

# LOSS OF 3 LIVES IN MORWELL FIRE

## Hospital Saved After Hard Fight

Three people lost their lives, several others were critically burned, a flax mill was destroyed, thousands of pounds of damage was done to property, and hundreds of sheep, cattle, and horses were burned in disastrous fires in the Morwell district yesterday afternoon.

Those who lost their lives were: Miss GRACE HARE, of Morwell, Mrs WOOLLCOTT, of Hazelwood, Mr FRANK WALKER, of Yinnar. Those who were critically burned and taken to hospital include: Mr Ernest Hare, Cr A. L. Hare, and Mr and Mrs Percy James, of Morwell. The fire broke out in Hearn's Oak in the Haunted Hills, about 5 miles east of Morwell, about 2pm. The fire spread rapidly and 19 houses were destroyed and the fire then swept on towards Morwell, breaking into the open country.

Miss Grace Hare, who lived with her brother, Mr Ernest Hare, about 2 miles out of Morwell, lost her life in trying to save their home. Ernest Hare and Cr A. L. Hare, who had hurried out from Morwell to assist them, were both badly burned and taken to Morwell hospital. Ten houses in Morwell itself were destroyed and the hospital was saved after being in great danger, a large number of firefighters battling the flames desperately. Patients were removed from the hospital to the town hall.

The flax mill was destroyed, and for a time the Australian Paper Mill was in great danger. A military camp at Yallourn also was destroyed. Although light rain checked it briefly, the fire was still burning fiercely late last night.

# DARNUM HAS NARROW ESCAPE

## Hall and 2 Houses Burnt

(By a Special Reporter)

Travelling at terrific speed, a fire, which began 1 1/2 miles away, almost overwhelmed Darnum, a township on the main Gippsland line about 4 miles from Warragul. The mechanics' institute, and 2 houses were wiped out in a few minutes, and only the fine work of a well-organized band of about 200 firefighters saved the rest of the township. Outbuildings, haystacks, grass, and miles of fencing were destroyed. Other properties were saved by narrow margins.

When a haystack near the railway station caught fire the strong wind carried wisps of straw across the main road, setting on fire the mechanics' institute. All that could be saved from the building were the piano and a little crockery. The building, which was of wood, with an iron roof, was insured for about £700.

Mr J. Oldham, who was working at Darnum sawmills, was warned of an approaching fire. He ran across to his home, only a few hundred yards away, but could do no more than hurry his wife and 2 children to safety, as the place became a mass of flames. He lost everything, including a motorcar, and estimates his loss of furniture and personal effects at £200. He is no stranger to fires, as he lost property in the 1926 Noojee fire and the 1939 Neerim North fire.

Next door lived Mr Percy ("Pat") Naylor, a wood contractor. He was away from his home only a few minutes, and in that time it was razed to the ground. In addition to his house and furniture, he lost £80 in notes. His wife is on a holiday in Melbourne.

Garages and sheds in houses in the main street were scorched, but the flames were beaten out in time. The fire then raged in the direction of the property of Mr W. Gall, jumping the road en route, but the timely arrival of a number of firefighters saved that property. Haystacks, fencing, and many acres of grass were lost in that locality. Mr Strelitz lost a shed and some machinery, including a binder, but his house, and 2 others close by, were saved.

Two cars were wrecked and the occupants had narrow escapes, when they collided in the smoke-laden atmosphere on the Gainsborough road. Mrs Fryer and 2 of her 3 children suffered minor abrasions, and Mr A. Martin, of Warragul, driver of the other car, also escaped serious injury.

# HOMES LOST AT WONTHAGGI

Seven houses were destroyed and 6 others damaged in the residential area of Wonthaggi. The fire started in scrub and grass on the Korumburra rd, opposite the recreation reserve. Fanned by a strong northerly gale, it jumped the railway line and gutted 3 homes in Bent and Quarry streets, Wonthaggi. Despite the efforts of the fire brigade and hundreds of volunteers, the flames raged through to Graham st, where 2 homes were destroyed. The house of Mr W. G. McKenzie, M.L.A. had a very close call. The front verandah was badly burnt.

Sparks from burning buildings lit the grass on the Reservoir hill, and the fire raced on a 2-mile front towards Bommy Town, where for 2 hours the police and volunteer helpers fought the flames. Two houses were destroyed there and 4 others damaged.

All the surface workers at the State colliery were taken to lend a hand at Wonthaggi. Furniture was removed from all houses at the east end of Graham st, but much of the furniture removed from the homes for safety was destroyed.

# SAN REMO BLAZE

In response to an urgent call 3 lorry loads of men left Wonthaggi to assist in fire fighting at San Remo, where 3 homes were destroyed. Residents of Cowes, led by the shire president, Mr J. O. Edhouse, saved the settlement of Rhyll. One small home belonging to Mr McMillan, was destroyed there. The fire fighters saved 7 farmers' homes.

All the fires in this district were reported to be under control last night excepting the fire in the scrub country along the Cape Patterson road. Sheep and cattle had been removed from the area, and it was thought that providing the wind did not change the fire could do no serious damage.

It was reported from Phillip Island that, although almost two-thirds of the sanctuary had been swept by fire, the mortality among the koala bears was not very great. Many of the bears could be seen on the tops of the trees.

# TOOK REFUGE IN DAM

About 2,000 acres were swept by a fire in the Leongatha district. It began on the property of Mr John A. McIndoe, at Boorool, and swept rapidly through the parish of Mardian, destroying the home of Mr Thomas W. Coulter, with all the contents and outbuildings. Later the flames spread to Mr D. W. Findlay's property, and destroyed a number of pedigree Jersey cattle and some sheep, but the house was saved. Women and children sought refuge in a dam. The wind changed to the south about 4pm, and light rain stopped the spread of the fire.

At Tarwin Lower a large tract of country was swept, but no homes were destroyed.

# DAMAGE NEAR KOONDROOK

BENDIGO, Mon: Fire which broke out in the Guttram redgum forest at Culfer, about 6 miles from Koondrook, on Friday afternoon, and which was suppressed yesterday, flared up again this morning. This afternoon police and volunteer fire fighters from Koondrook, Berham, Cohuna, Kerang, and Bendigo answered a radio call to fight the flames. Men employed at the Koondrook sawmill assisted. Several hundred acres of forest were destroyed, and considerable damage to scrub land.

# OUTBREAK NEAR EMERALD

Two houses were destroyed by a fire in the Dewhurst district, between Emerald and Upper Beaconsfield, at 4pm yesterday. Chief damage was caused in scrub country, and Emerald and Upper Beaconsfield fire brigades had the fire under control at 7.30pm.

# TENNIS BALLS RE-COVERED

First in with used balls will be the first to receive a supply of re-covered balls. Take your used balls now to the Melbourne Sports Depot, 85 Elizabeth street. M2244.-(Adv.)

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ARGUS, TUES, FEB 15/44-3

# HUNDREDS OF TROOPS FIGHT FLAMES

Great help in fighting the bush fires between Yallourn and Sale was given by Army and Air Force personnel yesterday afternoon and last night. Soon after the call for assistance was made troops were rushed from many parts of Gippsland, and these were reinforced early last night by about 500 from the metropolitan area.

Twenty trucks filled with soldiers who were equipped with knapsack sprays and fire-beaters, 10 trucks carrying additional equipment, and 2 ambulances left Melbourne early last evening for the critical fire areas.

Troops on the Mornington Peninsula were engaged for many hours last night in fighting bush fires in the Frankston and Langwarrin areas.

Because of the serious bush fire danger soldiers throughout Victoria were called upon to stand by ready to proceed at 10 minutes' notice to assist in fire-fighting.

# BIG RUSH OF FRUITPICKERS FOR MILDURA

Hundreds of youths and girls, and men and women of all ages, invaded the Victorian Manpower Directorate offices yesterday to register for seasonal work as fruitpickers in Mildura district. The rush began at 8.30am and by late afternoon more than 1,000 had been enlisted.

Applicants included munition and other workers in protected industries who expected to receive extended leave to take part in fruit harvesting. Manpower officials pointed out that these employees must produce certificates of release from their industries.

The first special train for Mildura will leave Melbourne on Friday at 8.35pm. This will carry over 1,000 fruitpickers who will be met on arrival and allocated to growers.

Manpower officials said that applications were still being received from men and women for Swan Hill and Nyah districts.

# NO IMMEDIATE PROSPECT OF MILK RATIONING

As a result of action taken by the Milk Board to divert supplies from manufacturing plants, no prospect of milk rationing exists at present. The action was taken under powers recently conferred by Federal Government.

It is expected that with the shortage of fodder already known to exist in the State, a considerable decline in milk production will take place in progressive stages, reaching its peak in winter.

One difficulty in maintaining metropolitan whole milk supplies is that all milk is not suitable for this purpose.

"DRIVE YOURSELF" CARS may still be hired for business purposes only from Latrobe Motors Pty. Ltd., 182 Exhibition street, P6141.-(Adv.)

# WIDESPREAD DAMAGE ON PENINSULA

One of the biggest fires in the history of the Frankston district swept miles of farm country yesterday. Outbuildings at Ballan Park, the property of Dr Dennis; an employee's house on the property of Sir Keith Murdoch, and a church hall and 9 homesteads were destroyed in the Langwarrin, Baxter, Pearceade, and Frankston districts. The fire last night was raging in the State pine plantation.

About 200 servicemen and 300 residents, with police from Chelsea, Mordialloc, Cheltenham, Frankston, and Malvern districts, fought the flames on a 12 to 15 miles front. Each first-constable of police took charge of a body of about 50 men, and groups were organised to move women and children from their homes. Some women had to be removed by force from their threatened homes, mothers and children making desperate efforts to save some of the contents.

By the efforts of Frankston Volunteer Fire Brigade and police, who at grave risk ventured into the burning area, many homes were saved. More than a dozen police, under the command of Insp H. de la Rue, of Malvern district, had uniforms and boots scorched as they raced in to save the contents of homes.

The fire, which started on the Peninsula Country Golf Club property, destroyed miles of fencing, scores of outbuildings, and much stock.

Last night the fire was racing to Hastings township, but light rain was falling, and there was hope of the danger passing.

# Change of Wind Expected to Cover Whole State

The Weather Bureau advised last night that the fire danger in western and SW districts had been removed by winds backing SW. It was expected that the change of wind would extend throughout Victoria during the following 12 hours. Meanwhile danger of fire would persist in Gippsland and eastern Victoria, with winds between NW and west.

# STRUGGLE TO SAVE YARRAM

Bush fires, which started many miles away yesterday morning, were raging round Yarram last night. A fire at Jack River was the most dangerous, but another fire near Valley View enveloped Yarram in smoke throughout the day. At 5.30pm rain began to fall. It amounted to only a few points, however, and the fires raged on. A fire at Calgnee extended to Merriman's Creek, and with the north wind still blowing, the homes of Messrs Denman, Bayles, Esler, Mattern, Welsh, O'Keefe, Watkins, and Friend were in danger.

At 6pm Yarram firebell tolled again for volunteers. The fire had passed the North Devon post-office and store shortly before, all residents in the vicinity having been evacuated to Yarram. The firebell again tolled at 7.30 for volunteers to fight a fire at Carrabung, but all available manpower had been absorbed by previous calls. Carloads of men from Tarra-ville and Port Albert, at least 7 miles away, came to Yarram to help to fight the fires. At 8.55pm the Yarram Fire Brigade made a wonderful save of a score of houses at the north end of the town. At 9.45 the fire jumped the Tarra River, north of Yarram, and was travelling towards Green Mount. Won Wron post-office and store was reported to be burnt; also several houses in the Jack River area.

# PRODUCER-GAS BAN EXPIRED AT MIDNIGHT

After a special meeting of the Forests Commission, and after consultation with the Director of Meteorological Services, radio warnings were broadcast yesterday prohibiting the use of gas-producers until midnight last night in any part of the State excepting within a 5 miles radius of the GPO. The ban expired at midnight.

This was the first action taken since the Premier last week issued an order under NS Regulations to enable gas-producers to be prohibited in any part of the State on days for which bush fire warnings have been issued.

# POSTWAR HOUSING PLANS FOR COUNTRY DISTRICTS

CANBERRA, Mon: A special committee of departmental experts will be set up soon to report on possible plans for postwar housing in country districts. The committee will be appointed by the postwar reconstruction department and will investigate 3 aspects of rural housing.

These will be housing of small farmers, housing of farm workers, and adequate housing of the floating populations of country towns such as railway, postal, and other workers.

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# MR DEDMAN SAYS FARMERS' INCOMES HIGHER SINCE WAR

Farmers' incomes had risen and production of every basic food now in short supply for civilian consumption had substantially increased since the Curtin Government took office, Mr Dedman, Minister for War Organisation of Industry, said yesterday. The fact that a number of country centres had exceeded their quotas for the 4th Liberty Loan gave the lie direct to those who insinuated that the Government had neglected primary industries.

Statistics showed that in addition to increases in volume of foodstuffs produced, farmers' incomes had also increased. Indebtedness of farmers mounting annually before the war, but since the war, and particularly in the last 2 years, they had reduced their debts by £60,000,000 he said.

# POSTWAR LAND SETTLEMENT

It is not proposed to wait until after the war to begin a plan for training discharged servicemen desiring to settle on the land, Mr Martin, Minister for Agriculture, said yesterday. Immediately sufficient men have indicated their desire for training, a beginning would be made.

Mr Martin said that while it was expected the 14,000 men who applied for land in Victoria after the 1914-18 war would be largely exceeded this time because of the greater number of men in the services, the number of blocks available was likely to be fewer. It would be necessary, therefore, to require a greater degree of farm experience than that accepted on previous occasions.

Where applicants had no adequate previous experience they would be required to undergo a course on selected private farms, to be followed by a short, intensive, final course by Dookie or Longerenon college. The Research Farm at Werribee, or Burnley Agricultural School.

To enable these State institutions to accommodate and train up to approximately 1,000 discharged soldiers a year £60,000 expenditure would be necessary. It is proposed that the State provide the course free.

# 100 REBUILDING PERMITS GRANTED

Of 144 applications for permission to rebuild homes and other buildings lost in recent bush fires, 100 had been granted and the others were being considered, Mr L. L. Burch, Victorian Deputy Director, Department of War Organisation of Industry, said yesterday. Substantial quantities of galvanised iron for bush fire areas would be released.

When applying to Supply Department for release of galvanised iron building contractors and merchants should quote the special bush fire permit number issued by the Department of WOI for the building concerned, said Mr Burch. Issue of galvanised iron would be confined to areas dependent upon rainwater catchment for domestic supplies. Alternative roofing materials were available for areas where settlers had a town water supply.

# ARMY GIVING ALL REASONABLE AID, SAYS MR FORDE

"The Army has not refused—nor will it refuse—any reasonable request for assistance from victims of the recent tragic bush fires," Mr Forde, Army Minister, said yesterday. He was replying to Mr Chandler, M.L.C., chairman, Fire Relief Committee, who was reported to have told a meeting of settlers at Lismore that the Commonwealth Government had rejected a request for secondhand galvanised iron from unused military camps.

Although these camps were vacant at the moment the Army had definite plans to use them, Mr Forde said. In fighting fires and in work of rehabilitation, the Army had played a most important part. Bush fire victims approached its work. All available wire had been distributed in devastated areas, and 500,000 pickets made available for repair of fences. Hundreds of soldiers had been sent to assist in burying burnt stock.

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