in Canberra where he passed away in July 1979.

## ACTING CHIEF OFFICERS 1964 - 1974

From the retirement of Chief Officer Holdom in 1964 through to the establishment of the ACT Fire Brigade there were a number of acting appointments as Chief Officer for the Canberra Fire Brigade.

Most notable for the duration of their acting appointments were Inspector Alf Morris from NSW who was promoted to the rank of Superintendent while in Canberra and then transferred back to Sydney.

Chief Officer Morris was followed by Inspector Jack Mundy who was appointed as Chief Officer in May 1965.

Incidents in this era included:

- 1966 fire in Mineral Resources building;
- 1969 Lyneham Primary School fire;
- 1969 Old Civic Police Station;
- 1970 five shops destroyed on Northbourne Avenue;
- 1971 Canberra floods;
- 1971 flash flooding Woden, with seven fatalities;
- 18 January 1971 triple bomb blasts at the Russian Embassy;
- 1972 Tudor House fire Yarralumla;
- 1972 Queanbeyan Leagues Club fire; and
- 1973 Canberra Theatre fire.

# NSW BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS

The Brigade continued to provide service to the ACT community while under the direction of the NSW Board of Fire Commissioners, with increases in capability and calls going hand in hand with an increase in industrial unrest.

Two new stations were opened in Canberra during this time. On 2 May 1969, Phillip Fire Station opened to service the growing Woden/Weston Creek community, and on 27 September 1971 Belconnen Fire Station opened. Each new station opening brought with it an increase in the strength of the Brigade.

In October 1969, a street parade was held to demonstrate the Canberra Fire Brigades capability and to highlight the need for fire prevention. The parade made its way from Childers Street through to Hobart Place where a demonstration of capability was held. It was not until 2013 that a similar parade was held.

On 18 January (a date that has become synonymous with major incidents in Canberra) 1975, one Station Officer and eleven firefighters were deployed to assist firefighters in Darwin after Cyclone Tracy.

In the late 1960's through to late 1972 industrial action was occurring on a regular basis within the Canberra Fire Brigade, with even the Chief Officer withdrawing his services due to a Senior Officers strike in NSW.

Arguably these ongoing industrial issues provided the right environment for NSW Authorities to commence discussions on the transfer of control of the Canberra Fire Brigade back to the ACT. In November 1972, ACT firefighters were treated as a separate group for wage and condition negotiations.

In June 1973 the Minister for the Capital Territory, Mr Enderby, announced that he had given approval for an independent ACT Fire Brigade to be established and that Canberra was now big enough to maintain its own Fire Brigade.

In November 1974, a three month trial of administration of the Fire Brigade by the Department of Capital Territories commenced. In February 1975 it was

announced that this trial would continue and the takeover of control by the ACT was to be delayed due to administrative reasons.

In November 1974, the Fire Brigade Administration Act was gazetted thereby legislatively creating the ACT Fire Brigade, however the actual creation did not occur until 16<sup>th</sup> January 1976.

Up until 1955 the 56 hour week roster worked by firefighters was two-day shifts, two night shifts and then two days off. This roster was followed by the triple eight roster which was in place until 1975. In May 1975 it was announced that a new rostering system would be introduced that would see firefighters working two ten-hour days and two fourteen-hour nights over an eight day cycle.

The transition from the triple eight roster did not go smoothly, with NSW blocking the change in its early stages. This opposition was overcome and eventually saw the commencement of the 10/14 roster that still continues today.

## ACT FIRE BRIGADE

On Friday 16 February 1976, Canberra Fire Brigade members officially became employees of the Department of Capital Territories and the ACT Fire Brigade came into existence.

Chief Officer Jack Mundy had been appointed Acting Commissioner in November 1974 to assist with the change in administrative arrangements, the position of Fire Commissioner was advertised in May 1975 with Mr Mundy being successful in securing this position.

The strength of the ACT Fire Brigade on transition day was reported as being:

- 1 Chief Officer;
- 3 Senior Officers;
- 27 Station officers;
- 83 Firefighters;
- 2 Service maintenance officers;
- 2 Technicians;
- 7 fire appliance;
- 1 ladder;
- 2 large water tankers;
- 2 small water tankers; and
- 4 portable pumps.

At this time approval was also given for the recruitment of 50 additional staff. This recruitment campaign culminated in what has since been colloquially referred to as “*The College of 50*”.

One important tradition that was essential upon the establishment of the ACT Fire Brigade was the design of an insignia and cap badge. This insignia was developed by Bob Lilley. When the insignia was designed, Mr Lilley was a senior firefighter attached to Phillip Fire Station and he retired as a Superintendent in June 1997.

The symbolism behind the badge is defined as:

**The Torch**-represents the tradition of the Fire Brigade and comes from the earliest Fire Services which were established by the Insurance Companies;

**The Shield**-represents the protection that ACT Fire Brigade provides to the Community;

**The Laurel Wreath**-represents the courage of the firefighters; and

**The Coat of Arms**-represents the ACT Community.

Staff members also designed and introduced a shoulder badge that was worn on uniforms.

With the expansion of the ACT Fire Brigade, new headquarters were required as the existing building adjacent to Forrest Fire Station (known as *The Castle*) was not large enough. A new headquarters building and a training tower were constructed adjacent to Belconnen Fire Station and opened on 2 February 1979.



The College of 50, 2 September 1976



ACT Fire Brigade Badge since 1950



Chief Officer and Station Officer Rooms,  
Forrest Fire Station



Training Tower Belconnen



Acting Commissioner Ted Stokes at ACT Fire Brigade HQ, Belconnen circa 1984

## STATION GROWTH AND ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

With the expansion of Canberra South towards the Tuggeranong Valley, a new station was opened at Kambah on 22 October 1979. This station included a workshop area designed to provide facilities to undertake regular servicing and maintenance on the ACT Fire Brigade's fleet of vehicles.

Charnwood Fire Station opened on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1981 to provide fire protection for the growing residential areas in West Belconnen.

The facilities at Forrest Fire Station were beginning to come under pressure as the station was over 40 years old. On 27 July 1983, a district station was opened at Fyshwick and became Number 1 station. The old Forrest Fire Station maintained a role as the ACT Fire Brigades communications hub.

In 1985, *The Canberra Times* awarded The ACT firefighter as *Canberran of the Year* in recognition of all firefighters' efforts as a result of fires around the region earlier that year.

In March 1986, headquarters was moved from Belconnen to the ANU Staff Centre until the need for additional space and the expansion of the Fire Safety Section saw a move to Swanson Plaza, Belconnen in November 1988. The facilities at Rae Street, Belconnen were retained as a designated training facility until 2012.

With further expansion to the south of Canberra, Chisholm Fire Station was opened on the 15 of October 1986, and Greenway Fire Station was opened on the 14 of December 1990.

In 1991, the ACT Fire Brigade became part of the newly formed ACT Fire and Emergency Services. This organisation was made up of the ACT Fire Brigade, The ACT Bush Fire Council and ACT Emergency Services. This body later became the Emergency Services Bureau (ESB) with the addition of ACT Ambulance coming under the administrative umbrella.





In September 1993 all of the Australian Capital Territories emergency administrative resources were brought together under one roof at the vacated North Curtin Primary School. At this time Communications facilities located at Forrest since 1939 were moved to Curtin; and Forrest was decommissioned as an operational site. Today the old Forrest Fire Station houses the Canberra Fire Museum.

On Friday 13 of February 1998 the ACT Minister for Police & Emergency Mr Gary Humphries, opened the Gungahlin Joint Emergency Services Complex (JESC). This facility houses ACT Fire & Rescue, ACT Rural Fire Service, SES Volunteers, ACT Ambulance and Australian Federal Police resources under the one roof.



Chief Officer Holdom and FF Pat Conway at Forrest switchboard circa 1956



Senior Firefighter Dean Lambert  
Forrest Communications Centre  
circa 1992

Following the 2003 Bushfires the ESB became the ACT Emergency Services Authority with all services working under the *ACT Emergencies Act 2004*. This was the end of another era when the Fire Brigade Act and Administration Act were rescinded.

In 2006, the ACT Emergency Services Authority was renamed the ACT Emergency Services Agency and was no longer a statutory authority, instead moving back under the administrative umbrella of the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

On 17 February 2009, the ACT Fire Brigade suffered its first line of duty death. Senior Firefighter David Balfour (415) died in Victoria while a member of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ACT taskforce deployed to assist the Victorian fire efforts. The ACT taskforce was staged at Alexandra, working on a fire line at Big River. David Balfour suffered head injuries and despite the best efforts of fellow firefighters and paramedics these injuries proved fatal.

David was posthumously awarded the National Emergency Medal with a Victoria 2011 clasp by the Governor-General in recognition of his significant efforts.

In 2011, all ACT Emergency Services Authority administrative resources and the Communications Centre (COMCEN) moved into a purpose built headquarters built on the former Fairbairn RAAF base at Canberra Airport. In 2012, a purpose built training facility was opened at Hume and Recruit College 34 was the first ACT Fire Brigade Recruit College to hold their passing out parade at this facility.

# ACT FIRE & RESCUE

In November 2011, the ACT Fire Brigade was renamed ACT Fire & Rescue to better reflect the diverse range of service that the organisation provides to the ACT Community.



The ACT Fire & Rescue badge was designed to retain the traditions of the ACT Fire Brigade badge

## CAPABILITY

In 2013, ACT Fire & Rescue provides the following capability to the ACT Community:

- Respond to structure fires;
- Respond to hazardous materials incidents;
- Respond to bushfires;
- Respond to chemical, biological and radiological incidents;
- Respond to vehicle fires;
- Assess fire engineered building solutions;
- Undertake motor vehicle accident rescue;
- Ensure fire safety compliance in buildings;
- Undertake confined space rescue;
- Conduct fire hazard inspections;

- Undertake trench rescue;
- Provide community education;
- Respond to building collapse;
- Provide emergency medical assistance;
- Undertake animal rescue;
- Coordinate community fire units;
- Conduct fire investigation;
- Conduct community events planning;
- Provide storm damage assistance;
- Conduct community safety planning;
- Respond to automatic fire alarms;
- Provide communications support to emergency agencies; and
- Provide assistance to community events and organisations.

In 2012-13 ACT Fire & Rescue attended 10,744 incidents. This involved 22,207 responses by operational crews, 277 of these incidents were structural fires.

ACT Fire & Rescue currently monitors 3,258 automatic fire alarms connections throughout the ACT. Compare this to five telephone alarms in 1916 and 140 automatic fire alarms in 1964.

Fatalities unfortunately occur in structure and vehicle fires and the ACT is not immune to this issue. Annual reports between 1974 and 1990 record 34 fatalities in the ACT as a result of fires, and the *Report on Government Services 2012* identifies 24 fatalities as a result of structure fires between 2000 and 2009. ACT firefighters work hard to reduce the impact of fires on the ACT community, and each fatality takes its toll on the community and its firefighters.

## CURRENT STRENGTH

The current establishment strength of ACT Fire & Rescue is:

- 1 Chief Officer;
- 1 Deputy Chief Officer;
- 4 Superintendents;
- 18 Commanders;
- 88 Station Officers;
- 226 Firefighters;
- 1080 Community Fire Unit Volunteers and Community Fire Unit; Administrative Support Volunteers;
- 15 Fire Brigade Historical Society Volunteers; and
- 4 Administrative support positions.

## ACT FIRE & RESCUE HAS A VEHICLE FLEET OF:

- 9 frontline Scania Pumps, 2 of which are heavy rescue pumps;
- 5 recall fleet Scania Pumps, 1 of which is a heavy rescue pumper;
- 1 Scania 44 Metre Aerial Appliance;
- 1 Isuzu Breathing Apparatus support vehicle;
- 1 Scania Hazardous Materials support vehicle;
- 2 Scania Hooklift Trucks;
- 13 Platform on Demand (POD) which includes the following capabilities:
  - Breathing Apparatus Support
  - Breathing Apparatus Accountability and Command
  - General Purpose
  - Mass decontamination
  - Rapid Decontamination
  - Rehabilitation

- Salvage and ventilation
- Technical Rescue
- Urban Search and Rescue 1
- Urban Search and Rescue 2
- Welfare;
- 2 Isuzu 2000 litre Compressed Air Fire fighting System (CAFS) Tankers;
- 2 Volvo 8000 litre Compressed Air Fire fighting System (CAFS) Tankers;
- 3 Hino large bushfire tankers;
- 2 Toyota Landcruiser light bushfire tankers;
- 1 Toyota Landcruiser off road vertical rescue 4 wheel drive;
- 1 Toyota Landcruiser off road rescue 4 wheel drive;
- 1 Mitsubishi logistics support vehicle;
- 1 Bobcat; and
- 54 Community Fire Unit Trailers.





The following is a chronology of information sourced from *The Canberra Times* and National Archives files, in relation to new fire engines and appliances that have been purchased and placed into service with the Canberra Fire Brigade and ACT Fire Brigade.

In May 1924, a fire engine based on a French Hotchkiss chassis was ordered through the Melbourne Fire Brigades which undertook the bodywork on the vehicle.

On 15 July 1927, an order was placed for an Albion fire truck which was due to be delivered in September 1927. The vehicle arrived on 25 November 1927 at a cost of £1650. It was described at the time as being *“As complete as a fire engine as can be bought in any part of the world”*.

The Albion was described as having:

- 4 scaling ladders
- 28 feet of suction hose
- A 200 gallon per minute pump at a pressure of 150 pounds Maximum speed of 40 MPH.

In a memorandum in 1928, Chief Officer Douglas noted that with a population of 10,000 three additional engines were required to achieve proper fire coverage of Canberra.

On 12 August 1929, the horse drawn fire engine was approved to be disposed of by auction.

On 20 July 1930, a Ford tray vehicle was transferred from the Parks and Gardens fleet to the Fire Brigade and was given the call sign CL 38.

On 24 December 1930, a Baby Austin was delivered and placed into service for Brigade business.

On 30 June 1931, Chief Officer Douglas stowed his private vehicle with a hose and made it available to the Fire Brigade due to a lack of fire engines.

On 16 December 1931, it was reported that the Sunbeam fire engine was commissioned at 5 pm on the 14 of December and “*its performance was most satisfactory*”

In 1941, the fleet of the Canberra Fire Brigade was reported as being:

- Dennis Fire engine;
- Sunbeam Fire engine;
- Albion Fire engine;
- Inspection vehicle C 590;
- Utility C 617;
- Buick ambulance; and
- Austin ambulance.

On 1 December 1942, two trailer pumps with 250 gallon per minute capacity and one with 500 gallon per minute were received and placed into service.

On 10 December 1942, an International fire engine was ordered with a body build to the approved cost of £375.

On 3 May 1942, it was reported that the Chevrolet utility truck C 8649 was stolen and later found in Civic with minor damage.

On 1 September 1951 the 1927 Sunbeam fire truck was sold at auction to a Mr J Swan for the price of £270.

On 14 May 1952, it was reported that a new truck and a 120 foot ladder had been ordered, however this vehicle never made it to Canberra because it could not fit in the Forrest station.

On 18 August 1952, a 650 gallon tanker wagon for fighting grass fires was delivered.

On 31 October 1955, orders were placed for a new fire engine.

On 15 April 1957, a new Dennis fire engine ordered in October 1955 arrived. The vehicle was described as having:

- 150 horsepower engine;

- 800 gallons per minute pumping capacity;
- 100 gallon auxiliary water tank; and
- 50 foot wheeled escape ladder that could “*reach all points of any building in Canberra*”.

On 30 June 1959, the Albion fire engine placed into service in July 1927 was decommissioned and offered up for auction.

In February 1971, the Brigade received what was described at the time as being “*one of the latest and best equipped fire engines in the world*”, the Dennis fire engine which was built in England and powered by a Jaguar motor.

The second *ACT Fire Brigade Annual Report 1975-76* stated that total expenditure for the Brigade in its first full year of operations was \$1,798,015 which included \$74,040 for the purchase of two Volvo F86 fire appliances.

On 31 August 1976, three more new Volvo F86 fire engines arrived and were placed into service. These vehicles were manufactured at a cost of \$125,691 each and were stationed at Ainslie, Phillip and Belconnen.

In 1980, three new vehicles were purchased. The first was a Ford F350 which was purchased at a cost of \$27,579 and was used as a rescue vehicle. Two Volvo F7 appliances were also purchased at a cost of \$91,829 each.

In 1981, the Dennis Jaguar purchased in 1971 was disposed of by auction.

On 6 March 1983, it was reported that the Skyjet which cost \$208,000 had arrived but was not yet in service.

On 23 December 1983, a Mercedes 911 water tanker arrived and was placed in service. The vehicle cost \$42,000 to build and had a 2700 litre water capacity.

These tankers replaced the Dodge water tanker which was then converted to a Breathing Apparatus support vehicle and then a canteen van.

On February 28 1984, it was reported that the Skyjet was still not placed into service.

In 1985, two Mercedes 911 water tankers were purchased and placed into service.

On 2 July 1986, it was reported that training had begun on the new series of Mark 3 pumpers.

On 23 June 1988, the 1928 Dennis pumper was repurchased by the ACT Fire Brigade at a cost of \$10,000 and placed into the Museum.

On the same date it was reported that a 30 metre hydraulic platform valued at \$700,000 had been ordered and two more of the Mark 3 pumpers were ordered at a cost of \$260,000 each.

On 23 November 1989 the hydraulic platform or Bronto arrived and was placed into service. The vehicle was 13 metres long, 3.8 metres high, weighed 21 tonnes and had a reach of 30.3 metres or a height of 10 storeys.

In 1998 the first of the new series 4 Scania pumpers arrived and was placed into service. These vehicles became the basis of the current ACT Fire & Rescue fleet and are without doubt the most popular and reliable fire engines used in the ACT.

In 2000, a process began to dedicate Scania pumpers in honour of the Commissioners and Chief Officers who had led the ACT Fire Brigade since its inception. Each new pumper was commissioned into service with the name of a previous Fire Commissioner or Chief Officer and their period of service on the door of the vehicle.

## WHY YELLOW FIRE TRUCKS?

The 1979-80 Sixth annual report identifies that a Volvo F86 appliance purchased that year had been painted with a lime yellow reflective band around it to provide easier identification as part of a trial.

In the *ACT Fire Brigade Annual Report 1984-85*, an article appears in relation to the successful trial of a Volvo F7 painted yellow conducted at Belconnen Fire Station. The report goes on to state “*The Brigade has been concerned for some years at the problems caused by the ‘fire engine red’ appliances on the road becoming invisible under certain conditions. Accordingly, one appliance was painted lime green in order to examine safety aspects of appliances both at incidents and when responding to calls. As a result of*

*favourable reports received from the operational area the Brigade has adopted the policy that all new appliances will be lime green”*

In 1986, the Mark 3 pumpers purchased were all delivered painted yellow following a successful trial of a yellow fire truck and agreement between the Fire Commissioner and the Union that yellow was a safer colour as it was “*more perceptible*”.

Today all ACT Fire & Rescue appliances are officially painted Scania paint code 1396349 which is described as either ACT fire yellow, ACT green or ACT Fire & Rescue lime/green.

### VEHICLES IN 2013

ACTF&R currently has five front line Varley Type 4 pumpers in the fleet. These pumpers carry a minimum crew of four at all times, comprising of a Station Officer and three Firefighters, with the capacity to increase the crew to four Firefighters should the need arise.

The Varley Type 4 pumpers include many functions the primary ones being rescue and fire suppressions capabilities. Other capabilities consist of foam making and pumping, Breathing Apparatus (BA), ladder rescue, Hazmat, medical emergencies, the ability to store personnel protective equipment and equipment to perform many other rescue functions.



Varley Type 4 mid ship pumper and heavy rescue pumper

ACTF&R currently has in service a Bronto 44 metre aerial appliance capable of performing both rescues at varying heights and is utilised as a firefighting appliance. The Telescopic Ladder Platform has a minimum working height of forty four (44) metres (measured from the base of the cage to the ground) with telescopic lower booms and an articulated telescopic upper boom, hydraulically operated with a fixed waterway and escape ladder fitted to the Base Vehicle.

The Bronto is presently stationed at Fyshwick fire station and carries a crew of two Firefighters both qualified in Bronto aerial firefighting.

ACTF&R presently has a specialised HAZMAT vehicle capable of responding to and managing hazardous materials, chemical, biological and radiological (CBR), post fire atmospheric monitoring and fire fighting support response. The vehicle is located at Fyshwick Fire Station and is staffed by a Station Officer and three Firefighters.



**BRONTO Aerial Appliance (44 RLX)**



**HAZMAT Support Vehicle**

ACTF&R currently has two heavy and two light Compressed Air Foam System (CAFS) tanker units strategically located north and south of Lake Burley Griffin. The CAFS units work in tandem, to assist in the protection of life and property, when responding to bush and grass fire incidents in the built up area as well as the rural interface of the ACT.

The great advantage of these appliances is the ability to generate and apply large amounts of 'sticky' foam to structures and vegetation that are at risk from fire.

The units are staffed by a Station Officer and three Firefighters and are located on the south of the ACT at Chisholm Fire Station and in the north at Gungahlin Fire Station.



Compressed Air Foam System (CAFS) Tankers

# ACT FIRE BRIGADE COMMISSIONERS

## JACK MUNDY QFSM 1974-1980



Chief Inspector Jack Mundy, from NSW Fire Brigades, was appointed Fire Commissioner of the ACT Fire Brigade in November 1974. Mr Mundy began his Fire Service career with the NSW Fire Brigades at the age of 16 as a cadet firefighter. Mr Mundy was appointed to the position of Fire Commissioner in 1976. Mr Mundy retained this position until his retirement in 1980 after serving 48 years as a firefighter.

Mr Mundy worked through some difficult and challenging issues in his tenure. He oversaw the introduction of new fire tunics following an on duty injury to a firefighter whose tunic caught fire battling a blaze at The Causeway. The opening of Kambah Fire station was delayed due to issues raised by firefighters in relation to the design and on-site parking. One success story was the design and building of the training tower at Belconnen which in its day cost \$140,000. This tower is still used as a training prop today.

In December 1975, Commissioner Mundy called for a program of post occupancy inspections of premises in Canberra to ensure they still complied with fire safety regulations. One fire safety issue that he oversaw was the removal of community hose carts from the Canberra suburbs of Oaks Estate and Pialligo. This followed the removal in previous years of similar carts from O'Connor, Fyshwick and Hall. It would not be until 2004, following the devastating 2003 Canberra Bushfires that a similar system would be reintroduced.

Major incidents that Commissioner Mundy oversaw included;

- 1976 Cusack's fire;
- 1976 St Vincent de Paul shop fire Dickson;

- 1977 Centre Cinema explosion and fire;
- 1977 Jolimont Centre fire;
- 1978 Jamison Shops fire; and
- 1978 Mitchell Shops fire.

Mr Mundy was an accomplished cricketer in his time and had a Sheffield Shield batting average of 38.66. In 1976 Mr Mundy was awarded the Queens Fire Service Medal, one of only 99 Australians ever to receive this honour. Mr Mundy passed away on 16 May 2003 after a long battle with illness.

### **DON WILLIAMSON GFireE 1980-1984**



Mr Don Williamson was born in Brisbane in 1929. In his younger years he served with the Navy, before joining the Brisbane Metropolitan Fire Brigade in 1955. Mr Williamson enjoyed studying and gained his Graduate qualifications from the Institution of Fire Engineers in 1959. In 1961 he moved from the Brisbane Metropolitan area to the Queensland

outback town of Mary Kathleen.

It was during this regional posting that he saw an advertisement for Officers in the Hong Kong Fire Service, and was successful in his application, serving there from 1963 until 1966 where he reached the rank of Divisional Officer. Mr Williamson was involved in a major fire aboard a ship carrying chemicals in Victoria Harbour in Hong Kong where he was trapped in the hull for a period of time. This incident affected his health in later years.

Mr Williamson returned to Australia in 1966 and was unable to secure a position with a fire service, so took on work as a Fire Prevention Officer with the Post Master General. It was during this time he was selected to attend the prestigious 16 week fire safety course at Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire, England.

Mr Williamson was successful in securing a position as a District Officer with ACT Fire Brigade in 1974. He was soon promoted to the rank of Superintendent,

the first under the ACT Fire Brigade, and eventually replaced Jack Mundy as Fire Commissioner in 1980, a position he held until he retired in 1984.

Industrial relations issues during Mr Williamson's tenure turned to rescue. The dispute over rescue responsibilities between Police and Fire Services grew during this time. Mr Williamson was able to secure the purchase of the much loved Mercedes water tankers in December 1983, a vehicle that was the favourite of most ACT firefighters.

Major incidents that occurred during Mr Williamson's tenure included:

- 1982 Truck fire incident where the vehicle was carrying Toluene Diisocyanate;
- 1983 Melba house fire - three fatalities;
- 1983 Higgins house fire- one fatality;
- 1983 Parthenon Restaurant fire;
- 1983 Belconnen Markets fire; and
- 1983 Multiple shooting and fire fatality at a house in McGregor.

Mr Williamson passed away on 19 April 2003.

### **BILL KERR QFSM AFSM FIFireE 1984-1992**



Mr William (Bill) Moore Gould Kerr served as Fire Commissioner of the ACT Fire Brigade from 1984 until 1992.

Mr Kerr began his long and distinguished Fire Service career in the UK, joining the Hartlepool Fire Brigade in 1951. He progressed through the ranks being promoted to Station Officer in 1965, Assistant Divisional Commander in 1972, and Assistant Chief Fire Officer in 1979. In 1980 Mr Kerr was appointed the Fire Master in Lothian and Borders (Edinburgh) Fire Brigade.

In recognition of his contribution to the UK Fire Services he was awarded the Queens Fire Service Medal in 1984. This is the same year that he retired from

the UK Fire Service, immigrated to Australia and was successful in securing the position as ACT Fire Commissioner.

Mr Kerr was heavily involved with the Australian Fire Authorities Council, where he served as Chairman, and with the Australian Fire Prevention Association. He was awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal in 1990 in recognition of his contribution to the Australian Fire services, and is one of only a handful of firefighters who have been recognised with an Imperial and Australian Honour for services to firefighting.

Commissioner Kerr's tenure as ACT Fire Commissioner can only be described as tumultuous. He was locked out of his office for around 12 months due to industrial action. This occurred after the announcement of his appointment as Fire Commissioner. Following this he worked hard to gain the trust of firefighters, the Government and the ACT Community.

During Mr Kerr's time as Fire Commissioner, inquiries and reviews into the ACT Fire Brigade prevailed.

The Committee of Enquiry into the ACT Fire Brigade was established in 1986, following an extended period of serious industrial disputation. These disputes were mainly centred on the appointment of Mr Kerr as Fire Commissioner. The report from the Committee of Enquiry, known as the Attwood Report, was tabled in August 1986 and was scathing in its criticisms, making 97 recommendations for improvements that could be made to the ACT Fire Brigade.

Further reviews that involved the ACT Fire Brigade included:

- 1988 Purdue Report
  - focussed on a comprehensive model for management development and training;
- 1991 Hannan Report
  - Review of the effectiveness of fire and emergency service organisations

- Recommended that the ACT Fire Brigade, ACT Rural Fire Service and ACT Emergency Services be merged into a new service-ACT Fire & Emergency Services.

On 23 September 1992, the Minister for Urban Services advised that the Government was not going to proceed with any proposed full merger. Instead the Government opted for a combined administrative organisation, and each of the services maintaining its operational identity.

Commissioner Kerr acted in the newly created position of Director ACT Fire & Emergency Services until it was filled by Mr Glenn Gaskill.

Significant incidents that occurred during Commissioner Kerr's tenure included:

- 1984-85 bushfires;
- 1984 Manuka Village fire;
- 1985 National Library fire;
- 1985 house fire, Fadden, three fatalities;
- 1985 house fire, Macgregor, four fatalities;
- 1988 factory fire, Geelong Street Fyshwick;
- 1988 Greens Removals fire;
- 1988 major church fire, Holder;
- 1989 house fire, Chisholm, two fatalities;
- 1989 house fire, Hackett, one fatality; and
- 1989 house fire Fisher, one fatality.

Mr Kerr also led firefighting operations from the front at a fire at the CSIRO in February 1986 when firefighters were on strike.

Other notable achievements included:

- The appointment of the ACT's first fulltime female firefighter in 1989;
- The purchase of the 30 metre Bronto Skylift; and

- Assisted with the purchase of the 1928 Dennis pumper from a local collector for the Canberra Fire Museum.

Mr Kerr's most significant achievement was the establishment of a contemporary rescue capability for all ACT fire appliances and rescue training for all ACT Firefighters.

Former ACT Firefighter and current Chief Officer of the Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service Mr Steve Rothwell AFSM, sums up Commissioner Kerr by saying:

*“The major influence in my career and the driving force for me to go further was Commissioner William (Bill) Kerr. He was a hard man, a proud man, a man steeped in tradition and importantly a visionary man. He put the fire service back into the fire service and was instrumental in the transformation of the ACTFB from being a dysfunctional family to a contemporary fire and rescue service”.*

Mr Kerr passed away in Canberra on 14 August 2007, after a long illness.

## **JIM DANCE MIFireE 1992-2000**



Mr Ronald James (Jim) Dance commenced as Fire Commissioner following the retirement of Mr Kerr.

Mr Dance commenced his career as a maths and science teacher at the Brunswick Technical College in Melbourne. He left this job to join the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade where he became the youngest person to reach the rank of Superintendent.

He left the fire service and took up a role with emergency management Australia as Deputy Director at their Mt Macedon facility. He then joined the Commonwealth Public Service and worked at the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) before taking up his role as ACT Fire Commissioner.

Fire Commissioner Dance worked during an era of substantial change for the ACT Fire Brigade. The transition into the Emergency Services Bureau, the

amalgamation of administrative resources and support into the one facility at Curtin as well as constant change were all factors that influenced his tenure.

Final implementation of recommendations made in previous reports and additional reports and enquiries drew in the ACT Fire Brigade during Commissioner Dance's tenure and included:

- 1992 Purdon Report Review of the Hannan Report; and
- 1993 McDonald Report.

The McDonald Report made a total of 35 recommendations and was designed to review and examine aspects of the ACT's emergency services to determine the most appropriate structure for the provision of services, to determine if co-location or other rationalisation of emergency services was required, and the most appropriate means of training for emergency service workers.

Commissioner Dance will be best remembered for his commitment to national incidents and the development of a national Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) capability. Mr Dance supported and funded international experts to travel to Australia in 1995 and conduct a national Category 2 USAR training course.

Mr Dance supported the first large scale deployments of ACT Firefighter Firefighters firefighters interstate since cyclone Tracy, and our first international deployment.

These deployments included:

- 1994-95 Sydney bushfires;
- 1997 Thredbo landslide;
- 1999 Sydney hailstorm; and
- 1999 Taiwan USAR deployment.

Major incidents that occurred in Mr Dance's tenure included:

- 1993 MiG aircraft crash, Narrabundah;
- 1993 Childers St theatre destroyed by fire;
- 1994 Jolimont Centre siege and fire;

- 1994 Cooleman Court fire;
- 1997 July Canberra Hospital implosion;
- 1997 Foreign Affairs building fire, Barton;
- 1998 Finnish Club fire, Jamison; and
- 2000 March Manuka Football Club explosion.

Mr Dance retired on 17 April 2000. In his farewell message to ACT firefighters, he noted “*The Brigade has moved from a single focus fire service to a multifaceted fire and rescue organisation with a preeminent role in emergency management... The specialist rescue, Hazmat and fire fighting expertise of the Brigade’s firefighters is widely recognised throughout Australia*”

### IAN BENNETT 2000-2004



Mr Ian Bennett joined the ACT Fire Brigade as an 18 year old in The College of 50, September 1976. He was the first ACT Firefighter to work his way from Recruit College to the top position in the organisation.

Mr Bennett took on the role of Fire Commissioner during a period of transitional change and restructure. Where previous Commissioners had direct reporting lines to the responsible Minister, changes to governance structures and legislation placed additional levels of structure between the ACT Fire Brigade Commissioner and the Minister. The introduction of the *Emergencies Act 2004* and transition out of the *Fire Brigade Act 1957* was a pivotal part of the change that occurred during this period.

Fire Commissioner Bennett oversaw the ACT Fire Brigade as it worked its way towards formalised, national competency-based training frameworks, national qualifications and standards.

Commissioner Bennett was seen as the firefighters’ Commissioner and was respected for his ability to interact on the same level with everyone, from recruit firefighters through to Ministers.

Following the 2003 bushfires, Commissioner Bennett moved from the role of Fire Commissioner to work on the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce where he worked until June 2004. In July 2004 Mr Bennett took on the role of Commander of the Joint Emergency Services Training Academy (JESTA) and then took on the role of Assistant Commissioner (Emergency Services Agency), People and Development, before taking up a position in Private Industry in September 2006. Major incidents that occurred in Commissioner Bennett's tenure included:

- 2001 light plane crash and fire, Canberra Airport;
- 2001 Christmas bushfires;
- 2002 Mooseheads nightclub fire;
- 2003 January 18 fires; and
- 2003 Canberra Airport Hanger collapse.

Commissioner Bennett also oversaw the ACT Fire Brigades commitment to the 2000 Sydney Olympics and the events that were held in Canberra.

# ACT FIRE BRIGADE CHIEF OFFICERS

## DAVID PRINCE AFSM 2004-2007



Mr David Prince moved to Canberra from Adelaide in 1977 to join the Commonwealth Police. On 12 February 1981, Mr Prince joined the ACT Fire Brigade in Recruit Class 6 after encouragement from his father in law, Superintendent Don Williamson. Both Mr Prince and Mr Williamson were to hold the top position within the ACT Fire Brigade throughout their careers.

In April 1986, during a period of industrial activity within the ACT Fire Brigade, Mr Prince left to further pursue his career with the Police. He quickly realised that the Police Force career was not for him and he returned to the ACT Fire Brigade in January 1987.

During his career Mr Prince worked in operations, training and on numerous specialist projects. At the time of the 2003 Canberra Bushfires, Mr. Prince was working as Deputy Director of the Communications Upgrade Project which was reviewing and introducing a new computer aided dispatch system for the ACT Emergency Services.

Mr Prince acted in the position of Fire Commissioner from February 2003 until June 2004, and was appointed as Chief Officer on 1 July 2004.

Chief Officer Prince worked hard to rebuild the ACT Fire Brigade after the devastating 2003 bushfires, dealing with concerned community groups and a disenfranchised workforce. Mr Prince oversaw the introduction of the Community Fire Unit program, and ensured that Senior Officer positions within the ACT Fire Brigade were permanently filled.

Chief Officer Prince also worked on the introduction of a capability model to define the linkages between ACT Government outputs and outcomes and provided a basis for securing Commonwealth fire payment funding.

Major incidents that occurred in Chief Officer Prince's tenure included:

- 2004 Namadgi fire;
- 2005 biological substance identified at Indonesian Embassy;
- 2005 multiple suspicious packages identified and delivered to Canberra buildings;
- 2005 Koomari building fire Phillip;
- 2005 Yarralumla Brickyards fire, two houses destroyed, two damaged;
- 2005 ANU explosion and fire; and
- 2006 Roof collapse Joint Staff College, Weston.

Chief Officer Prince resigned in May 2007 to take work for the Australian Federal Police in a command training role.

### **BRIAN PARRY AFSM 2007-2009**



Mr Brian Parry began volunteering as a firefighter in his twenties. He became a professional firefighter in the 1970s, worked for four years as a firefighter with NSW Fire Brigades and then joined the New South Wales Bush Fire Service as a fulltime employee.

In 1993 he was appointed Manager of State Operations shortly before the state's worst fire season, when 67 fires raged in northern New South Wales. Mr Parry subsequently moved to

Erowal Bay in southern New South Wales and was appointed Fire Control Officer for the Shoalhaven area.

In December 2001/January 2002 Mr Parry was in charge of a major bushfire emergency and was responsible for the safety of thousands of people in the Shoalhaven district. His efforts and fire prediction modelling saved numerous

townships in the Shoalhaven area. This same area was subjected to fire threat in December 2002, and not long after these fires were controlled, crews from the Shoalhaven were assisting the ACT in January 2003.

Brian Parry was awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal in 2000 for distinguished service, and in 2003 was awarded the honour of Australian of the Year, Local Hero.

In 2007 Mr Parry was appointed to the role of Deputy Commissioner of the Emergency Services Agency (ESA) with oversight as Chief Officer for ACT Fire Brigade, ACT Rural Fire Service and ACT SES. Chief Officer Parry had the Deputy Chief Officers, responsible for each service, reporting to him.

Chief Officer Parry oversaw and coordinated the deployment of ACT Fire fighting resources to the Victorian Bushfires in 2009. Mr Parry recalls this as one of his best achievements, seeing all of the ACT's operational resources working together towards one common goal.

Chief Officer Parry supported training and a common understanding of Incident Control Systems for all ACT responders, and engaged instructors from Queensland to assist deliver that training in the ACT.

Chief Officer Parry was passionate about firefighter safety, in particular the effects that carbon monoxide has on firefighters, and the impacts of occupational exposures leading to cancers in firefighters.

Mr Parry retired in mid 2009.

### **CONRAD BARR AFSM 2009-2010**

Following the retirement of Chief Officer Brian Parry, the role of Chief Officer was filled by Deputy Chief Officer Conrad Barr. Mr Barr filled the position during a period of change and review that ended with the announcement that the Government would be re instigating the role of Chief Officer for the Territories operational services. This change was part of a process to further strengthen the ESA's governance framework.

## PAUL SWAIN AFSM 2010-2011

Chief Officer Paul Swain was appointed to the role of ACT Fire Brigade Chief Officer in May 2010. Mr Swain was previously an Assistant Chief Officer with the Melbourne Fire and Emergency Services Board and came to the ACT Fire Brigade with extensive experience in the technical and strategic aspects of metropolitan firefighting.

Chief Officer Swain has overseen a number of major incidents and deployments including:

- Queensland Floods 12 January 2011
  - two firefighters deployed to Queensland as part of a NSW Urban Search & Rescue Medium Taskforce;
- Christchurch New Zealand earthquake 22 February 2011
  - four firefighters deployed to Christchurch as part of a NSW Urban Search & Rescue Heavy Taskforce on 22 February;
  - three firefighters and two paramedics deployed to Christchurch as part of an Australian multi agency Urban Search & Rescue Heavy Taskforce on 5 March;
- Japan earthquake and tsunami 11 March 2011
  - two firefighters and two station officers deployed to Japan as part of an NSW Urban Search & Rescue Heavy Taskforce;
- 28 April 2011 Canberra Services Club fire; and
- 15 September 2011 Mitchell chemical fire and explosion.

On 4 November 2011, Mr Swain oversaw changes and the renaming of the ACT Fire Brigade to ACT Fire & Rescue. This change was announced by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Mr Simon Corbell MLA. The name change was aimed at better reflecting the diverse range of service, including rescue services, ACT Fire & Rescue provides to the ACT Community.

## **CHIEF OFFICER ACT FIRE & RESCUE PAUL SWAIN AFSM 2011-PRESENT**

Chief Officer Swain continues to oversee a dynamic forward looking organisation. ACTF&R vehicles, equipment, personal protection clothing and training are equivalent to the best throughout Australasia. Professional development programs have been established for all Firefighters and Officers, while a career development framework is in place for technical skill acquisition.

ACTF&R have embraced modern incident management processes and structures, while enhancing capabilities for chemical, biological and radioactive response. Our career Firefighters are multi skilled, while our Volunteers are intertwined with their local communities. The Fire and Rescue Service is well placed to meet future challenges in meeting the needs of our community in emergency response and management activities.





# THE FUTURE

## STATION UPGRADE AND RELOCATION PROGRAM (SURP)

The Station Upgrade and Relocation Program is about improving community safety for Canberra as the city expands and the population grows. It seeks to reduce, and where possible, prevent the impact of emergencies should they occur. This includes particular attention to the protection and preservation of life, property and the environment.

Extensive analysis has been undertaken into where ambulance and fire stations should be located in the Territory for at least the next 40 years. The studies identify options as to where new ESA stations will be required to meet current and projected demand as the city grows.

The Station Upgrade and Relocation Strategy was prepared from the study findings. Since then an Implementation Plan has been developed in close consultation with operational staff to determine the most effective way to deliver the recommended service improvements.

Subject to ACT Government budgetary and statutory approvals, the ESA plans to deliver emergency service improvements to the ACT in four phases.



Artist impression of South Tuggeranong Station

Phase	Stations	Services	Work
<b>Phase 1</b>	<a href="#">South Tuggeranong</a>	F&R	New station
	<a href="#">Charnwood</a>	AS/F&R	New station
	<a href="#">Aranda</a>	AS/F&R	New station
<b>Phase 2</b>	<a href="#">Fyshwick</a>	AS/F&R	Major upgrade
	<a href="#">Pialligo</a>	F&R	New station
	<a href="#">City</a>	AS	New station
	<a href="#">Calwell</a>	SES	New base
	<a href="#">Gungahlin</a>	RFS	Minor upgrade
	<a href="#">Greenway</a>	AS	Adaptive Reuse
<b>Phase 3</b>	Kambah	F&R	Major upgrade
<b>Phase 4</b>	Molonglo	AS/F&R	New station
	Phillip	AS/F&R	Major upgrade or relocation

At the completion of the Station Upgrade and Relocation Program, ACT Fire & Rescue will be far better positioned to provide emergency response capability for the protection of the ACT community well into the future. Capability will be increased through a total of 11 stations that are strategically located close to the major arterial road network.

Our facilities will be built to last, by using robust and fit for purpose construction materials and thoughtful design that incorporates end user input, to support the critical operational activities of the ACT Fire & Rescue.

