

# ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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## NEWSLETTER

### ORBOST AMBULANCE SERVICE

**This history of the Orbost Ambulance Service was compiled by Brian Rayner in 2006. Brian was the seventh Station Officer to serve at Orbost. Prior to his official appointment Brian had undertaken several stints of relief work at Orbost whilst the appointed Station Officer was on leave. Brian was previously stationed at Sale and served at Orbost from 1966 until his retirement in 1987.**

#### ORBOST AMBULANCE SERVICE HISTORY:

A history of ambulance transport in Orbost district began after WW II, prior to that time a local doctor or private transport was used as in Omeo and similar sized country districts.

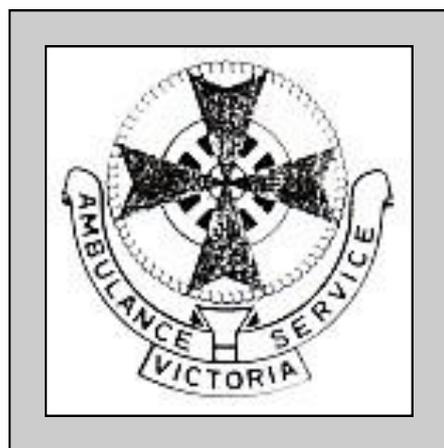
Following WW II a Country branch of Victorian Civil Ambulance Service Melbourne was commenced usually with a vehicle supplied by V.C.A.S. but driven by local first aid qualified drivers, namely Harold Rodwell, Lindsay Trewin and Victor Mehlert. The ambulance was housed at Rodwell's garage.

In 1954 East Gippsland Ambulance Service began with headquarters at Sale under the supervision of Superintendent R. J. Fairhall. Orbost and other towns in East Gippsland amalgamated with Sale forming a region from Rosedale to Mallacoota and Omeo. Orbost service area extended from Nowa-Nowa to Mt Drummer; Buchan to the N.S.W. border; north of Orbost to Bonang and Bendoc; north of Cann River to the N.S.W. border.

This amalgamation provided some state government funding toward supply of full time Station Officers, construction of ambulance stations, accommodation facilities and supply and maintenance of modern ambulances built

by "Bodycraft" of Geelong and "Schubert & Staff" of Sale.

The duty of S/O's and / or drivers was to provide 24 hour ambulance transport, first aid training to the public and a volunteer ambulance driver back up team and raise funds, through a contribution scheme (ambulance transport insurance), to cover running costs and towards building and maintaining permanent ambulance premises.



The first permanent Station Officer was Leon Moroney (1954-57) who formulated the initial branch advisory and / or fund raising committee and ladies fund raising committee as required by

the branch constitution.

The second Station Officer was Keith Bateman (1957-60). During this period a modern house and land of the estate of Arthur Gear was purchased on the corner of Tennyson & Stanley Streets and plans were developed to construct a new ambulance building on some of this vacant land. Also during this period a second ambulance was provided as transport work increased. Until this time ambulances were capable of carrying 4 stretcher patients, but the

for admission to the service and to qualify in Diploma courses in ambulance procedures .

In 1976 with the change over of a new superintendent at Head Quarters at Sale (Mr D. G. Woodhouse) training in this service was accelerated in all branches with the appointment of the first full time in-service training officer for this region. This training saw the introduction of supply and applicational use of cardiac monitor-defibrillators and intravenous fluid and drug administration in rural areas. This evolved into



new second vehicles were frequently made to transport single patients on long distance transports.

The third Station Officer was Robert Prentice (1960-61). The new station construction began in this period, also this was the year of the first statewide ambulance officer training schools beginning at Geelong then to "Mayfield" and later to Waverly. Additionally driver training to a qualified level began and eventually a training standard was formulated at the D.E.C.A. police driver complex at Shepparton.

Orbost officers had to complete these courses

Mica officer training which until this time was only allowable in metropolitan areas.

The fourth Station Officer was Albert Thexton (1961-64). The new ambulance station consisting of an office, 3 car garage and car wash facilities was officially opened during this interval.

The fifth Station Officer was James Woolgar (1964-65).

The sixth Station Officer was Walter Tanner (1965-66).

The seventh Station Officer was Brian Rayner

(1966-87). During this period branch work load increased to its maximum demand in the mid 1970's which saw the need for a second permanent officer from 1975 onwards and the purchase of a second residence in Hamilton St for the additional staff.

The work load was lessened with the provision of a permanent officer at Lakes Entrance in the late 1960's (Lakes Entrance then shared the work load of the Buchan, Gelantipy districts).

and back up from air ambulance and crews from the Latrobe Valley Ambulance Service. Although there was an extensive range of injuries among the bus driver and passengers no fatalities were experienced.

The 2nd officers stationed at Orbost from 1975 were:

Alan Rogers (1975-78) promoted to Mt Beauty  
Ernie Nunn (1978-80) promoted to Nhill  
David Dandy (1980-85) promoted to Sea Lake



Further work load was decreased with the opening of a volunteer ambulance branch at Cann River (1976-77) and the supply of air ambulance services through Marlo, Lakes Entrance, Bairnsdale and Merimbula, and transport service by rotary wing aircraft (helicopters) (1971 Orbost flood onwards!!) to lift patients from football fields etc., in Orbost and other townships or direct from incident sites in the mountains or on highways.

The largest demand incident attended by the branch was the 36 passenger bus accident on the Princes Highway at Mt Raymond on 31st January 1973. This incident provoked the major disaster plan incorporating the crews and vehicles from other branches within the region

Michael Judd (1985-86) transfer to Sale  
Anthony Wright (1986-87) transfer to Sale  
Gerard Cahill (1987-92) transfer back to Melbourne  
David McAleer (1992-95) transfer to Tallangatta  
Bruce Wilson (1995-96) transfer to Area Office – Bairnsdale  
David Calder (1996-99) transfer to Warragul  
Harry Berns (1999 ----

Permanent staff in the branch was responsible for public first aid training, advanced first aid and volunteer officer training at Nowa-Nowa, Omeo, Cann River, and Mallacoota. Additionally training and upgrades was provided to Red Cross, S E S & Forestry personnel.

This training encouraged and formulated a

supply of volunteer officers at Orbost, Mallacoota & Cann River.

Over the years volunteers at Orbost comprised:

George Bradford, Nash Clarke, Barry Coulton, Anthony Cousins, William Curphey, Chris Davidson, Peter Davis, Gary Downey, Marita Downey, Lisa Filmer, Bruce Findley, Ronald Fletcher, James Gascoigne, Harold Grosvenor, James Gunn, Robert Hulme, Harold Isaakson, Alan Jenkins, John Kleverlaan, Tom Leahy, Cedric Leathbridge, Bruce Lewis, Jack Light, Sue Light, Peter Martin, Valerie Martin, Victor Mehlert, Irene Miles, Peter Miles, Bronwyn Morgan, Richard Morgan, Gordon Muir, John Mundy, Craig Oldis, Clifford Perry, George Perry, Greg Pinnock, Harold Rodwell, Peter Roney, Ruth Ryan, Lindsay Scott, Ann Slatter, Lindsay Trewin, John Vandyk, Kim Vandyk, Jacqui Winchester, Rick Young.

Prior to the provision of 2nd officers in rural branches in 1975 the branches could only function in a practical sense if the Station Officer's wives filled in the gaps in the service to the public by manning telephones and radios and some office duties but all in an unpaid capacity.

During the 1970's-80's also saw the beginning of the supply of specialised but standard equipment such as statewide standard ambulances, folding stretchers, resuscitators, lifting devices, inflatable and adjustable splints all heavily subsidised by state government funding.

The 8th Station Officer James Barnett commenced duty on 14th December 1987 after 10 years service in Melbourne.

Volunteer crews became paid casual staff of the Ambulance service to ensure that in the event of them sustaining an injury that compensation was then available. Along with this came increased responsibility, provision of uniform and personal protective equipment.

Approximately 1990 saw the amalgamation of Ambulance Services in Victoria from 15 country services and one metropolitan service to five country services and one metropolitan service. East Gippsland Service was amalgamated with South Gippsland and Latrobe Valley to form South East Region Ambulance Service.

In 1996 a proposal was put to the local branch that with the pilot scheme of amalgamation of health services in Orbost to one site in Boundary

Road that the Ambulance station and staff relocate to the same site. This was an opportunity for the service to replace an aging facility which had passed its use by date and functionality. Initial plan was for Ambulance staff to assist in Accident and Emergency when it was busy. Unfortunately due to political forces this co-operative approach has not eventuated.

Funding for the move to the health services site came from a grant from the Health Department of Victoria and a commitment from the local Ambulance Auxiliary to raise a minimum of \$50,000. This was achieved via major raffles at Christmas time over a number of years, combined fundraiser / bush dance for helimed one and many wood raffles. The old branch and residence in Tennyson Street are today utilised as accommodation for relieving staff.

1999 again saw the rationalisation of Ambulance Services in rural Victoria to form one Service named Rural Ambulance Victoria with the head office located in Ballarat and an area office based in Bairnsdale.

In 2001 all Ambulance Officers were given the opportunity to increase their skill levels from Basic Life Support (BLS) to Advanced Life Support (ALS). This has enabled officers to provide an extremely high level of care to patients, which was not previously available to members of rural and remote communities in a timely manner.

2004 saw the appointment of a full time qualified Paramedic Officer to Mallacoota which has taken some of the workload away from the Orbost branch although we are still used as a resource to back up the community officers at Mallacoota when the full time Paramedic is out of town.

From the early days of the formation of the Ambulance Service in Orbost to the present day the staff and volunteers / community officers have been supported by a band of civic-minded community members who formed an Auxiliary. These hard working Auxiliary members have over the years represented the Orbost branch in many ways – from district management meetings to community forums, all in their own time and at their own expense. They have provided money and equipment to enable the branch to stay at the forefront in providing emergency and non-emergency care in Far East Gippsland.