

NSW Rural Fire Service
The Award of the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM)
Honours and Awards Queen's Birthday 2009

Jim Chivas

Jim Chivas is both an employee and a volunteer in the Rural Fire Service. He has served in virtually every major fire in the Blue Mountains since the 1950s. He has held the rank of Captain and Group Captain and has led major deployments of fire fighting units throughout New South Wales, served on numerous incident management teams and made a major contribution to the development of remote area fire fighting techniques.

At a time when most people his age would be considering retirement, and in the wake of the major fires of 1994, he joined the Rural Fire Service as a full-time employee. His career as a teacher over several decades and his Masters qualification in teacher supervision, combined with his decades of extensive bush fire fighting experience made him ideal for a senior training role. His understanding of training issues, not only in the Rural Fire Service, but in the Australian vocational education and training system, is regarded widely as "leading edge".

As an employee of the Service, he has been responsible for the development of numerous training programs concerned with training trainers, assessors and training coordinators; and senior staff and volunteers in the management of large scale fire fighting operations. He was instrumental in enabling the Service to become a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) to deliver nationally recognised training and has participated in the development of national training standards and training materials. Some 2000 trainers and 1000 assessors in the Service have benefited directly from his work. Few members have had such a positive and pervading influence on the performance of the Service in serving the community.

Further, he has consistently displayed outstanding dedication to promoting the needs, capabilities and reputation of the Rural Fire Service. He is a model employee who has mastered the often difficult task of balancing the responsibilities of work, volunteer involvement and home life. He is well liked and respected as a person who epitomises fairness and the volunteer ethic, and he has displayed an outstanding talent to resolve conflicts and grievances in ways that often lead to remarkably positive results.

He is a most worthy candidate for the award of the Australian Fire Service Medal on the basis of his highly dedicated service, spanning five decades as a volunteer and thirteen years as a permanent employee that has visibly improved the effectiveness and reputation of the NSW Rural Fire Service; his assistance to numerous members of the Service with their work and his safeguarding of the community in way well beyond those expected of an individual.

Brett Bowden

Superintendent Bowden has provided 28 years of devoted service to the NSW Rural Fire Service as both a volunteer and salaried member of the Service. During his tenure with the service he has been instrumental in providing inspiration and leadership to an innumerable number of fire fighters throughout the Hunter and Western areas of the State.

He joined the Rural Fire Service as a volunteer in 1980 with the Salt Ash Rural Fire Brigade in the Port Stephens District. He immediately became involved in completing training and then assisting with training in the Brigade and also the Mallabulla Rural Fire Brigade. In 1990 he was appointed Deputy Captain at Seaham Rural Fire Brigade and the following year he was appointed as Captain, a position he held until 1995. During his early volunteer days he was actively involved attending and leading fire fighters in wildfire responses and he also played an active role during the response to the Newcastle earthquake.

In 1995 he was appointed Fire Control Officer with Cabonne Shire Council. He assumed the role after a very unsettling period with the local area having seen three Fire Control Officers move through the role in a very short period resulting in volunteers becoming disillusioned with the system. He immediately set about developing strategic relationships, re-building trust and earning the respect of the volunteers. At this point the volunteers had expected more of the same and did not believe that Superintendent Bowden would be able to provide the necessary skills set to ensure that the needs of the volunteers were met.

Having developed a respectful relationship with the volunteers, he embarked on an extremely challenging program of call out procedures, paging and communication systems and training. He became one of the pioneers in the Service with the use of aircraft. In typical fashion, he achieved all that he set out to achieve and in the process, he won not only the respect of the volunteers but also a high level of respect from his peers.

He was appointed Superintendent Operations for the Canobolas Zone in 2004 allowing him to focus on the operational side of the Zone for which he had a passion. During his current tenure he has put into place the necessary steps to ensure the Zone fleet will be completely diesel powered by the end of 2009. He has also been instrumental in having communications in the zone upgraded so that “black spots” are no longer an issue for the volunteers. He has also ensured that equipment levels are of the highest standards and that all fire fighters enjoy a level of support and safety which is second to none.

Superintendent Bowden’s commitment and support of the volunteer members of the Service is exemplary and he has ensured that they have all that is needed to tackle incidents both small and large. His ability to support and ensure that the best is attained from all members of the Service is a further reflection of this commitment to maintaining a high level of competence within the Zone. He will not shy away from a discussion when the credibility of volunteers and subordinates is at stake.

He has given tirelessly of himself to the benefit of the Service and the community and is highly deserving of the award of the Australian Fire Service Medal.

Christopher Barron

Superintendent Barron commenced employment with Jerilderie Shire Council as its Fire Control officer on 17 July 1996. Prior to his appointment the duties of the Fire Control Officer were carried out by the Shire Engineer. The then Jerilderie District Bush Fire Brigade did the best they could with the resources at their disposal with training and tanker allocation being virtually non-existent and the organisational structure being at best, basic. Upon his appointment and in the face of initial scepticism from some quarters, Superintendent Barron totally transformed the Jerilderie District Rural Fire District into a cohesive, organised, trained and equipped contributor to the local and state-wide operations of the Rural Fire Service. He achieved this result through an absolute commitment to the District's volunteers. It was this quality which set him apart from his peers. Coming from a long term background as a volunteer, he came to the role of Fire Control Officer with credibility and an ability to engage both short term and long term volunteers on their own terms. He has the hands on experience in fire fighting and an engaging manner that exudes confidence to the volunteers. This was crucial in bringing volunteers, especially long term ones, around to accept the massive changes that needed to happen to modernise the District's structure, particularly in terms of command structure, the wearing of personnel protective equipment, training requirements and the supply of brigade tankers.

He is totally committed to improving the lot of the volunteer. He is also consistently approachable beyond the hours of duty for any reason. Where possible, he makes all administrative calls after hours to minimise interruption to the busy volunteer's working days. The lines of communication to him are always open. He never belittles the volunteers; rather he encourages the individual or group to obtain a higher level of commitment and achievement. He has nurtured and encouraged young community members, some from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, transforming them into competent and enthusiastic volunteer fire fighters, and valued members of the community enhancing their self esteem and sense of belonging.

Following his appointment, Superintendent Barron was also able to break down the barriers that existed locally between the Rural Fire Service members and members of the NSW Fire Brigades, uniting the two agencies into a cohesive and effective fire fighting and emergency response force. His vision for training has been endless. Apart from running the standard Rural Fire Service courses, he has instigated additional programs such as a weekend 4WD tanker driving course conducted in the mountainous terrain around Tumut, designed to provide drivers from the flat terrain areas with the skills to competently and safely drive tankers in the terrain that they would typically find themselves when participating in Section 44 rural bush fire emergencies. Programs such as this have imparted the skills, knowledge and confidence to volunteers from flat terrain areas to enable them to make a valuable contribution to Section 44 campaigns in mountainous terrain, something that did not occur previously.

He also implemented a tanker replacement program soon after his appointment. When he assumed the duties of Fire Control Officer only two of the District's thirteen brigades had a Rural Fire Service supplied and dedicated tanker. Through his tireless efforts, every Rural Fire Brigade in the District now has a good quality, diesel powered tanker. It is the belief of the District's volunteers that his absolute commitment to their welfare, advancement and ethos combined with his many years of distinguished service, makes him a worthy candidate for the award of the Australian Fire Service Medal.

Statements of Nomination

Rural Fire Service Nominations for the Award of the Australian Fire Service Medal
Queen's Birthday 2009

Alfred Kenneth Raistrick

Group Captain Alfred Raistrick joined the Cobbitty Rural Fire Brigade in August 1952 at the age of 12. At that time, it was not uncommon for members of local brigades to be of quite a young age. He has since continued to be an active member of the Rural Fire Service for over 55 years.

He was integral to the development of the Cobbitty Brigade in their early years, and participated in all facets of brigade activity. He attended many incidents that occurred in the Camden District and across New South Wales as a fire fighter and he developed extensive skills in this regard. Further, he was involved in the continued development of the Brigade's fire fighting resources and training. He made significant contributions to the design and construction of brigade tankers during their early developmental years, and he became a mentor to newer fire fighters with the brigade. In recognition of his dedication and commitment he was awarded Life Membership of the Cobbitty Rural Fire Brigade in 1991.

He has undertaken a variety of core Service and specialist training courses aimed at providing the highest level of service to the Brigade, the Service and to the community. He has participated in training at all levels of the organisation and his accumulated experience has been a great source of information and insight to many fire fighters. He was appointed to the position of Group Captain in 1990 and he continues to hold this position.

He has also been involved in many significant bush fire events during his 55 year career. Notably, he participated in major fires in the 1967/68 bush fire season at Yanderra, in the 1980s at Baulkham Hills, Liverpool and the Royal National Park, Cootamundra in 1990, the 1994 Sydney Bush Fire Emergency and in 1997 in the Hawkesbury area and in 2001, the Sydney Christmas Bush Fires. Additionally, he has also been involved in many incidents in the role of Crew Leader, Group Leader, Sector Commander, Division Commander, Task Force Leader and Service Liaison Officer. His expertise extends beyond the role of fire fighter and fire manager and his skills have been called upon to assist other agencies with resource management and coordination.

Group Captain Raistrick was heavily involved as a representative of his volunteers during the formation of the Macarthur Zone, where the Districts of Camden, Campbelltown and Liverpool were amalgamated into a single entity. He has also participated in a number of events as a mediator and played a supporting role to volunteers during times of hardship and distress. He has participated in the resolution processes associated with grievance and dispute handling and has consistently been a responsible leader and mentor to those who serve with him and under him. In 1997, he transferred his membership to Camden West Rural Fire Brigade and he continues to provide the same support and guidance in that brigade as he has provided in his many years of service.

He has provided over 55 years of dedicated and distinguished service to the people of New South Wales. He continues to be a respected and valuable member of the Rural Fire Service. He is a most worthy candidate for the award of the Australian Fire Service Medal.

Keith Darral Butt

Group Captain Butt has been a member of the Rural Fire Service since he joined in 1960 at age 17. He has always been active in the Monteagle Rural Fire Brigade. Monteagle is a small village just outside of the township of Young. He rose through the ranks of the brigade to become Brigade Captain in 1988, a position he held for 12 years, until he relinquished this position to become a Group Captain in 2000.

During the past 40 years, Group Captain Butt and his family have been heavily involved in every aspect of the Rural Fire Service (his son is currently the Brigade Captain). His wife, Gail is the District’s Communications Operator and their children Andrew, Denise, Phillip and Glen and their families have become an invaluable part of the Service fabric with the Zone. Group Captain Butt has been a leader, change manager, fire manager, active participant and committee member within the local Rural Fire Service Zone. He was instrumental in the initial arrangement for the “Zone” being put into place between the Councils of Harden, Boorowa and Young. Without his stewardship, the bringing together of this group was considered to have not been possible. He has also been heavily involved in training and he became an Instructor in 1996 and has assisted in all levels of training on a yearly basis ever since.

He has also been an active member of the South West Slopes Zone Bush Fire Management Committee, Senior Management Team, Zone Discipline Panel, Training Committee and Group Captains/Captain Forums. He has also participated in many out of area strike teams and task forces, both as a leader and participant, attending incidents at Pilliga, Blue Mountains, Tenterfield, Orana and Goobang. He is always willing, ready and able to respond day or night to protect the community.

The Butt family were the force behind the creation of a catering trailer, equipped to feed fire fighters in the field from grants from local retailers and the Rural Fire Service Association. The family also assist providing the much needed food and welfare to the volunteers at incidents.

Group Captain Butt has been a driving force behind the incremental changes with the South West Slopes Zone, including the change to tankers from pumps and trailers, the implementation of Personnel Protective Equipment and its wearing by the volunteers and the local community education arrangements. He continues to show a selfless attitude towards the Service, often forgoing his farming operations in preference to his Service duties. He is a strong, diligent, caring and compassionate leader of volunteers creating an environment whereby the volunteers will follow his direction without fear. His service has been distinguished in every way and he is a worthy candidate for the award of the Australian Fire Service Medal.

James (Jim) Thomas Smith

Deputy Group Captain Jim Smith joined the Middle Dural Rural Fire Brigade in 1975 after experiencing a devastating fire in the District in that year. As an Engineer in large scale building projects, he brought to the Rural Fire Service excellent leadership skills, attention to detail and abilities to achieve outcomes and manage time so important to volunteers.

He quickly developed an exceptionally acute understanding of fire behaviour, brigade operations and volunteer ethics. After holding a number of deputy positions he was appointed Brigade Captain in 1992 and held this role for 16 years, accepting a Group Captain role in 1997. Under his leadership, the brigade developed into a vibrant and dedicated team of members whose commitment and reliability was outstanding, a quality which remains today. He structured the management of the brigade involving the members in all facets and developed local bush fire fuel management programs enhancing the role of the brigade within the community. He has implemented building extensions and upgrades to the brigade station including a major rebuild in 2006 ensuring an appropriate environment for the benefit of members. His expertise in project design, management and supervision has also been freely given to the District station rebuild programmes including the Fire Control Centre.

Operationally, his knowledge and his capacity to think strategically, to apply and act tactically particularly while under pressure is a real asset to the Service. His demonstrated leadership abilities from small to major incidents are excellent and these are also applied across the full spectrum of incident management tasks.

His commitment and dedication have not only been confined to his brigade but to the District and Service as a whole. Within the District, he is active on the Senior Management and Training Committees and is a representative on the Bush Fire Management and Planning Committees. He actively carries out his Group role working with the staff, members and the community, setting direction with well constructed opinions.

From the outset he has been part of the establishment and ongoing success of the Rural Fire Service Association Inc in the District and through Region and State still representing on the Operations Group, Workers Compensation Committee and inputs into the Technical Sub Committee.

Having devoted immeasurable time and energy to the Service he still advances with boundless enthusiasm and at the same time maintaining his commitment to his family and career. He is held in the highest regard by all members of the Service in the District and all would agree he is more than worthy of the award of the Australian Fire Service Medal.
