



THE BEACON

OFFICIAL QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE AMBULANCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA



Chas Martin O. A. M. Ambulance Victoria Museum

38TH EDITION — AUTUMN 2026

\$6.00

North Coast NSW Bus Crashes 1989



These two catastrophic passenger coach crashes occurred just nine weeks apart in late 1989 taking 57 lives. The individual tragedies initiated an outstanding response from our NSW Ambulance Regional Counterparts.



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**Just \$10.00 P. A. (\$30 for 3yrs) buys 3 years AHSV Museum
Membership and (12 Issues) of The Beacon
Email Barb: vintambos@bigpond.com Or Phone/Text: 0417 290 946**

Trial Public Opening Sundays

Ambulance Victoria Museum will Trial opening to the public on the last Sunday of each month.

The opening period will be 4 hours: 1000 - 1400 hrs. Admission is a voluntary donation.

Dates for the next three (3) Sundays: June 28. July 26. August 30. - 2026.

Former Ambulance Service personnel will be on duty to answer your questions of past years in our proud Victorian ambulance history * There is so much to see and learn * 28 magnificently restored various vintage ambulances * Vintage equipment * Memorabilia * Bring along family and friends * History information boards of ambulance major incidents ** New Helicopter Rescue (HEMS) display model and background of Ambulance Victoria's renowned helicopter emergency and rescue teams. **SEE BACK COVER OVERVIEW**

Curator's Report



Greetings Members, and welcome to my Autumn Beacon Curator/Manager report. And where did the first 5 months of this year go?

At midway through 2026 our AHSV internal and external vintage vehicle exhibit teams have been kept busy. Internal group visits Year To Date have seen 15 groups totalling 186 people through our museum. These patrons enjoyed our vintage vehicles, equipment displays and general history, and were very complimentary. Also, the Regional event team, that take our state ambulance history to country people, have attended events at various locations. And recently we sent 3 of our Ford vintage ambulances to showcase at the 'Winton Ford Classic' event.

To top off a very successful year to date, our 2026 Museum 'Open Day', held on Sunday April 19, attracted approximately 300 people. And when you add into all of the museum volunteering; our vintage ambulance filming crews, our catering angels, Wendy and Col Evans collating statistics, and The Beacon team of Pete and Barb, I consider that we are operating a top outfit that is producing a very satisfying and worthwhile result. Also, it is beyond doubt that we are truly achieving our objective of preserving our proud state ambulance history and bringing it to the public. Our open day also corresponded with the unveiling of our extensively worked on helicopter 'Diorama Project.' The Diorama project is in recognition of our AAV rotary wing division, the 'Helicopter Emergency Medical Service', (HEMS). This project was able to proceed through the expert assistance and generosity of former AAV HEMS paramedic Robert Rigby, and his wife Yvonne. Robert donated the model VicPol, CFA and AAV HEMS helicopters for our Diorama. And to compliment the display, our museum and AV combined and produced a short video presentation of the AAV story. The Diorama now creates another very interesting display at our museum. Images of our museum's new Helicopter Diorama can be seen on page 7 of this Beacon edition.

On behalf of our museum team, I would like to pass on gratitude to our CEO Jordan Emery for his recognition of our volunteer complement during Volunteers Week. *Lynn Kearney* and *Joel Marley* from AV Media presented our team members with an AV Volunteer printed carry bag. The carry bag was accompanied with a small note from Jordan. His kind gesture has been sincerely appreciated.

Turning to administrative news from the AHSV/AV Museum, we have recently finalised the documentation for prospective new museum volunteers. This package, titled "Becoming an AHSV Volunteer," clearly outlines the expectations of both parties in a voluntary museum role. It also reinforces the obligations attached to wearing the AHSV/Museum uniform as a representative of Ambulance Victoria. These obligations, together with the code of conduct, are critical and apply to all AHSV members, and must be observed at all times without exception! If any member is uncertain of these requirements please contact me.

Hand in hand with The Beacon, we continue to proudly move forward with further development and operation of our AHSV/AV Museum, fulfilling our history preservation objective, and this is in despite of the restriction that we face daily, due to our smaller premises. This space restriction means that our vintage vehicle mechanical maintenance and repair team operates under duress and also that we cannot expand our vintage fleet, or to this end, even display all of the wonderful vintage ambulances that we already possess. And it is frustrating when we are compelled to store attractions such as our full size Leyland 12-bed Disaster Bus off site, and away from public viewing. Also, there are times when decommissioned Air Ambulance fixed wing and rotary wing display aircraft, are offered to our museum. However, our museum cannot accommodate these wonderful attractions, despite our NSW counterpart's Ambulance Museum at Temora displaying both fixed and rotary wing aircraft.

I would like to conclude my Autumn Curator/Manager report on a personal note. I am proud to be an integral part of the AHSV/AV Museum, and I am sure my colleagues share that sentiment. Built entirely by volunteers over the past 20 years, this remarkable institution has become a source of pride for the people of Victoria. On the fourth anniversary of his passing, we pay tribute to our late Curator, Charlie (Chas) Martin. In 2006, at the request of then AV CEO Greg Sassella, Chas set out at Thomastown to create the AV Museum. Through dedication, hard work, and tireless commitment, supported by his wife Marg, he succeeded. Chas left a lasting legacy and passed the baton to those who continue his work. Charles Henry (Chas) Martin will be remembered always, with great respect and as one of our true legends. Thank you, Chas.

Please drive safely, and stay well,

Ralph Casey, ASM

Curator/Manager.

VL3RS Feedback and Contributions

Camberwell Depot.- A few days after posting out the Summer Beacon, I received an email from former AV CEO, *Tony Walker* ASM. Tony has provided the following facts in regard to the status of the Camberwell Depot. He advises that Camberwell Depot became surplus to AV needs when the operations moved to the new branch near St Georges Hospital in Kew. Tony also advised that potential caveats on the property were searched and that there was nothing registered that prevented the sale, and subsequently Camberwell Depot was sold in 2021. According to a press report, also provided by Tony, there was difficulty finding a purchaser. However, eventually the Camberwell Depot, located at 61 Canterbury Road, Canterbury, was sold at auction for approx. \$1.5 Million, to be used as a storage facility, and supposedly that the premises would remain “pretty much as is.” Tony went on to say that the proceeds of the Camberwell Depot sale were used to support other AV branch renovations and builds across the state. Also, in a return email, Tony said that he had returned to normal health since major surgery and ‘he was enjoying life once again’. Great news Tony! and thank you for finally providing the facts surrounding this issue, which can now be concluded and also entered into our state Ambulance history. The final outcome will leave many fond memories for our colleagues that were stationed at Camberwell Depot in years gone by.

AHSV member Rona Halliwell, now aged 93yrs, served as a Pioneer Air Ambulance Flight Sister for VCAS 1970-1983. She phoned me after receiving her ‘Spring’ Beacon. Rona has advanced Macular Degeneration; however, she lives alone and unaided with her small canine companion ‘*Millie*’ in a retirement village at Rowville, and a friend reads the Beacon to her. Being a pioneer Air Ambulance Flight Sister, Rona called me to comment on the “HEMS Life Liners” feature, and in particular the personal career profile written by HEMS MICA Paramedic crew member *Michaela Malcolm*. Rona commented that, as a pioneer flight sister, the article fascinated her. She stated that this was not only the physical entry requirements for male and female alike, but the on-going training and skills assessments. And then the magnificent and courageous work that these special members carry out from the sky. Additionally, with her first-hand knowledge of Air Ambulance Victoria’s early development, she has witnessed its growth into the distinguished and acclaimed Air Ambulance Service it is today and expresses pride in having contributed to its foundation.

We received a very interesting email in response to the ‘Life Liners’ feature in the last (Summer) edition of The Beacon, from David Sullivan. David is a former LVDAS paramedic, and also a HEMS crewman. His extensive expertise in rotary wing operation has been developed nationally, and internationally. In his retirement David is compiling an extensive history of rotary wing aeromedical development, including the development of our Air Ambulance Service Victoria, AAV HEMS. And commencing in this issue of The Beacon, we will publish David’s research and the encountered trials and tribulations on this journey. The valuable account will then be entered into our Victorian state ambulance history. Part (1) of David’s account ; *AAV Aeromedical Journey-- The Tears and Smiles* can be found in this edition on page 10.

There’s a couple of blokes I meet now and again at our local golf club who are both characters, *Barry* and *Geoff*. They have been mates since primary school, and these two are at it all the time stirring each other, normally in fun. On an evening recently the three of us were having a beer, and Barry said to Geoff “*I’ve got a good one on you Geoff, you should keep your curtains closed!*” Geoff replied, “*why’s that Barry?*” Barry said, “*well I walked past your house last Wednesday night about 11 pm, and the curtains were open, the bed lamp was on and I could see you and your wife in bed laughing.*” Geoff replied, “*well the joke’s on you Barry! because I wasn’t at home last Wednesday night!*”

As we were finalising this issue of *The Beacon*, we received an email from Terry (Doc) Brooks, who had just returned with Regional Events teammates David Cawte and Gary Dole. The team represented the Chas Martin OAM AV Museum at the 2026 ‘Ford Only Classic’ in Winton, Victoria, where they displayed three vintage Ford ambulances: the 350, Galaxy, and F100. Their exhibit won the major trophy for Best Club Display, adding to the more than 12 trophies our museum has received at events across the state. I also recall the Euroa Show and Shine in about 2015, where Chas Martin and the team won four trophies across several categories from a field of more than 300 vehicles. These awards are a strong endorsement of the dedication our volunteers bring to preserving our state’s ambulance history. That pride is only deepened by the thousands of people who have visited and appreciated our vintage ambulance and history displays, both at the museum and at regional events.

Cont. next page

A **family enquiry** regarding a potential former VCAS member was passed to me from our museum and resulted in the following service history development. Ralph Casey, our Museum Curator/Manager, forwarded an email from *Amy Tan*, from Beveridge, Vic. requesting our assistance. Amy is acting on behalf of the family, and her enquiry sought information about her Great Uncle *Ken Thomas*, and his possible employment with VCAS post WW2, around 1950 onwards. Amy's email asked if he was a VCAS Officer and if so, did he attend the West Gate Bridge Disaster 1970? Her family elders believed he had attended. Most readers will now be aware that the VCAS/ASM/MAS personnel/service records were destroyed in 1993/5 to this date, together with most of our other history. However, in providence, a small booklet covering a period (from late 1940 – mid 1970) survived listing VCAS personnel only. Also, I believe that *John Blossfelds* managed to salvage a personnel file of another period, possibly into 1980, before it went into the Firman shredder.

From the small VCAS book, I was able to find recorded: *Thomas K.R. S/No 101- commenced 12-2-1957*. I sought further details from Amy regarding her Great Uncle to assist me. She responded that he had returned from WW2 and forwarded me details of his DVA recorded, which showed: *Kenneth Richard Thomas – Enlisted 2 May 1940- S/No VX 13892, - Discharged 5 October 1945*. So it looked like we were in with a good chance to come up with a result. And to confirm this was the Ken Thomas that we sought, and corresponded with my VCAS listing, I contacted *John Blossfelds*, my back up historian guru. John instantly recognised the name and noted that Ken Thomas was also nicknamed '*Kooka*' (Kookaburra) because he talked endlessly. In addition to this, John emailed me a group photo which included '*Kooka*' Thomas, with others who will be recognised in the image. In relation to Ken Thomas's attendance at the West Gate Bridge Disaster, I have been unable to establish his participation or otherwise, and I have advised Amy Tas of this outcome.



This is the “Kooka” Thomas photo provided by John Blossfelds, I believe the time to be in the 1980s.

Can any reader help and fill in the name's missing ? **Back row** standing L- R ? - Gary Bartram - ? - ? - Kooka Thomas, David Shugg - ? **Front Row** Sitting . L-R - John Blossfelds, Bill Gibson B.E.M. - ? - ?

Remembering



25th April 2026

Our AV Museum's Helicopter Diorama



These are the images of the Helicopter Diorama, a new addition to our Chas Martin OAM - AV Museum at Bayswater Vic.

The Helicopter Diorama project has been a joint venture between our AV Ambulance Museum and AV Media. All three model helicopters were made and kindly donated to complete the Diorama by former helicopter flight paramedic *Robert Rigby* and his wife *Yvonne*.

Robert Rigby has a remarkable background. He joined the ASV Peninsula Ambulance Service in 1966 and spent 37 years working across both road and air ambulance services. He describes the career as exciting and challenging, particularly through ASV's various amalgamations. When helicopters were introduced to ambulance operations in Victoria, Robert was regularly selected to serve as a flight paramedic on the legendary 'Angel of Mercy' based at Tyabb. Around that time, he also joined the Melbourne Radio Control Helicopter Club where he began building model aircraft as a hobby.

In 2005, he built an Army Hughes 500 Helicopter and represented the club at the Avalon Air Show, and his club were rewarded with 1st Prize! In his retirement years Rob has built a number of scale model helicopters and showcased them at various air shows, or static displays around the state. Your career and hobby has been a most notable achievement Robert. Thank You! Ed.

Ambulance Officer Grade 3 Course, Mayfield AOTC, 1968

Does any reader recognise any member in this photograph?





The Editor's Desk

G' day all. We are now nearly halfway through 2026 and on the doorstep of winter. Here, north of the Murray, Autumn has been beautiful and especially welcome after one of the hottest and driest summers in many years. We had relentless heat, very little rain, and six straight days above 43 degrees. I also imagine this oppressive weather coincided with the time the late fugitive *Dezi Freeman* was reportedly hiding out in a shipping container. This location is just 15 kilometres upstream on the Murray River from our home as the crow flies. And I expect most people would hope he was enjoying our Riverina summer in this remote lifestyle.

While editing this issue of *The Beacon*, Barb and I have been heartened by the strong sense of ambulance camaraderie shown through the generous contributions and information provided for the personal articles in this edition. I especially thank *Doug Dawson*, who immediately supported my idea for a tribute to the late Ian (Ernie) Clifford and provided valuable background about Ian's life. We also acknowledge the others who contributed helpful information. This willing support for a former colleague reinforces that the bond between Ambos remains strong, regardless of the calendar of our service.

In this spirit, I was saddened to hear of the sudden passing of my colleague Ted Van Dyken on the NSW Central Coast. Ted and I went back many years to my time at Ringwood in the mid-1960s and early 1970s, when he was a local tow truck driver and we crossed paths at many MCAs. Ted joined the VCAS frontline in 1975. It is the people we meet throughout life who create lasting memories, mostly good, and a few bad.

I can already imagine the response: "He's on about this again!" But how much of our valuable ambulance history still exists only in the memories of former colleagues, and how much of it will be lost with age? This issue shows why that question matters. One important account came from my old colleague from 1965, *Bob Beggs*. While we were talking on the phone about the late *Ian Clifford*, Bob happened to mention the 1970 VCAS Air Ambulance crash over Moorabbin. His recollection of witnessing the crash with his colleague *Pommy Hall* is a 'once in a lifetime' contribution to Victorian ambulance history. Bob's report on this incredible coincidence appears on page 12 in this Beacon

Following soon after Bob Beggs' contribution, I received an email from *David Sullivan* about the history and development of our AAV aeromedical helicopter service. David said he was prompted to communicate after reading the 'Life Liners' feature in the Summer edition of *The Beacon*. His account is a critical piece of Air Ambulance history and it is essential that it be recorded. Dave's account also appears as a standalone article in this edition of *The Beacon*, on page 12. At the same time that I pursue history, I understand and respect that some members prefer not to revisit their service experiences and may wish to maintain their privacy in retirement. Even so, it remains important that we continue seeking out and preserving our state ambulance history for future generations.

Barb and I are now in our tenth year of publishing *The Beacon*. During that time, we have recovered a considerable amount of lost ambulance history and uncovered substantially more. This has only been possible through persistence, and the generous goodwill of our contributors. Over these years, we have also been able to recognise members of our service who, for various reasons, have stood out, or achieved. And it is the combination of these outcomes that give Barb and I satisfaction in performing the Beacon role. Also, there is our 'Golden Group,' these are the people that are constantly on the lookout for The Beacon content that pertains to our state ambulance history. And also at times when our interstate counterparts have been involved in a significant incident, disaster, or an event in the extreme. And this is the case in this edition of The Beacon.

Quite some time ago AHSV member *John Clancy* provided me with an account of two consecutive and tragic passenger coach crashes in Northern NSW. The two bus crashes were just nine weeks apart, and claimed 57 lives of men, women, and children passengers collectively. I considered that the coincidental occurrence of these tragedies in such magnitude, and within an extremely narrow time frame, is reader worthy. As well, I acknowledge the competent management structure of the two separate disasters in response. Also, this is notwithstanding the demands that were placed on the NSW Regional Ambulance Service resources at both incidents. In publishing the details of these two bus accidents, and the general emergency services involvement surrounding each crash, it is the intent of The Beacon to pay tribute to our NSW Ambulance counterparts, and associates for an outstanding effort at each of these tragic scenes. Also, when NEVDAS was confronted with a bus/truck collision in 1993, at North Wangaratta, NSW Ambulance Service, Albury offered to respond and backup.



As always, keep safe, and keep smiling.

Pete and Barb.



Tribute / Remembrance

S/O. Ian (Ernie) Charles Clifford, 1954 – 1998 (Tragically In the Call Of Duty)

Ian Charles Clifford was born on January 14, 1954, only child of *Tom* and *Elsie Clifford* of Highett.

Ian attended Sandringham East Primary School, progressing to Sandringham Technical College, here he attained his year 10 Secondary Certificate. And it seems that Ian's heart was always set on a life career in ambulance. At 15 years of age he became a St. John Ambulance (Sandringham Div.) cadet, which included the 'Junior Rescue Squad'. I am informed by Bob Beggs that Ian's enthusiasm was so intense, often after school, and on school holidays, Ian would ride his push bike to Peninsula Ambulance Service (PAS) H.Q. at Moorabbin. And on these visits he would record the registration numbers of the ambulances, sit in the cabins, and at times assist with cleaning duties of the ambulances in the H.Q. garage area.



When the West Gate Bridge Disaster occurred on 15 October 1970, Ian was at his friend *Doug Dawson's* home during the school holidays. Both were aged about 16 years. Doug Dawson's father, *Alfred (Mick) Dawson* was also at home this day. Mick Dawson served as a St John Ambulance Superintendent, and when he was notified of the West Gate Disaster, he requested both the St John cadets to accompany him to the West Gate Disaster scene. This timing was at the height of the emergency response efforts. However, the two young people weren't simply onlookers; they were given a hands-on approach and actively participated in the rescue of injured and deceased workers. And I can personally attest to the hideous sights of human injury and traumatic death that would have confronted these two courageous young men.

Immediately on the completion of his secondary education at Sandringham in 1971, Ian entered a Cadetship with Peninsula Ambulance Service, aged 17 years. It was here at PAS that Ian progressed through the AOTC qualifications in ambulance. After 4 years at PAS, in 1975 Ian transferred to the *North East Victoria District Ambulance Service* (NEVDAS), where he was stationed at Wangaratta H.Q. operational, and mainly on control-room duties. While at PAS Ian had acquired the nick name of "*Ernie Owl*" which accompanied him throughout his ambulance career. Apparently the Monica was bestowed upon him due to his ability to remain awake and alert on night shift. Also, Ian was a big bloke with a sense of humour and could laugh at himself. During Ian's tenure at NEVDAS H.Q. he met *Kathleen Evans*. Kathy was employed in the NEVDAS Administration Department. Kathy and Ian married at Wangaratta and they brought 4 children to their marriage, 2 girls, Belinda, and Haley, and 2 boys Douglas and Thomas. Their first son was named Douglas, specifically chosen to honour Ian's two lifetime friends, *Douglas Dawson*, and *Darrell Douglas*. The two men were respectively Best Man and Groomsman, at Kathy and Ian's wedding.



In 1986, Ian was transferred to NEVDAS Myrtleford Branch and took up the position of Station Officer. The family were accommodated in the attached Ambulance Station residence. Myrtleford Branch is located in the valley leading up to the Snowy Mountains in rugged terrain, many roads are rough and narrow, and in winter often snow or frost covered and treacherous. The absence of appropriate ambulance vehicles for these conditions was an issue that caused Ian significant concern. Ironically, safe driving and purpose safe

vehicles were always foremost in Ian's mind. And this was the primary reason that he immediately began the process for obtaining appropriate 4WD ambulances for these mountainous roads. With the support of fellow colleague *Ian Enders*, and other ambulance personnel, his branch obtained a 4WD ambulance for the Myrtleford district work, and also the first in the NEVDAS fleet.

Most of Ian's time was dedicated to operating the Myrtleford Branch, however, Victoria's North East is renowned for fishing, and soon Ian developed a passion for this pastime. On occasions off duty, or on leave, when he was not involved in assisting others locally, which was very common, Ian would head for the Dartmouth Dam. It was here that he stored his boat to go fishing on Dartmouth Dam for 'the big one!' He was also a founding member of the Dartmouth Fishing Club. And to give testimony

of his acquired fishing skills, in 1991 Ian won the annual 'Dartmouth Cup' with the largest catch. After Ian's passing the Dartmouth Fishing Club introduced an annual 'Ian Clifford Memorial Trophy' and in 2017, Ian's sons, Douglas and Thomas teamed together and won the trophy.

On Thursday May 28, 1998, at approximately 1300 hrs, while on duty with his A/O Myrtleford colleague, the crew received a 'Signal 8' emergency call to a location out of Myrtleford. At approximately 1310 hrs the ambulance was proceeding to their destination with all emergency warning devices deployed. In the process of overtaking a vehicle within the town limits, the ambulance collided with another vehicle turning right. This caused the ambulance to roll over and strike a tree on Ian's passenger side. Ian, aged 44 yrs, was killed instantly on impact with the tree, however his colleague who was driving the ambulance avoided physical injury.



Shocked counterpart NEVDAS ambulance crews from Beechworth and Wangaratta Branches attended Ian's fatal accident. News of his accident and death resonated throughout the entire Victorian Ambulance Service. Ian Clifford was a highly respected citizen and a pillar of the 4000 strong Myrtleford community. His accidental passing saddened the town and surrounding region, which responded alongside NEVDAS management and colleagues with strong support for his family in their tragic loss.



Ian left a loving family, his wife Kathleen, and four children, Belinda aged 21, Douglas 19, Haley 17 and Thomas aged 8 years.

Ian (Ernie) Clifford was a devoted family man. He had a deep affinity with the bush, and a passion for fishing, both of which were fulfilled during his posting to Myrtleford.

He also gave his time generously to the wellbeing of the community. Ian was a life member of the Apex Club, and took part in five charity rallies, 'Camp Quality,' and 'Canteen Supporting Children, and Teenagers, With Cancer.' He was a member of the Wangaratta and Myrtleford SES. Ian left a legacy of respect, gratitude, and goodwill. He will always be remembered warmly by the

wider ambulance fraternity, friends, and the Myrtleford community.

Ian Charles (Ernie) Clifford was farewelled with an Ambulance Victoria Service Funeral. The ceremony was conducted at St Mary's Catholic Church Myrtleford, at 1300 hrs. on June 3, 1998. His farewell attracted fellow emergency service personnel, colleagues, and an exceptionally large gathering of mourners from throughout Victoria, and beyond. Ian's service was followed by a private cremation at a later date.

As a youngster, Ian Clifford dreamed of a career in ambulance. And in his tragically shortened life he had achieved much of his childhood dream. This was accomplished admirably as a respected colleague.

Ian wore our uniform with pride, integrity, competence and compassion.
Sobeit.



S/O Ian ('Ernie') Charles Clifford, Family Man, Paramedic, Friend, and Colleague - Taken Too Soon.

'Deo Confidimus'

~~~~~

## AAV Helicopter Aeromedical Journey – The Tears and Smiles.

Dear Peter,

*I hope this email finds you well. I became aware of “The Beacon” through my association with the Retired Ambulance Association of Victoria over the past 2 years, and its link to the Chas Martin Ambulance Service Victoria Museum. In the latest edition I was very interested in the articles “Life Liners” and “History of Air Ambulance”, having been exposed to parts of the Ambulance Victoria rotary wing journey for 20 years. Reference the Foreword, Life Liners/History of Air Ambulance Articles – The Beacon, 37th Edition, Summer Initially, and prior to entering retirement at the completion of the Contract/Implementation Manager role for the AAV 5/6 HEMS rotary aircraft commercial contract during 2014-2020 period. Also, I was very aware of Michaela’s initial journey at Air Ambulance and she clearly does deserve recognition for her skill, persistence and endurance in the airborne MICA/rescue roles.*

*Since retiring, I have had time to reflect on the development of rotary-wing aviation within Air Ambulance Victoria (AAV). The references in the ‘Life Liners’ article ‘touches the tops of the mountains’ of this history. In my view, the story of how Air Ambulance became what it is today has never been properly recorded, and key people have not been adequately recognised. For example, the Victorian Health Department strongly opposed ambulance helicopters from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. And in 1993, Premier Kennett sought to halt further development and growth in rotary-wing ambulance operations. I spoke with him personally during his visit to LVDAS helicopter base that year and, to his credit, he listened to the case for the irreplaceable value of rotary-wing remote pre-hospital emergency care.*

**Helicopter today** forms an integral part of Ambulance Victoria service delivery. Air Ambulance Victoria, (AAV) ability to respond to remote, limited access, urban and regional areas aeromedical requests has never been more capable. The journey to today’s capability in Victoria, likely had its genesis in 1970, when in conjunction with Vowell Air Services, and Dr Tom Ready “a call when needed” agreement was entered into with Peninsula Ambulance Service (PAS). Subsequently, a Bell 206 Jet Ranger aircraft was based at Tyabb Airport, South East of Frankston. The primary mission of the helicopter was to transfer patients to Melbourne hospitals, and on occasion provide Ambulance response to Mornington Peninsula.

Ambulance Officer training for this role at the time was limited to primarily operating safely around the aircraft. Also, in 1980 LVDAS were able to access the NSCA Hughes 500D helicopter for aeromedical emergency primary and inter hospital care via the support of the SEC, the Gippsland Trade Unions and contractors. The aircraft was utilised by these stakeholders on a “call when needed” basis and supplied by the NSCA in support of the construction



**Bell 206 Angel of Mercy**

phase of Loy Yang Power Station, which commenced in 1977. LVDAS in turn contracted the helicopter on an ‘As required Basis’, contracting for up to 25 hours per month. However, on 01 October 1980 the Health Commission of Victoria instructed LVDAS to cease operating the helicopter, as approval to fund and operate the helicopter was never granted. In a time critical case from the Latrobe Valley to a Melbourne ICU, was 2hrs by road, and 45minutes by air.

Over the ensuing years more than ten different models or variants of helicopter have been operated or trialled by Ambulance Victoria, and the training of personnel in aeromedical and rotary wing operations has matured to best practice world standards.

Peninsula Ambulance Service (PAS) adopted active attempts to secure a wider role to accommodate their “Angel Of Mercy” helicopter service, by pursuing neighbouring Ambulance Services in the early 1980’s.

This move eventuated when the service realised that state government support was contemplated to be withdrawn. However, ‘The Angel’ ceased operation in 1987 after the Victorian Department of Health entered into a contract with Victoria Police (VicPol) in 1985. Following on in 1985, and after two years of research/submissions, and a third review by the Victorian Health Commission, it was agreed that up to 3 aircraft would be funded, two based in Melbourne and one in the Latrobe Valley.



**AS - 365C VicPol /ASV**

It was at the time when the Health Commission was ready to commit to dedicated Ambulance operated helicopters that the opportunity was lost. This occurred when Ambulance Service Melbourne (ASM) were cajoled by VicPol. VicPol had lobbied TAC for funding to support their “three helicopter” solution, which effectively made VicPol helicopter operators contractors to ASM. The aeromedical agreement with VicPol and ASM identified the contracted aircraft as VicPol/ASV.

The opportunity for dedicated Ambulance focused helicopters remained in the wilderness until 2014, when AV finally gained control of the entire rotary wing service in their own right. In the period prior to this date, some VicPol managers abjectly refused to acknowledge that Ambulance had any role in performing or delivering the SAR/rescue. However, evidence that presented during the 1980’s and 1990’s determined otherwise. And a critical and clear turning point was the 1998 Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race helicopter rescues in Bass Strait in perilous conditions and circumstances.

And, in support of my former statement, as an Ambulance Duty Officer, being personally contacted by a VicPol senior officer on a Monday morning advising that “Rescue is a Police role, not Ambulance,” and also that my dispatch on the previous Saturday (AFL Grand Final) afternoon of the Latrobe helicopter to a sandbar near Wilsons Promontory to rescue persons who were caught by a rising tide, was not appropriate. Subsequently, that day, in an enquiry to VicPol, Ambulance was advised that the only VicPol helicopter at the time of call was performing traffic duties, and would require refuelling, and the ETA to the scene would be at least 90 mins.

In 1987, Ambulance Officers qualified at the Air Force Aviation Medicine AVmed/ Passmed course, at Point Cook Victoria. This course was conducted under strict supervision. Candidates were exposed to simulated spatial disorientation and hypoxia scenarios, as part of the first training package for the helicopter rescue role. Also, scheduled into the same course for the first time, Helicopter Underwater Escape Training (HUET) was undertaken by Ambulance Officers.



**AW139 AAV/HEMS**

The reality is, that in my view, the Victorian Air Ambulance system is the best in Australia, if not internationally. I say this from a position of having worked in most states/territory the United Kingdom in aviation SAR, aerial firefighting, Oil and Gas and aeromedical services. To reach this standard, a considerable number of people spent significant volumes of time, effort, and energy. However, the commensurate recording, recognition, and contribution of these people on this incredible journey, in my personal view, has been sparse at best.

It is the intention of the author, in collaboration with AHSV/ The Beacon publication, to record this critical phase of AAV ‘Rotary Wing’ Pre- Hospital Emergency Care into our state ambulance history. And to achieve this goal, we require as much detail as possible of the rotary wing aeromedical journey, which spans over 50 years.

### **DO YOU HAVE ANY ANGEL, 495/491, HELIMED, or HEMS EXPERIENCES TO SHARE?**

Please contact me: - David Sullivan - Email: [dwsullivan1951@gmail.com](mailto:dwsullivan1951@gmail.com)  
Mob: 0408 702237



**A younger David Sullivan**

#### **About the Author.**

David Sullivan was born in 1951 at Thornbury, Melbourne. He served as a rifleman in the Australian Army (RAR) and was honourably discharged in 1973. In 1977, David joined the Latrobe Valley District Ambulance Service (LVDAS), where he completed AOTC training, and was appointed S/O2 at LVDAS Headquarters in Morwell. As a Station Officer, he supported staff training in helicopter response and rescue. During this period, he developed a strong interest in rotary-wing aviation and aeromedical search-and-rescue. This led to operational and executive roles in Australia and overseas, including the USA, the UK, PNG, East Timor and the Solomon Islands. **Cont’d over**

David's specialised work included aircraft accident investigation and the delivery of dedicated aviation services supporting military (Air Force and Army) operations, NSW and Victorian fire agencies. His aviation credentials span light, medium, and heavy helicopter operations, including Aircrewman and Hoist Operator/Rappeler endorsements. In the period of 2014 - 2020, David returned as the Contract/Implementation Manager with Ambulance Victoria to support the procurement, delivery and implementation of the next-generation AW139 aircraft. On completion of this role, in 2020 he retired from numerated employment, and today serves the community in various voluntary roles.

**We will publish (Part 2) of this AAV account written by David Sullivan in the Beacon 'Winter' edition.**

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VL3RS Feedback and Contributions- Bob Beggs.

A Once In A Lifetime Witnessing .

The following remarkable account has been brought to light by sheer chance. Also, I believe that history witnessing a VCAS Air Ambulance mid-air crash by two Ambulance Officers is previously unrecorded. This invaluable information surfaced when vintage VCAS colleague *Bob Beggs* responded to my request posted on 'Signal 8,' the information sought relating to a Tribute to the late *Ian Clifford* that is published in this Beacon. Bob and I acquaint from the mid-1960s, so of course in the phone call, the subject of old times, events, and former colleagues arose, including those members that we sadly have lost from our ranks. It was in the duration of this topic that Bob informed me that he and his crew mate, A/O *Bill (Pommy) Hall*, directly witnessed the mid-air collision involving our Air Ambulance over Moorabbin, in the afternoon of October 19, 1970. The crew was stationary at the intersection of Nepean Highway and South Road in Moorabbin when the incident occurred in the airspace above them. And also that both men watched the Air Ambulance falling to ground and crashing into a residential area probably some 200 metres in front of the ambulance. The crew immediately notified VCAS controller (*Gary Pink*) of a plane crash, then proceeded with urgency to locate the site of the crashed plane wreckage, which miraculously had impacted to ground in a laneway between two houses.

The ambulance crew were not aware that it was our Air Ambulance until they arrived at the crash site. Bob climbed onto the plane's wing and identified VCAS Flight Nurse *Helen Lang* aged 24 years, deceased in the cockpit of the Air Ambulance. Both Bob and Bill were stationed at the VCAS Moorabbin Branch, and our Air Ambulance operation was conducted from Moorabbin Airport. Subsequently, the Moorabbin ambulance crews on duty had regular contact loading and unloading patients with our Air Ambulance flight nurses, and most were well known to each other. So for Bob Beggs it was a shock finding Helen Lang deceased in the plane. Also, when the Air Ambulance crashed in the laneway, consequently the aircraft's fuel tanks ruptured saturating the aeroplane and immediate vicinity with aviation fuel. At the time, Bob Beggs was standing on the wing of the crashed Air Ambulance having just identified nurse Helen Lang, when a spectator walked out of the laneway with a lighted cigarette in his mouth. The actions of this fool could have created another catastrophe, causing an explosion and further loss of life. Bob's reaction to this utter stupidity was predictable and came in the form of a spontaneous and loud 'verbal directive' for this person to exit the area forthwith. Also the directive contained many expletives that are not printable! Unfortunately, Ambulance Officers frequently encountered similar hazards at accident scenes, particularly during an era when cigarette smoking was common and occurred in most places. It is most interesting that Bob informed me that at the time of the mid-air collision, the sky was cloudless and blue, giving the men a clear vision of the incident. However, the Moorabbin ambulance crew were not aware of the fate of the helicopter involved in this tragic accident until afterwards.

The VCAS-contracted Nicholas Airways Air Ambulance, piloted by *Peter Stone*, collided mid-air with a charter helicopter conducting SEC power-line inspections over the Moorabbin area. The helicopter pilot, a former RAAF Vietnam Vet. and two SEC inspectors were killed. All three were married with children. The helicopter wreckage fell into a nearby residential area but, remarkably, caused no further casualties. However, a battery believed to have come from the helicopter crashed through the roof of a house and landed on the lounge room floor. Air Ambulance pilot *Peter Stone* was married with an infant child, and Flight Sister *Helen Lang* was engaged to be married.

Sadly, the hand of fate would deliver our Service another Air Ambulance crash at Essendon in 1986 taking another six lives. And this tragic toll would include duty Air Ambulance Flight Sister, *Deleine Bury*.



=====

Our Journey in Communications

The Ambulance Service was one of Melbourne's first telephone subscribers. The quick spread of telephones meant emergency calls could be promptly attended from the earliest days. By 1905, ambulance call boxes were located on the docks and at city street corners.

During World War II, the generosity of the Melbourne City Council led to the most significant advance in ambulance since the introduction of the motor vehicle. The council had installed a radio transmitter in the town hall offices and were willing to share the facility. V.C.A.S. began transmitting messages to vehicles on the road in October 1944.

In the first eight months, 856 messages were transmitted, including 250 accident cases. For the first time, an ambulance in transit could be diverted to a more urgent case. The merit of radio dispatch was immediately apparent. The entire fleet of 27 vehicles were equipped with radio receivers within two years.

To improve the system, the Service needed to install two-way radio. This was beyond its financial resources. The cost of a suitable system was estimated at £2,500, rising to £5,000 in 1948 and £11,000 by 1952.

The impending Royal Visit of 1954 added impetus to the need for a two-way radio communications system. A public appeal was launched to raise £15,000, but the response was poor – only £6,000 was donated. This was used as a down payment on the radio equipment and 43 two-way units were installed by February of that year. The R.A.C.V. raised £3,000 for the Service late in 1954.

By 1956, the Service was handling 88,000 telephone calls each year and co-ordinating the movement of more than 10,800 patients. All traffic was directed by radio-telephone. The transmitting tower was located in Surrey Hills. The practice of notifying hospitals of the imminent arrival of seriously ill patients was introduced. A second radio channel was needed by 1964.

In the mid-1960s, the Convention of Australian Ambulance Authorities set up a Radio Working Party to examine the adoption of a common radio frequency for Ambulance Services throughout Australia. The advantages of this at state borders were obvious and in due course 67.76 MHz in the VHF band was allocated.

As V.C.A.S. increased in size and workload, a third radio channel was obtained in 1968. Operations were divided into North and South, with a channel in reserve as a spare and for major incidents. A separate channel to handle Car Division operations commenced in 1978.

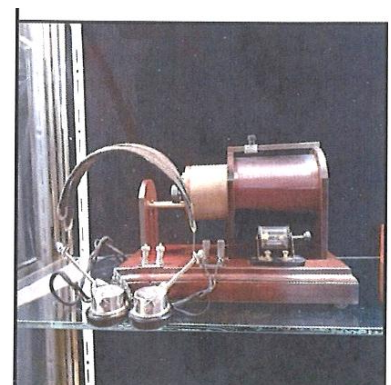
Communications- the Beginning



This Liquid Cup Telephone is an accurate reproduction of Alexander Graham Bell's first experimental telephone transmitter of 1876. The first words ever spoken over an electric telephone were "Mr Watson come here I want you".



Spark balls similar to this model were used in early wireless transmissions made by Guglielmo Marconi. (1896)



This crystal radio receiver is a "Loose coupled crystal radio" manufactured in 1922. They were home made by the millions as they could be made with a few inexpensive parts.



Baramedic 1887"

Remembering Charlie (Chas) Martin OAM, 1938- 2022



Chas at Violet Town, 2019



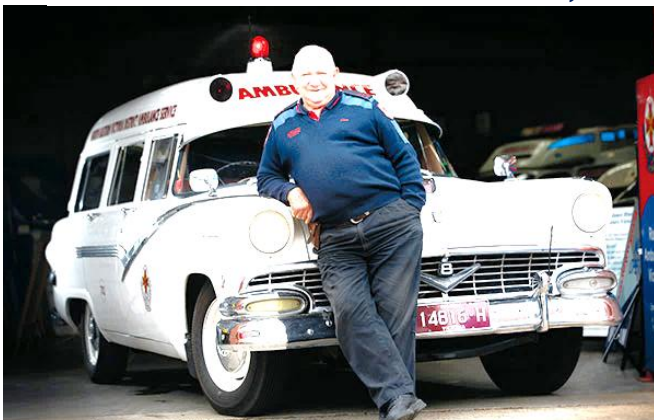
Peter Dent, Chas and Gary Dole, Violet Town 2019



Chas and John Blossfelds at our Museum, 2021



Chas and his pet project - Our Disaster Bus restoration



Chas and the 1956 Mainline



**Terry (Doc) Brooks pours Chas a drink - Christmas Party, 2021
(Note Drink dispenser)**

Thanks for the memories Charlie, you have left a great legacy to Ambulance in Victoria.



**Peter Leek, Terry (Doc) Brooks, John Clancy, Peter Dent
Violet Town, 2019**



Curator Ralph Casey and Peter Leek at Wangaratta



*** Reader Beware, Graphic text and images!

Consecutive Bus Disasters In North Coastal NSW 1989 Claims 57 Lives

Foreword: Just nine weeks apart, two passenger coach accidents occurred in the NSW North coast region taking the lives of 57 men, women, and children. The combined death toll that resulted from the two crashes was almost as tragic as the Granville Rail Disaster.

The first accident occurred on Friday 20 October 1989 at approximately 0400hrs on the original Pacific Highway, one km North of Cowper, near Grafton, on a straight but narrow stretch of the Pacific Highway. Barb and I have travelled this road on several occasions. The original Pacific Highway ran alongside the Clarence River, and although the road was a bituminous surface, it was notoriously narrow at approximately seven metres wide. This leaves a minimum margin of error for two large vehicles passing in an opposite direction. Subsequently, at approximately 0400hrs a Southbound semi-trailer veered to the left hand side of the road while passing the Northbound passenger coach, colliding with the righthand side of the coach. The collision impact tore out the entire left hand side, including the occupied seating on that side of the bus.

The second accident occurred at 0338 hrs, on Friday 22 December 1989 only nine weeks later, one km north of the Smithtown turnoff 15 kms from Kempsey. A Northbound Trans City coach collided head on, in light rain, in a concrete single lane section of the Pacific Highway, at the tiny village of Clybucca Flat, with a Southbound Mc Cafferty's coach. The collision impact concertinaed the front of both bus's front sections together, squashing the first six rows of seats and their occupants into the space of one seat. The collision's force catapulted passengers to the back of the buses as they recoiled from impact, into a space of two seats' rows. This was evidenced by the 14 to 15 bodies that had to be extricated from the back section, between the toilet and two seat rows on the buses. A large number of the survivors and deceased were trapped in both vehicles, taking a large complement of ambulance officers more than 13 hours to clear from the scene. Consequently, this tragic collision surpassed the semi-trailer and passenger coach collision at Cowper, becoming Australia's worst road accident. It resulted in the deaths of 35 individuals and injuries to 39 others.

Passenger Coach and Semi-Trailer Accident Pacific Highway - Cowper, NSW

20 October 1989

On Friday 20 October 1989, Station Officer *G. Gillies*, Coffs Harbour Sub Co-ordination Centre received a call at 0403 hours from Grafton Police to a bus accident one kilometre North of Cowper on the original Pacific Highway. It had been established that there were at least 30 people injured and a number of people trapped. Initially one Ambulance with a double crew from Maclean and two Ambulances with a single crew from Grafton were responded.

A further eight vehicles were dispatched within the ensuing 30 minutes and within an hour a total of 13 vehicles, including Heli 5 from Lismore had been mobilised.

Acting Area Superintendent R. Waterhouse and Acting Deputy Superintendent N. Craig were notified at 0414 hours. Superintendent Waterhouse notified the Assistant Regional Superintendent 'Operations' Mr. J. Jacobson and then proceeded to the scene, arriving at 0516 hours. The co-ordination of the incident was carried out from the Co- ordination Centre at Coffs Harbour.

The initial reports from the scene were of "several deceased, (Signal 83) and several code 9's, (Trapped)". The Officers also requested a medical team be sent to the scene. On arrival at 0432 hours, Station Officer, Algie from Maclean, who was first vehicle on the scene, reported a disastrous situation, "many deceased and many trapped".

Maclean Hospital was notified of the situation at 0440 hours and requested to provide a medical team. Grafton Base Hospital was notified at 0443 hours and also requested to provide a medical team.

The Maclean Medical Team proceeded to the scene in a hospital car arriving at 0530 hours and the Grafton Medical Team was picked up by a Woolgoolga Ambulance and transported to the scene arriving at 0532 hours.

At 0530 hours a car was dispatched from Coffs Harbour to provide cover at Grafton Ambulance Station. The Maclean area was similarly covered by a car from Evans Head.



Superintendent Jacobson arrived at the scene while this report was being made and assumed the role of Ambulance Commander and Acting Area Superintendent Waterhouse the Deputy Commander.

Superintendent Jacobson made a quick reconnaissance of the site to ensure the operation was being carried out in compliance with the North Coast Counter Disaster Plan. As a result of the check, he confirmed that two fire appliances were already on the scene as were State Emergency Service Rescue Units from Maclean and Grafton.



The scene was well organised with a triage and treatment area established between the coach and the roadway.

There were a number of patients (7-10) in the treatment area who were being supervised by a medical team which had just arrived.

A temporary morgue was established in a paddock out of sight of the treatment area on the other side of the overturned coach. A number of deceased had been removed from the coach and were on stretchers in this area awaiting the Police DVI (Disaster Victim Identification) Team.

Ambulance vehicles were parked back from the scene on the east and west sides of the accident site which became the loading points to transfer patients to hospitals both north and south of the accident scene. Patients were reassessed immediately, prior to loading into cars, to ensure that the ones with most serious injuries were transported first, those being with red labels. This process was necessary because there were a number of casualties with orange labels and priorities had to be constantly reassessed.

Superintendent Jacobson spoke to the Police Commander; Inspector Morris and a communication centre was set up with a police vehicle and a cellular telephone in one of the State Emergency Service Rescue Worker's private vehicles near the accident site back from the loading area.

Whilst Coffs Harbour Sub Co-ordination Centre was controlling the incident, the Regional Co-ordination Centre at Lismore was kept informed of the situations and at times was directly involved in the control of the vehicles moving from the north of the region to the accident scene.

At 0441 hours - a Rescue Helicopter from Lismore had been activated to attend the scene with an advanced life support officer from Lismore as well as the Director of Lismore Base Hospital's Accident and Emergency Department, Dr. Arvier. The Helicopter arrived at the scene at 0605 hours.

Dr. Griffin, the Medical Superintendent of Lismore Base Hospital, advised Gold Coast and Royal Brisbane Hospitals at 0619 hours, and requested they have a helicopter and medical teams on standby if required. At 0620 hours - Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade, Coolangatta Ambulance Service was placed on stand by and had Southport Ambulance Service backing them if they were required to cross the border as per North Coast Counter Disaster Plan to render assistance.



Thirty-four minutes later, the Gold Coast Rescue Helicopter was activated with two doctors on board and directed to Grafton Base Hospital to assist with secondary transports.

Shortly after, the Regional Co-ordination Centre was advised by Queensland Police that four helicopters were available should they be required.

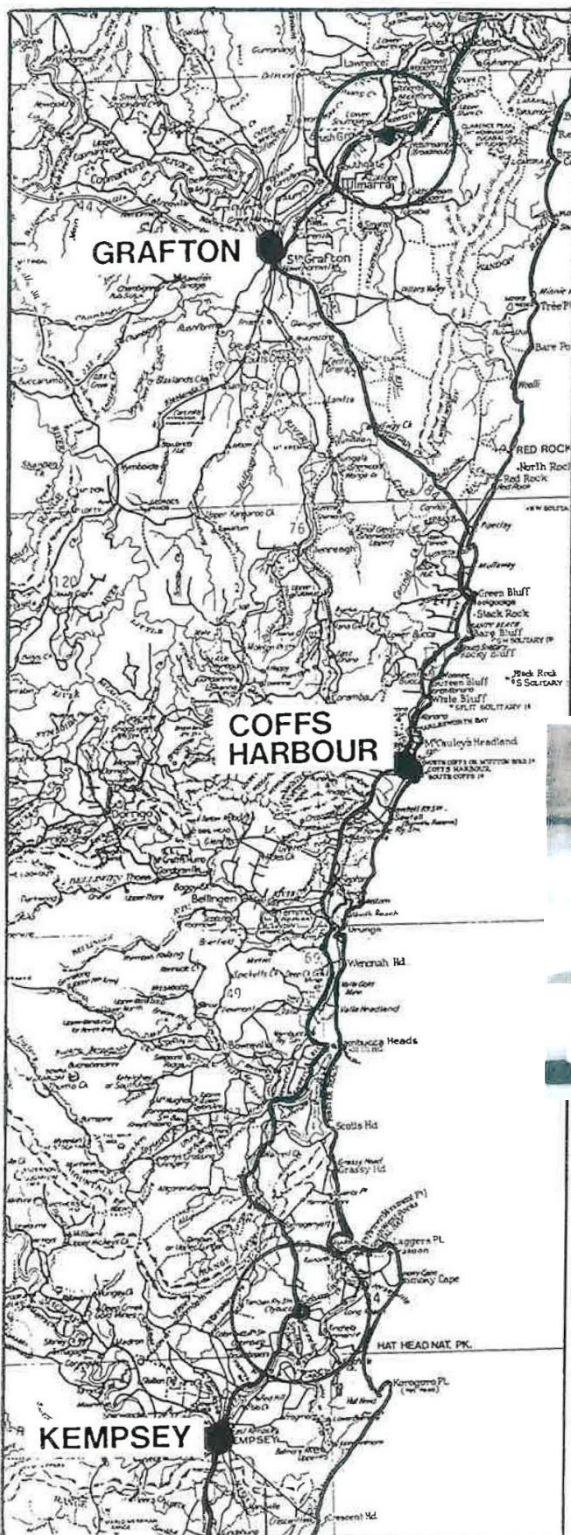
Whilst the movements outlined were taking place, activity continued at a rapid pace at the site of the accident. One of the major problems at the scene was establishing the number of people on the coach. The confusion arose because the coach driver was seriously injured and transported from the scene in a semi-conscious state as soon as his condition was stabilised by advanced life support officers. A copy of the passenger manifest could not be readily found in the overturned coach but was discovered some time later and confirmed the number of occupants, including the driver, to be 42.

The first patients were transported from the scene at 0530 hours and the six most seriously injured, including the coach driver, had all been transported by 0540 hours. All but three patients had been moved out by 0636 hours and by 0642 hours all survivors of the accident had been transported to hospitals, leaving only the 19 deceased at the scene.

Injuries varied from minor lacerations to facial injuries, leg, skull, chest and spinal fractures and hypertension. In all 24 patients were transported in 11 road ambulance vehicles and one helicopter. All the injured were transported from the scene within two hours and 39 minutes from receipt of the original call.

All deceased persons were removed from the scene between 0720 hours and 0755 hours and taken to the Grafton Hospital after the DVI procedures had been completed by the police. Four cars took 19 deceased patients between them.

A time delay was experienced until a crane arrived to lift the coach so as an inspection could be made underneath the overturned vehicle for any deceased persons that may have been trapped under the vehicle and emergency service workers had to search through the bus and surrounds to locate and retrieve parts of dismembered bodies.



John Jacobson



Passenger Coach Accident Pacific Highway, Kempsey NSW. Friday 22 December 1989

At 0338 hours on Friday 22 December 1989, Station Officer W. O'Brien from Port Macquarie Sub Co-ordination Centre received a phone call from Kempsey Police to "a head on collision between two buses on the Pacific Highway, one kilometre north of the Smithtown turn". It was established that 60 plus passengers were involved with many dead and injured. Immediately S.O. O'Brien despatched on-call Officers from Kempsey and surrounding areas.

Support was requested from other Regions due to the need for all available crew and vehicles to attend this disaster and the response was as follows:

In addition, Paramedic Officers from Illawarra and Central District Ambulance arrived by helicopter and were taken direct to Kempsey Hospital.

Port Macquarie Co-ordination Centre advised that the Regional Co-ordination Centre at Lismore had been notified and additional staff were being called. As well, hospitals were being advised and requests were made for medical teams from Hastings District Hospital (Port Macquarie) and Kempsey District Hospital.

The first Ambulance Officers arrived at the scene at 0353 hours and carried out a quick reconnaissance of the site, confirming that there was a major incident with many persons being trapped and seriously injured as well as a large number of deceased persons.

The officers at the scene were advised by Port Macquarie Co-ordination Centre that all available resources were being despatched.

To gain access to the buses the State Emergency Services Rescue Squad cut an entry into the side of both vehicles, where patients were trapped and the patients removed from the buses through these open areas.

A Triage/Treatment area was set up on the southern side of the accident site, approximately 50 metres from the scene.

Superintendent Brennan arrived at the scene at 0440 hours, was advised of the situation by Acting Station Officer M. Lower, Kempsey Branch who had assumed the role of Site Controller and confirmed that a Triage/Treatment area had been established and patients were being assessed and treated by Ambulance Officers and Medical Teams.

At this point, after surveying the scene and ascertaining all required resources were being responded, Superintendent Brennan assumed the role of Ambulance Commander until the arrival of Superintendent Jacobson.

All injured persons had been transported from the scene to various hospitals within four hours 21 minutes.

In the early stages of the handling of this incident a number of steps had been taken to maximise the rescue effort.

At 0404 hours, - The Kempsey Hospital Medical Team arrived at the scene and was transported by Police vehicles.

Thirty minutes elapsed before the arrival of the Hastings Hospital Medical Team (Port Macquarie by police vehicle at 0435 hours.)

The Westpac 3 Helicopter was notified at 0501 hours, however due to low cloud and inclement weather, it could not depart Newcastle until 0507 hours with two paramedics from Newcastle.

A short while later, Heli 5 departed Lismore, arriving at the accident site at 0640 hours. The aircraft brought Superintendent Jacobson to the scene where he made a quick reconnaissance of the site and assumed the role of Ambulance Commander and Superintendent Brennan as Deputy Commander.

At this time there were still several persons trapped in the buses and being treated by Ambulance Paramedics. Due to the anticipated long-term nature of the rescue operation, the Care Flight Helicopter departed Mascot for Kempsey via Royal Prince Alfred and Westmead Hospitals to pick up doctors and equipment.

At 0759 hours, the last patient was removed from the bus and it was then established that 39 patients were being transported to the various hospitals.

Approximately ten deceased persons had been removed from the bus, a further 24 bodies were still to be removed.

Two temporary morgues were established at the scene. This was necessary as the police required deceased persons to be separated and indicated as 'deceased persons' from Bus 1 and Bus 2. These temporary morgues

were situated at approximately 50 metres from the accident site on the southern side of the scene and situated on the left-hand and right-hand sides of the roadway.

Twenty bodies were removed from the buses and placed in the temporary morgues to wait the arrival of the Police DVI Team from Sydney, along with the other ten bodies that had been previously removed. A further four bodies, including the two coach drivers, were still trapped in the buses and could not be removed until the arrival of the Police DVI Team who wanted to take measurements and photographs of the buses in situ.

All bodies were taken from the scene by the Ambulance Service to a temporary morgue at Frederickton which was approximately four kilometres from the scene. This temporary morgue was a dairy cool-room and was used to house bodies until such time as arrangements could be made for their transfer to the City Morgue in Sydney.

The last body was removed from the bus at 1600 hours and, in addition to those killed instantly in the collision, another patient died en-route to hospital, making a total of 35 deceased persons.

This was a long and lengthy operation due to the large number of survivors and deceased that were trapped in the vehicles. A number of ambulance personnel spent more than 13 hours at the scene before clearing and returning to their respective stations.

The operation ran smoothly in much the same way as the previous disastrous accident and for the same reasons. This was the second time within two months that the North Coast Region Disaster Plan was put into action at Australia's worst ever road accident and again it worked most efficiently and effectively.



Overview

As a direct result of the two coach disasters on the North Coast of NSW, almost 60 persons perished and many more suffered life crippling injuries.

At the Coronial Inquest into the first collision at Cowper near Grafton, the blame was attributed to the driver of the semi-trailer, who was found to have a massive concentration of amphetamines in his blood stream.

However, the actual occupants of the buses were not the only victims of these disasters. A short period afterwards, a Police Officer, profoundly affected by what he had witnessed, took his own life. His death could also be regarded as a direct consequence of human driving error of the vehicles that collided. Further to this, many more ambulance, police, and rescue workers suffered extensive psychological trauma from being exposed to sights and sounds of a horrendous and unnatural source.

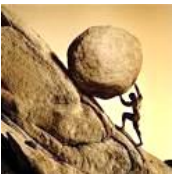
We sincerely hope, and it is indeed essential, that there is a system in place to support these individuals in their ongoing service preserving the lives of the people of NSW.

All serving and retired Ambulance Officers and Paramedics throughout Australia will pay tribute to their NSW counterparts that attended and contributed at these two horrific and tragic passenger bus disasters. And also the associated Emergency Services that worked as a team with NSW ambulance personnel during these trying days.

Our NSW colleagues faced with these two major tragic incidents just nine weeks apart, dealing with significant death, injury, and despair of men, women, and children, and also under almost insurmountable odds, in dreadful circumstances, they rose to the challenge. Responding with competence, dedication, and compassion, and delivered the finest possible pre-hospital care available. We salute you! Ed.

The Beacon is grateful to Snr Const Tom Damaschke NSW Police Force, and the Northern Star Newspaper, Lismore for use of the photographs. Also, the original report by John Jacobson, NSW Ambulance Service.

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## Courage

**The Courage Quote in this Beacon issue is dedicated to:**

***Neale Francis Daniher 15-2-1961 – 25-5-2026***

Rarely is courage demonstrated with such determination and endurance over a long period of time in the face of adversity. Diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease (MND) in 2013, aged 52 years. With the wellbeing of others in mind that may be so inflicted, Neale took up the fight to develop a cure for this dreadful, debilitating and terminal disease. He became Co-Founder of FightMND, and a leading MND advocate. Neale 'nicknamed' MND 'The Beast' and he was the catalyst for the major fund raising initiative 'The Big Freeze' on Queen/ King's Birthday long weekend. An event held at the MCG, preceding the traditional AFL Melbourne - Collingwood football match. In 2025, Neale was named 'Australian of The Year'. Sadly, Neale succumbed to MND on May 25, 2026, and at the time of his passing the FightMND research fund had raised \$115 million for MND research.

**Neale Daniher – A truly, inspirational Australian, and an exceptionally courageous man. He will be fondly remembered always.**

***"Sweet is the sleep that ends all suffering"***





We invite former Victorian ambulance cadets or the families of deceased or incapacitated cadets to participate in this study to recognise and acknowledge the contributions that the program and the cadets made to ambulance services in Victoria and to paramedic education.

### Background

The study will bring together expert participants to describe and acknowledge the contributions of the Victorian Ambulance Service Cadet Program that operated in the 1960s and 1970s. The objectives are to locate the available documents related to the program, identify all the cadets, capture the experiences and insights of former cadets and families, and reflect on the contributions that the program and the cadets made.

### What is expected of participants?

Participants are invited to complete a semi-structured on-line questionnaire that will provide an opportunity to recount their memories of the program and reflect on its impact. The researchers have used archival materials and their own personal knowledge to develop an incomplete list of Victorian Ambulance Service Cadets (some of whom are deceased) and participants will be invited to fill in the gaps. The questionnaire is likely to take from 15-25 minutes to complete.

Participants will be asked whether they would be willing to loan or send copies of any documents related the Victorian Ambulance Cadet Program. An opportunity to provide a short biography as a personal contribution to the project is also available, this will be edited and may be identifiable in publications, presentations and displays with consent.

### Why is this research significant?

Little information about the Victorian Ambulance Cadet Program is on the public record and acknowledgement of the program and those who participated is overdue. Responses to the questionnaire will be combined with documentary evidence to write a historical account to recognise and acknowledge the cadet program and its participants.

### Research Team

Peter O'Meara and Ken Curtis (both former cadets) are conducting this research through the auspices of Monash University, Department of Paramedicine.

### Approvals

This project has been approved by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee – Approval No. 50764.

### Next Step

To access further information and the on-line questionnaire, please use this link:

[https://monash.sydl.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_8xp4BX1z0eaJkCq](https://monash.sydl.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8xp4BX1z0eaJkCq)



### Farewell - Edward (Ted) Van Dyken 1947 – 2026.

Ted joined VCAS/MAS in 1975 and resigned in 1987 to return to the private sector.

In October 2020, Ted was hospitalised. It was in hospital where he conceived the idea of forming a Facebook site for retired ambulance personnel. And from that hospital stay 'Signal 8 Ambulance Services Victoria' was created. After his discharge, Ted enlisted friend and former paramedic, *Andrew Wilson* to assist in the development of this new initiative which was soon up and running and a great success.

Ted Van Dyken leaves a significant legacy with 'Signal 8'. His thoughtful foresight has brought connection and re-connected camaraderie for many retired paramedics.

Ted was deeply committed to the psychological wellbeing of his retired colleagues and will be warmly remembered by all who knew or worked with him at VCAS and MAS.

**Thank you Ted Van Dyken. - Rest peacefully.**



## Our UK Counterparts

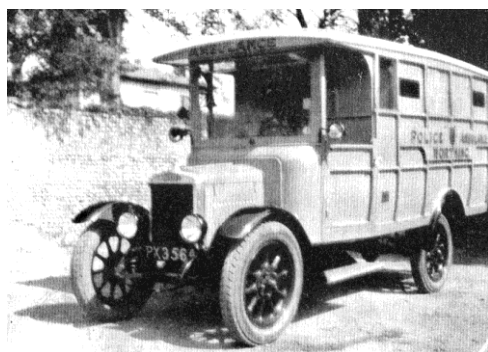
*Through the agency of David Cawte AHSV/AV Museum member, The Beacon has established collaboration with the 'Southern Ambulance Preservation Society' at Lincolnshire, UK. SAPS, also publish a quarterly magazine titled "Standby." It has been agreed that 'The Beacon' and 'Standby' share content on a 'Goodwill Basis' on topics considered to be of mutual interest. This correlation will add to our overseas contacts and provide reader diversity of ambulance history.*

## Worthing Ambulance History

By Brian Janman

**The Worthing Police Division** was responsible for the provision of an ambulance service in Worthing in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, initially providing a wheeled litter and then a horse-drawn ambulance. The Worthing Police Ambulance Committee was responsible for the operation of the service in the town assisted by members of the town's St. John Ambulance Society and later, the St. John Ambulance Brigade.

The Town's first motor ambulance, a Morris, was presented to the town by Mr. H. Aron of Angmering-on-Sea. It was formally handed over to the police in front of a large crowd at a ceremony held on Sunday the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 1926 outside Worthing Town Hall. The local police force formed three sides of a square facing the Town Hall with the new ambulance at the foot of the Town Hall steps. A detachment of special constables and men of the town's St. John Ambulance Division were also present.



*Worthing Police's first motor ambulance, a Morris Commercial, registration number PX 3564 seen parked opposite the Police Station in Union Road in 1928. It was replaced by a new ambulance in 1929 in Petworth.*



*Introduced in 1929, this was the second ambulance to be operated by the Worthing Police Ambulance Committee and was paid for by public subscription. It was built on a Dennis 30cwt chassis by Caffyns of Horsham.*

In January 1931 the Home Ambulance Service Committee presented an ambulance to the Worthing St. John Ambulance Division. As well as St. John Ambulance work, the ambulance was always available as "deputy to the police ambulance should that ambulance be out or undergoing repairs." An advert placed in the local paper at that time by H. Duncan McCall, Divisional Surgeon and Superintendent, appealed to friends of the brigade who had an unused garage that could be placed at the brigade's disposal. In April 1933, an ambulance, registration BBP 24, was presented by the town's Mayor, Mr T.B. Hawkins to the Worthing St. John Ambulance Division. It had a body taken from a Napier ambulance purchased from the St. John Ambulance Brigade in Guildford and rebuilt onto a Commer chassis by Messrs Rice & Harper Ltd of Guildford. It was nicknamed 'The Napier'.



*At this time the division had no permanent home and the ambulance was garaged in the railway station yard in Southcoate Road as seen in the photo. The young man on the left is Wilf Vigo, who went on to become the Station Officer at Worthing Ambulance Station in the 1960's.*

*A cutting from the September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1937, issue of the Worthing Herald shows the new Austin 18hp*

*ambulance that had been delivered to Worthing Police Station on the previous Monday. Once again, the vehicle had been funded by public subscription, and as with the previous police ambulances, it was normally driven by a volunteer off-duty police officer with the aid of a St. John ambulance attendant.*





*During the second world war a businessman from Worthing, Mr F.J. Clements, had this ambulance built at his own expense and presented it to the Worthing Home Guard unit for use in the area. Painted in camouflage colours, it was fully equipped with stretchers and was to be made available to the army for service overseas if required.*

In 1945, towards the end of the Second World War, and due to the reduction in the number of Police Officers in Worthing, the Police Ambulance Committee was finding it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to provide an ambulance service for the town.

Moreover, at the latter end of 1944, the Home Office had announced a policy that made it clear that the Home Secretary no longer approved of ambulance services being maintained by the Police Service, and that arrangements should be made for Local Authorities to relieve the Police of this service at an early date.

The Worthing Police Ambulance Committee met in early summer and reluctantly agreed that in the present circumstances and due to local demand, they could no longer maintain the service and a resolution was passed to the effect that they should present their ambulance to either the Worthing Borough Council or to the County Council. However, neither of these authorities were in a position to accept this offer, and therefore arrangements were made to hand the ambulance over to the Worthing St. John Ambulance Division.

The Division, along with the town's Nursing Division, acquired its first permanent headquarters in 1946 in a house called "Candia" on the corner of Farncombe Road and Lyndhurst Road. The building, with its spacious gardens, had previously been used by the town's Home Guard unit. They intended to build a large hall for drill purposes and garages for their ambulances with accommodation for their drivers in the grounds as soon as possible.

With the introduction of the National Health Service in 1948, the Worthing Division of the St. John Ambulance was contracted by West Sussex County to provide the ambulance service for the town under an Agency Agreement.

*"Candia", Worthing St John Ambulance Division's Headquarters, photographed 2025. The building on the left originally had two garages with accommodation for ambulance crews on the upper floor. The division operated the town's ambulance service under an agency agreement with West Sussex County Council from 1948 to 1963.*



*Following the termination of the agency agreement with the voluntary societies in 1963, West Sussex County Council rented these garages at the rear of "Candia" from the St. John Ambulance Brigade for their crews to use as a temporary ambulance station until the new station was opened in 1966. The ambulanceman in this photo is washing down a Wadham's BMC LD111.*

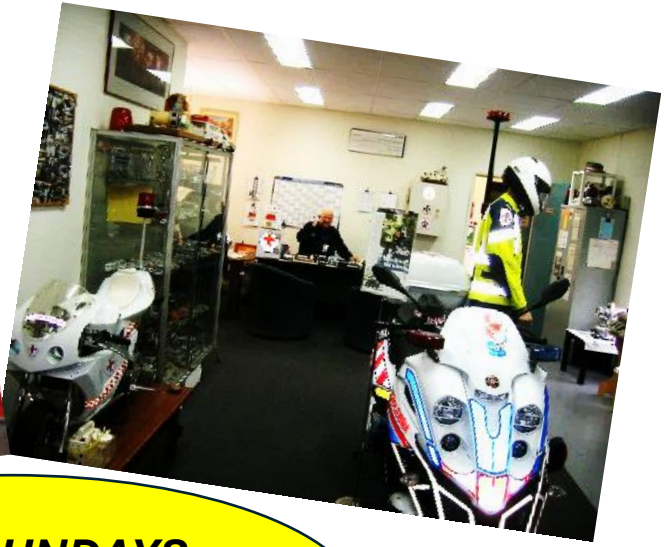
*Worthing's new ambulance station in Durrington Lane. Opened in 1966. It was built to the S.C.O.L.A. design pattern (Southern Coalition Of Local Authorities) used by West Sussex County Council in many of its new buildings in the 1960s including other ambulance stations, schools, libraries and municipal office buildings. This line-up of six ambulances on the forecourt in 1972 includes two Mk1 Ford Transits, two BMC LD111s and a single BMC*



Worthing latest ambulance station was built in Yeoman's

Road, Durrington, and opened in 1989 and it's still in use to this day. When SECamb (South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust) introduced their centralisation policy the ambulance stations in Littlehampton and Shoreham were closed and the vehicles and crews moved into the Worthing facility which now operates as a "Make Ready Centre" or "Hub" from which crews are dispatched to various stand-by points as dictated by ambulance control officers.

## Our Museum Today



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