

## A HAPPY CHRISTMAS DAY

by David Watson

On Christmas Day 1950 we had rather a bad fire at Willowdale, and I was called upon to patrol a large section of the face after it had been suppressed. A number of problems presented themselves -

1. There was no access other than the burnt fire edge which we could move along,
2. Water was needed in fairly large quantities,
3. I was given the help of 14 New Australians just arrived in the country.

Their command of English was about as good as my command of the Italian, Yugo Slav and Latvian languages.

I was able to muster approximately 10 pack sprays, a shovel or two, two water bags, some rakes and axes. We set off in single file to carry out what proved to be a good two mile trek. The first burning spar met with required the application of some water at a point 10 ft. above ground. After I had carefully explained in a loud voice, with much gesticulation, and arm waving and pointing, the men got the idea what was needed and all started to squirt water furiously in all directions. Again with much shouting, jumping up and down, arm waving and so forth, I managed to stop them. It seemed that under the circumstances the only thing to do was to use the men as pack horses, and do all the squirting myself.

I tried to lessen each carrier's supply of water in turn, favouring the older members. One of the men seemed to be

giving me a lot of cheek and abuse, so I saw that his packsprays was the last to be emptied. The emphasis, of course, was on speed on the outward journey so only the urgent tasks were done. Those men who were not carrying packsprays attended to such mopping up operations as were necessary, and that I was able to explain to them how to do. Gradually we reached the end of the patrol, and at the finish had about two gallons of water left.

Before commencing the journey back along the two miles face it was necessary to re-fill the packsprays from a small creek which I knew was located about 20 chains from the finishing point. When I led the men off on this hike, through very dense undergrowth, there was a great deal of argument and shouting and apparent disapproval, but they all tagged along and when we reached the creek and they understood what we had come for my stocks rose to a much higher level.

After everyone had had a drink and washed up and cooled off, I personally filled each packspray. I felt I could not leave this job to my assistants as they would have probably poured in leaves and other rubbish with the water.

During the return journey a more thorough job of mopping up was made and by this time the chaps had gathered the idea of what was wanted, and were doing a much better job with much less shouting and arm waving from me. Finally we were back at our starting point with this section of the fire tucked in and safe. After we had lunch we patrolled it once more and finally managed to get home in time for Christmas tea.

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