

'Nothing is stronger than the heart of a volunteer'

christmas day 2001 saw fires race towards the small South Coast village of Tomerong. Whilst Christmas dinners cooked, gale force winds drove a wall of flames speeding towards homes. As the fire encircled the town, families evacuated, abandoning Christmas gifts with safety becoming the priority.

Tomerong village, standing first in the line of fire, was taken by surprise. The brigades stood shoulder to shoulder to save the township. No heroes or heroines, just ordinary people trying to deal with mother nature at her worst.

The fire continued to rage relentlessly through the Shoalhaven area for the next three weeks, threatening and re-threatening coastal towns and villages, leaving over 100,000 hectares of blackened bushland in its swathe. Miraculously only 44 homes were lost with no loss of life.

The Tomerong Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade were at the fire front from the very onset, but they were soon joined by other local brigades and, once the enormity of this fire was recognised, by crews from throughout NSW as well as many interstate brigades.
(Of the 144 fire districts in NSW, 120 had brigades at the Shoalhaven fires)

Thankful community members sought for a way to acknowledge the mammoth effort of these crews and the idea of a calendar was put up in jest. The idea however quickly gained momentum when we realised not only was it a graphic way to recognise the men and women of our local crew but also a means of fundraising to upgrade equipment and replace resources depleted during the fires.

The brigade members took up the challenge and have embraced the project with their usual wit, courage and enthusiasm. The project has offered some light reprieve for the brigade after the intensity of the previous weeks.

Stripped of their protective garb, the dramatic photography of Ross Pulsford captures the reality that these are ordinary, vulnerable men and women, volunteers, who have shown enormous courage and fortitude in the face of any challenge.

We believe this calendar not only pays tribute to our brigade but a tribute to volunteer fire crews everywhere. Thank you one and all.

You will note we have rewritten chronology and this calendar year runs from March 2002 to February 2003 - all those who were cheated of their New Year's celebrations because of the fires are invited to celebrate February 28th!!!



Ross Pulsford

'If you've never known fear, then you've never known bravery.'