

Christmas Fires 2001 Kurrajong Heights





Fire thunderheads over Wheeny Gap



Fire In the Grose Vale Area Christmas Day



Fire moving quickly through the Blaxland Ridge area



The usual view from David McDonald's, Warks Hill Road, block is one of endless ridges to the north and west, looking towards Glenn Davis and further to Mudgee.

After the traumas of Christmas Day which did not affect Kurrajong Heights, it became obvious that the fire risk had heightened and so preparations were made beginning with the establishment of a bouywall or portable dam, which was donated to the brigade by the Bell's Line Lions Club after the 1994 fires.

Millie thinks Andrew Jones truck is worth a look!



Andrew Jones setting up Bouywall





Bouywall set up at Warks Hill Road





David McDonalds block now was used as a staging area for visiting brigades from Bellinghen and later CFA units from Victoria.

With increased activity, the community was alerted and became very active in their preparations for the possible impact of fire.

Some of the community remained unperturbed.



Constant patrols along the back fences of Warks Hill Road residences monitor the movement of the fire.

Smoke appears for the first time along fencelines in Warks Road.

The CFA units move into property protection mode.

Police and SES enforce evacuations.

Impact of the fire is imminent and it is eerie with so few people around.

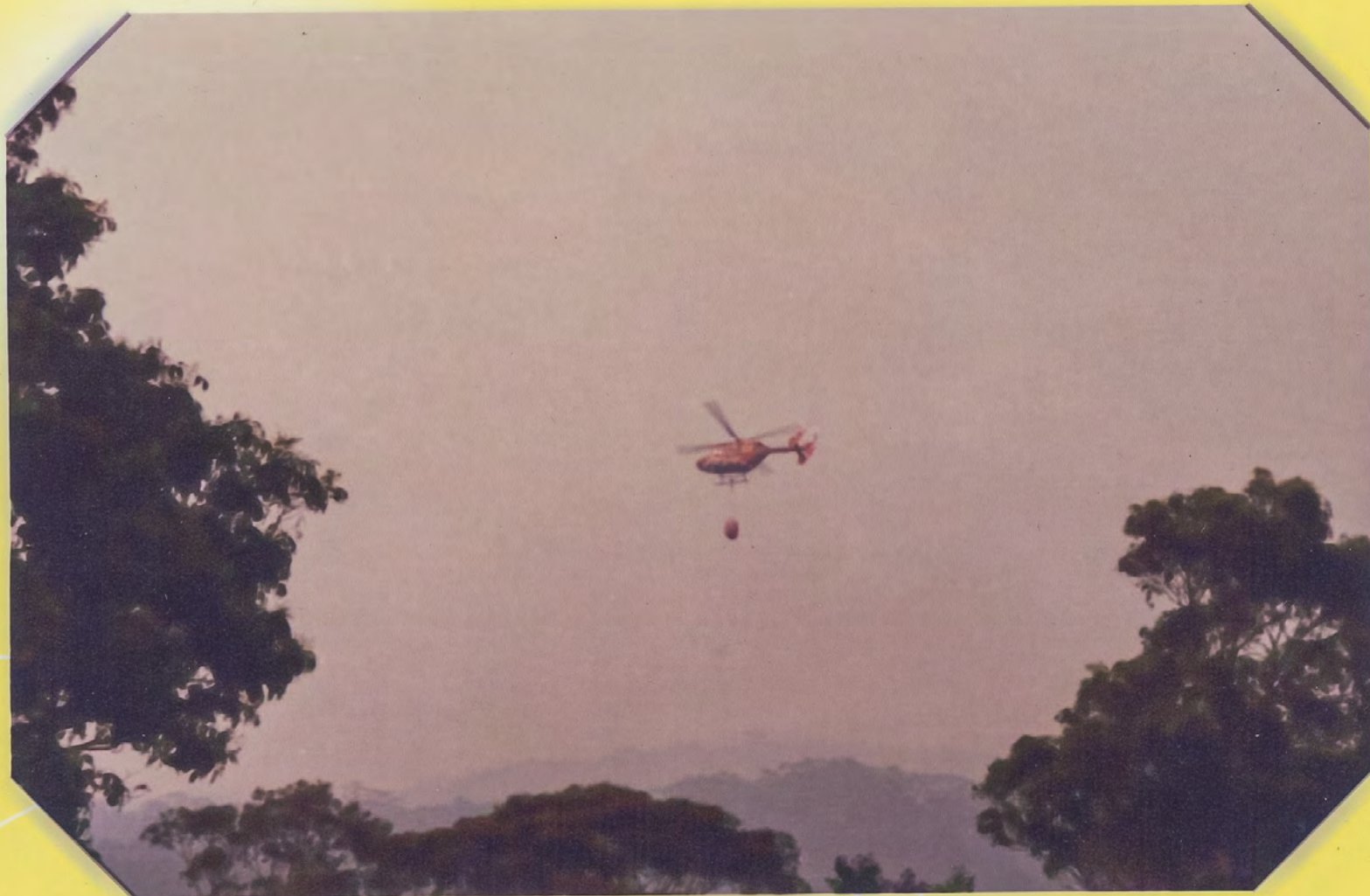
But so much to do!



With very hot conditions forecast, the size of the task force grew during the day (Sunday 30th December).

Despite the overall smoke cover, it is just possible to pick out heightened fire activity along the ridge, just north of us.









As the smoke thickened the choppers became incessant despite the poor visibility.

At the same time a substantial amount of "landscaping" was carried out to provide access for fire vehicles and personnel and to minimise the impact of the fire at strategic points.



Things are getting much hotter now.

Time to wet down.







Besides directing the flight of choppers to slow the fire and coordinating the visiting brigades engaged in property protection, Captain Brian Williams, with Senior Deputy Ray Lewis, were monitoring radio reports in order to "read" the fire and then devise a strategy to steer the fire towards a large tract of west facing slope which was hazard reduced in October. Without the hazard reduction and expertise in reading the fire, many houses would have been lost in the Heights. In addition to these tasks, Brian and Ray had ultimate responsibility for the safety of many Hawkesbury brigades which were working at the Heights at the time.

Coffee and cake were a welcome break as the smoke thickened.







Helicopter landing in Rossi's paddock Brian Williams joins Phil Hurst to do a recon flight after the water bombing



Crews lined up in Rossi's paddock, waiting to put a plan into action



Some difficult decisions to be made.



With a change in the wind and consequent arrival of smoke, it was appropriate to check the operation of pumps and effectiveness of the gutter plugs.

The choppers became more frequent and the greater in number, indicating the fire was active





More smoke and wind changes as the fire gets closer.
Elvis arrives, the first time used in Australia.



As the smoke gets even thicker, we get a confused
visitor and even Elvis has to leave the Heights





Despite the lower temperatures and lack of wind at night, the impact of the fire was severe at the northern end of Warks Hill Road.

These shots of David McDonald's property (end of Warks Hill Road) show the impact and how well he was able to defend his home.



The non native vegetation in Herb Bolle's garden (end of Warks Hill Road) was singed.

The panorama shows how the ridge tops have burnt but is preserved on the slopes where the fire burns less intensely and consequently, with less damage.













Power to the communications hut was lost when the overhead power supply was burnt. The hut provided the communications to the entire Hawkesbury Rural Fire Service radio network and power was restored when the batteries had less than one hour's supply remaining!



And after the fires;

A truck to clean with Millie's help. The trucks were out of the station for about 16 days, with crews changing on site for 12 hour sifts, working at Grose Vale, Cedar Ridge, Blaxlands Ridge, Colo Heights, Bilpin, Mountain Lagoon and Kurrajong Heights.

Some much appreciated community support in a street parade in Richmond.

And a city parade involving brigades from all over the state





Garth, Kim, Rod Gary and Tony ready for a long day.



The Red Rattler used as a group vehicle in Rossi's paddock.





