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L. J. MO

For Cyclone  
Alby file please  
5/59X

REPORT ON THE CYCLONE CRISIS IN THE SOUTHERN REGION :

APRIL 4/5th 1978

1. Introduction

This report briefly describes events in the Southern Region associated with the passage of Cyclone Alby on the 4/5th April 1978. Deficiencies and strengths in the organization and operation of the Dept during this crisis are listed and recommendations made.

2. Passage of the Storm

2.1 Forecasts. On Monday 3rd April the F.D. 1615 forecasts for southern region were "Cloudy with chance of light rain, winds variable up to 20 kph".

The 0745 forecasts on Tuesday 4th were "Patchy rain with a risk of a thunderstorm, outlook a few showers. Winds NE to E from 10-30 kph". This was revised at 1015 hrs on the 4th, giving winds for Pemberton and Bridgetown now as

1000 - 1200	NE	30
1200 - 1400	NE	50
1400 - 1600	NE	70.

2.2 Actual Weather. Overnight the 3rd & 4th 1.22 mm of rain fell at Manjimup and 1.4mm at Pemberton. Conditions were cool and overcast, with winds from E & NE.

At about 1230 the winds suddenly freshened and went N & NW. Wind strength climbed throughout the afternoon and evening, reaching strengths over 100 kph at Manjimup HQ by 2100 hrs.

At 2300 hrs wind strengths began to abate and moved into the west. Drizzly rain fell until about 0500 hrs on the 5th.

In summary : the storm lasted approx 8-10 hrs from about 1700 hrs on the 4th to about 0200 on the 5th.

There was a delay time between events at Manjimup and Pemberton and Walpole of about 1 hour respectively.

From daylight on the 5th, conditions were cool and cloudy with occasional showers and winds S & SW.

3. The position of the F.D. on the 4th

3.1 Prescribed Burning. Between the opening of the burning season and April 4th, the following had been carried out in the Southern Region :-

13 Karri Regeneration Burns

1 Aircraft Burn (actually carried out by Central Region, but in Pemberton Division)

2. Handburns

With the exception of last listed, all had been mopped up by March 31st. The nursery windrows had been lit on April 3rd and were still being burnt up on the 4th.

Both Pemberton and Manjimup divisions sought approval for new burns on the morning of the 4th. These were initially approved, but after the 1015 revision, approval was withdrawn.

In Summary : only one "live" F.D. burn in the region on the afternoon of the 4th.

- 3.2 Staff & Resources. Supt. Smart was on leave in Tasmania, A/Inspector Bradshaw was at a meeting in Como, DFO Bryant on ARL at Walpole, For. Kitson on ISL and D/F Court on S/L. Remaining staff on duty in their respective divisions.

Manjimup crews and Pemberton D4 were at the Nursery burn. All other crews on non-fire control work.

- 3.3 Detection. Because of O/N rain, spotter schedules originally were Walpole NIL, Pemberton & Manjimup PM circuits only. All spotter flights were cancelled after receipt of high wind forecast, and aircraft were tied down on Strip. Consideration was being given to detection alternatives when the Kirup Red Action was called at 1225 hrs.

#### 4. Diary of Events

4.1 Mobilization In response to the Kirup R.A. call, immediate despatch was made from Manjimup of 2 gangs, 2 H/D and 3 officers. A subsequent call from Nannup called for 3 Pemberton gangs and Heavy Duties and then a further call came from Kirup for the D6, a D4, 4 more gangs and H/D and 2 further officers.

All of these despatches were completed by 1530 hrs.

The Northcliffe gang and H/D were brought up to mind the Nursery windrows.

4.2 Organization. At 1400 hrs it was decided to establish an LFO at Manjimup in order to (i) co-ordinate supply of plantation Red Actions, (ii) regroup and control all remaining Sth resources in the event of local crisis and (iii) establish an intelligence group to substitute for detection system.

The LFO comprised :-

Controller	:	SDFO Underwood
Intelligence	:	DFO Sanderson
Supply	:	DFO Lush
Despatch	:	DFO Walker
Industry Liaison	:	DFO Harvey
Forest Assistant	:	F/A Peos.

Divisional OICs (Heberle, Sneeuwjagt & McKenzie) were advised to consider themselves as "sectors" of this regional LFO group.

The first meeting of LFO staff was held at 1500 hrs, tasks allotted to all participants, and the Manjimup DHQ converted to action stations.

All research and I & P staff were placed on standby until further notice. Divisional OICs were instructed to recall all staff and troops to their respective HQs.

4.3 Detection. The Divisional Hazard/Risk plans were used to demarcate areas of high value and hazard. Officers were dispatched to each of these and requested to report all smokes.

Office staff checked log books and plotted all smokes on P.P. recorded over previous 5 days.

4.4 Resources. After all despatches to Kirup and Nannup, fire fighting resources left in the Southern Region were :

- (i) Northcliffe gang & H/D at Nursery
- (ii) Harvey Hd/GT (O/S + 2) at Pemberton
- (iii) Pemberton No. 5 HD at Pemberton
- (iv) 2 Walpole gangs and H/D at Walpole, but with only 1 GT and 1 H/D, the others in workshops.
- (v) Pemberton D6 at Flybrook, Rupper 6 at Dombakup and Walpole 6 in Manjimup workshops. No low loaders.

By 1700 the following action had been taken : (i) Manjimup mechanics with spare parts sent to Walpole to repair their GT and HD, (ii) Walpole D6 put back together with old track gear, (iii) hired Bunning's low loader and low loader & TD 20 off Phil Brown, (iv) equipped a Manjimup tip truck with the D/b washdown unit to make a scratch H/D and, (v) sorted all T/As and Research and I&P personnel into small teams with hand tools and light vehicles.

4.5 The Fires. Reports of fires from ground recce staff, farmers, police and travellers came in with rapidity from about 1700 hours - for example :-

- 1630 : Officer reports regen burn at Iffley 3 "came to life and requires attention,"
- 1700 : Police report fire at Palgarup,
- 1805 : Settler reports escape from PP burn into Solai Block,
- 1815 : Farmers report Pemberton X-Rds Fire,
- 1930 : F/G reports Gandy's mill fire has escaped,

plus many others, mainly phone calls from settlers.

At about the same time Kirup office requested a further 7 officers be dispatched immediately.

LFO Group at Manjimup met and reviewed all knowledge on fires and resources. Decided to concentrate all resources on the defense of Manjimup. The Bridgetown-Manjimup Road was by this time impassable anyway.

The best information at 1900 hrs was that there were 3 fires immediately north of Manjimup, one tongue of which was only 300m north of the Overlander Motel.

SDFO Underwood called a meeting with OIC Manjimup Police (Sgt Dunlop) and Shire Clerk (M. Dunn). At this meeting it was decided to commence evacuation of townfolk in northern parts of town. All F.D.

"specialist" personnel were put onto this task.

The wind changed abruptly to the west at about 2300 hrs and heavy rain fell. Because of wet edges, roads everywhere blocked, lack of good intelligence and abatement of immediate threat to town, it was decided no further useful work could be done and most troops were sent home to rest before an 0600 recall.

The LFO was downgraded to Underwood-Walker-Lush-Peos until 0600.

Spotter aircraft flew at first light on the 5th and it was found that :

- (i) Manjimup division had 22 fires plus the bottom end of the Kirup fire;
- (ii) Pemberton had 4 fires;
- (iii) Walpole had 1 fire.

Fires generally involved both PP and SF.

Suppression began on a priority basis using scratch crews, volunteer B.F. brigades, contract machines and eventually the remaining F.D. crews after they had rested.

Officers and employees flown in from Northern divisions did some useful work where hand-tools could be used, or helped clean-up DHQ and open roads.

Over the next four days all fires were contained and mopped up.

#### 5. Deficiencies Noted in Organization or Performance.

- 5.1 Storm Warning. According to the Weather Bureau, cyclone warnings were issued from 4 a.m. on the 4th. These warnings should have been emphasised at 0745 and 1015. At no time was any official "alert" message received by A/OIC of the Region, SDFO Underwood.
- 5.2 F.D. Reaction Time after the 1015 revision was slow, e.g. Supt's meeting at Como should have been cancelled and senior staff returned to their operational positions.
- 5.3 Detection System. This failed under high winds, but there is little that can be done about this. Visibility in the Manjimup-Pemberton area was "5s all round" after 1500 hrs anyway due to smoke and dust coming down from the Blackwood fires.
- 5.4 Resources left in the Southern region after a full despatch to Blackwood Red Actions are so minimal that it must be accepted that this area is "sacrificed" under these conditions. This may require review in terms of the ability of remaining resources to protect major townships in a general calamity situation.
- 5.5 Communications. These worked particularly well for the Manjimup area, but were inadequate with respect to Walpole when their telephones went and the Mt Frankland repeater was destroyed. There is a need to review installation of SSB at Walpole.
- 5.6 C.E. Manjimup. No formal Civil Emergency procedures appear to exist for Manjimup and it was left to the F.D. to initiate and co-ordinate. The fact that a disaster was averted was more due to luck than anything else.

- 5.7 Manjimup Bush Fire Brigades are primitively equipped and poorly co-ordinated. They have no Radios and virtually no 4 WD fire units.
- 5.8 The Army Engineers were a huge disappointment. They did almost no work at all, their attitude was pessimistic and complaining. A great deal of F.D. time was wasted in mothering this pathetic little group.
- 5.9 Airlifted Fire Crews. The airlift of officers and gangs from the north which was organized by Como Control without a request from Manjimup Control, was not a success. These crews could not be equipped and therefore could do little useful work.

Neither could jobs be found for all the numerous officers flown in and attempts to return these personnel on the Thursday morning were repeatedly thwarted by Como Control.

Wherever possible infuture, gangs should travel by road in their own trucks, unless it can be pre-arranged to equip them on arrival.

- 5.10 Security of Manjimup office. There should be a review of the siting of this complex amongst tall pine trees.

## 6. Strengths Noted in Organization or Performance

- 6.1 The Regional LFO mounted in advance of local trouble on the 4th was very advantageous and operated smoothly.
- 6.2 Specialist Staff from Functional Group, I & P and Research performed very well in a number of different roles in a rapidly changing situation, revealing the depth in the F.D. staff.
- 6.3 B.F.B. Liaison Officers arrived early on the 5th and stayed for the duration. Their work with the Shire and Brigades was of a very high standard and took a lot of load off the F.D.
- 6.4 Dieback Hygiene and Q't provisions were religiously observed throughout - perhaps for the 1st time in an LFO in the south.
- 6.5 F.D. Plant & Equipment performed almost faultlessly. A minor problem with the Mack Low-loader was quickly repaired and only one H/D unit (the last of the old Coventry Climax pumpers) gave any problems.
- 6.6 Safety. No officer or employee suffered an injury and only two accidents to plant (a branch fell on a ~~Holden ute~~ <sup>18yr Holden ute</sup> and a Dihatsu collided with a stump in heavy smoke).
- 6.7 Burn Security. Of 16 F.D. burns carried out since the opening of the season, only 7 escaped, these escapes burnt only 119 ha, including 10 ha of P.P.
- 6.8 The Timber Industry co-operated fully. It was found to be advantageous to use DFO Harvey as Industry Liaison Officer as a separate LFO position from which he could maintain close contact with senior officers of the T. Industry in the area.

## 7. Conclusions

Solely from the fire viewpoint, the southern region emerged satisfactorily from the cyclone crisis. This was due to 5 factors :-

1. The light rains which fell on the night of the 3rd and 4th, raising SMC's throughout forest areas..

2. The heavy rain which came in on the wind shift at 2300 hrs on the 4th.
3. Good preparedness in that the LFO was thoroughly established in anticipation of the crisis itself.
4. Steady and affective staff work at all levels over the tidy-up days on the 5th & 6th.
5. A high degree of courage, discipline and dedication by all in the organization.

It now appears that the long-term problems of forest damage and loss of recent-burning effectiveness due to massive branch and leaf fall throughout the forest will be the major legacies of the storm.



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