



Hazel Smith with the 'heroes of the Valley' - Eugene Winmar and Gary Doust (standing) and Doug Giles and Owen Donovan. Photo by Bruce Telfer



The inscription says it all. Photo by Bruce Telfer

BRAVERY AND APPRECIATION AWARD

Presented to:

JARRAHDAL FIRE CREW
WHO RISKED THEMSELVES IN PROTECTING THE
AVON VALLEY NATIONAL PARK
RANGERS WIVES LIFE, HOUSE AND PROPERTY
DURING A MAJOR FIRE ON THE 30th NOVEMBER 1994.

OWEN DONOVAN, MICK GOLDING, GARY DOUST, DOUG GILES,
KEITH HUNT, EUGENE WINMAR, GEOFF STYLES, TREVOR FARMER,
STEVE SWEETMAN, JOHN REVILL AND CHARLES KERFOOT

SPECIAL THANKS TO FOREST RANGER OWEN DONOVAN
FOR HIS PROFESSIONALISM, CONTROL AND MOST OF ALL
HIS PERSONAL CONCERN IN THE FACE OF THE FIRE DANGER.

THIS PLAQUE IS PRESENTED TO THE
JARRAHDAL STAFF AND CREW
INVOLVED WITH THE HEARTFELT THANKS FROM
TREVOR AND HAZEL SMITH
AVON NATIONAL PARK.

Time found for kindness

IN the last week of November, CALM's weather forecasts based on information from the Met Bureau pointed to one thing - blow up conditions.

By the Wednesday of that week, the prediction had proven all too true as CALM fire-fighters were about to find out.

The temperature was 38°C, relative humidity 10 per cent and the winds initially nor'easters, swinging to sou'westers before turning again to west-nor'west.

At 11.30 that morning came the first fire report. One had started next to the railway line on the south side of a valley in the Avon Valley National Park.

The fire was next to very steep slopes and the westerly winds turned what was a flank into a headfire. The eastern flank was inaccessible because of the steep terrain.

At around 3 pm, the fire crossed Governor's Drive and threatened the ranger's house. Ranger Trevor Smith was working with a loader building firebreaks at another point of the fire and his wife Hazel was 'home alone'.

Jarrahdale forester Owen Donovan and his crew were despatched to protect the house. Forester Ian Gale from Mundaring was to link up with a tracked machine and escort it to the house site as support.

Owen arrived just as Hazel was about to take off in her vehicle. After a few comforting words, Owen packed the Smith's pet parrot into the cab of the ute and together the three of them sat with the vehicle running and air-conditioning on.

By this time, the fire was spotting around the house from the ridge to the west. Overseer Mick

by Bruce Telfer

Golding hooked up Trevor and Hazel's caravan to his gang truck ready for a quick escape. The units sheltered in the lee of the workshop.

Owen was giving a 'blow-by-blow' description as the fire bore down.

"When the headfire hit, the fuel supply heaved and the tanks vented," he said.

"The escaping vapour soon ignited but the crews cooled the tanks down to quell the venting fire."

After the headfire passed, the crews made the house safe.

Ian Gale, escorting the tracked machine, was caught in the headfire but found some cleared ground where he parked his ute - leaving the engine running - and sheltered under a blanket until the fire passed.

Ian then continued to work with the tracked machine.

The fire continued through to the early hours of Thursday morning when it ran into country subjected to a prescribed fuel hazard reduction burn only a few months earlier. Mundaring District senior ranger George Duxbury later spent time with Hazel and took her on 'tour' of the burned area.

Hazel appreciated the action of the CALM crews so much she had a special commemorative plaque struck and presented it to them on December 6. The crews were very touched with this gesture as it was a 'first' for them.

CALM rarely gets due recognition for this type of effort - in fact one Perth radio station called them 'fire brigade officers'.

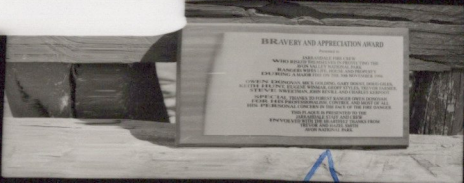
But it was the training, professionalism, understanding of fire behaviour and the correct use of the fire control structure and planning that saved the day.

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