

The Auckland Fire Brigade 1874-2024 Project

The 1980s Decade (1980 - 1989)

Although the 1980s was considered to be the best time in firefighters minds, two sleeping giants were being aroused that would culminate in catastrophic consequences for the brigade in the 1990s.

The business Round Table and the Government wanted change throughout the economy. This was initiated by deregulation by the Labour Government led by Roger Douglas, Finance Minister at the time. Later the National Government introduced draconian cost reduction policy led by Finance Minister Ruth Richardson.

The National Fire Service was only 4 years old and there was a tremendous amount of organisational structure change being planned and implemented. Additional executive officers were required to cope with the additional workload created by the establishment of the National Fire Service. The digital age had arrived with systems installed in the Control Room.

A chemical fire of some significance would see the establishment of an Occupational Health Nurse following the ICI Fire in 1984.

In 1980, the Phoenix badge was replaced by new badge with fern leaves outer, eight-pointed star [SERVIMUS] and either phoenix or crossed axe in centre. Brigade CFO's had choice. The detail in the badge were significantly improved, the outer ring were clearly fern leaves, not oak leaves. August 1 1984 both options replaced with fern leaves outside, eight-pointed star with crossed axes and helmet inside, Queen's crown surmounted on top. NZ The Fire Service motto SERVIMUS, which means we serve. The badge's eight-pointed star denotes the eight merits of the motto: strength, efficiency, resourcefulness, valour, integrity, mobility, unity, service.

During 1980, yellow Super Chieftain and Cairns fire helmets trialled in Auckland as more visible replacement for black Super Chieftain helmets. Trial lasted six to nine months, quite well received by Auckland staff. Did not receive enough support from other Region Commanders, lot of organisation structure change going on. Colour change happened in 1987 when NZ made Pacific Helmets, Wanganui introduced.

Late August 1980, Third Officer Bob [RAM] Baillie promoted to Deputy Chief Fire Officer Christchurch, the Brigade where he started. Replaced by Senior Divisional Officer [TV] Terry Miller, Terry replaced as Senior Divisional Officer by Divisional Officer Kevin [KG] O'Sullivan.

November 1 1980, Saturday, FIRS, [Fire Incident Reporting System] introduced. Modified USA computerised system used nationally, replaced multiple local systems. Staff completed paperwork, loaded by Command Clerks. Replaced about 2003 with SMS {Station Management System}. all events and activities entered by crew.

November 3 1980, afternoon, Monday, function held at Brigade Headquarters, Pitt Street to acknowledge a group of retired Officers and Firemen. Included were Lloyd Wilson, Ron Neary, Syd Adams, Abe Barrow, Eric Bell, George Carlisle, Ken Cox, George Dickson, Eddie Docherty, Trevor Gilbert, Noel Glen, Jim [JP] Harrington, Ken [LK] McNamara, Bert Manning, Scotty [Andrew] Mason, Fred Moss, Ruff Pownall, Bert Taplin, Dick [DP] Webb, Norm Whiting and others.

November 28 1980, Friday, new Senior Officer ranks introduced for paid staff. Chief Fire Officer Kerry J Everson became Chief Fire Commander, Dave Woodward became Senior Fire Commander, others Fire Commander and Assistant Fire Commander. Volunteer Brigades continued to use Chief Fire Officer etc.

During 1980 two experimental 11m ladders built by National Headquarters, used at Auckland Training Centre Mt Wellington, both quickly proved too heavy [4 men] and cumbersome and never went into service. Wood truss ladder built by Bindon's at Papatoetoe; alloy box truss built by Aluminium Ladders Glen Innes. Both overseen by Rodney Johnson ex SSO Takapuna and Auckland's ladder repair man.

May 1 1981, Friday, Auckland and North Shore amalgamated [Area's 1A and 1B]. Creation of four Divisional Commands - Northern [Ken P Derrick, Fire Commander], Central [David Woodward, Senior Fire Commander and DCFO], Western [Bob RG Grey, Fire Commander], and Southern [Terry V Miller, Senior Fire Commander]. Chief Fire Commander and CFO Kerry J Everson. The six Assistant Fire Commanders [AKA the dogsbodies] were Kevin G O'Sullivan, Ron Johnson, Cliff W Mears, Rodney T Nightingale, Graeme Wrigley, and Owen H Woods. Regional Commander No1 Region [Auckland] was Allan W Bruce.

July 22 1981 to September 12 1981, sixteen match Springbok Rugby Tour caused disturbances throughout NZ, two games called off. Two games in Auckland, September 5 1981 versus Auckland and September 12 1981 third and final test [AB's won 25-22]. Active protests outside both games culminated with low flying Cessna, flown by Marx Jones [32] with "bombardier" Grant Cole dropping flares and paper flour bombs onto Eden Park during test, game continued. Both games a Fire Safety Officer and a Senior Officer liaising inside ground. Police spent \$15M on 'Operation Rugby' over the tour.

About August 1981, extensions started at Mt Wellington Training Centre [Station 29]. added new lecture room block, second floor to smoke chamber. Architect Richard G Hillary. Recruit Course transferred to Takapuna.

September 7 1981, Monday, Recruit Course A12/81 started at Takapuna Station. Included were the first two full time female firefighters, Anne Barry [ex Senior Controlroom Operator] and Elizabeth England. Course graduated November 4 1981 [8 weeks], Shane Adams passed out No1, England [27] No2 and Barry [29] No3. Course at Takapuna [Station 80] due to major extensions at Mt Wellington Training Centre [Station 29]. Course instructors SSO [Senior Station Officer] Des Baldwin and SO [Station Officer] Wayne Tokley, DO [T] [Divisional Officer Training] Paul Cowan. SSO [T] Lance Blyde assisted as required.

November 14 1981, Saturday, multi-agency plans pre-prepared for possible emergency landing because of bad weather of US Space Shuttle Columbia. NASA's Space Transportation Shuttle STS-2 was the first time a crewed, orbital vehicle had been reused and returned to space. Auckland International Airport was only runway long enough in NZ. STS-2 landed safely at Edwards Air Force Base, California, 100 miles or 160 km northeast of Los Angeles. February 1 2003, Columbia broke up as it returned to earth, killing all seven astronauts on board, event led to the retirement of all the space shuttle fleet in 2011.

From mid-1981, Fire Service non firefighting uniform, [trousers, service jackets, caps] changed from black to blue. Initiative started by Chief Fire Officer Kerry [KJ] Everson. Old black uniform used by Maori Warden groups. From 1983, Officer white shirts worn during routine work replaced by light blue shirts, same as Firefighters. A couple of years later, blue shirts only worn. About 2002 light blue shirts replaced by dark blue.

May 1 1982, Saturday, Brian [BS] Armstrong, appointed Regional Commander, No1 Region [Auckland], replacing Allan [AW] Bruce. Transferred from Regional Commander No2 Region

[Hamilton]. Before that Chief Executive Officer, National Headquarters, a post below Fire Commissioners Later NZFS Chief Executive and National Commander. Retired to Auckland.

Between September and October 1982, the mainly 6" [150mm] station alarm turnout bells were replaced by Sepac electronic alert that started quiet and got louder. Pilot lights retained; they came on first. Direct hard wired telephone connections for station turnouts replaced with Selcal [selective calling radio system] tones from channel 3 at Quinns Road, Waiatarua. Even Great Barrier Island were turned out using tones from Quinns Road. Saved rental costs by not using Post and Telegraph telephone lines.

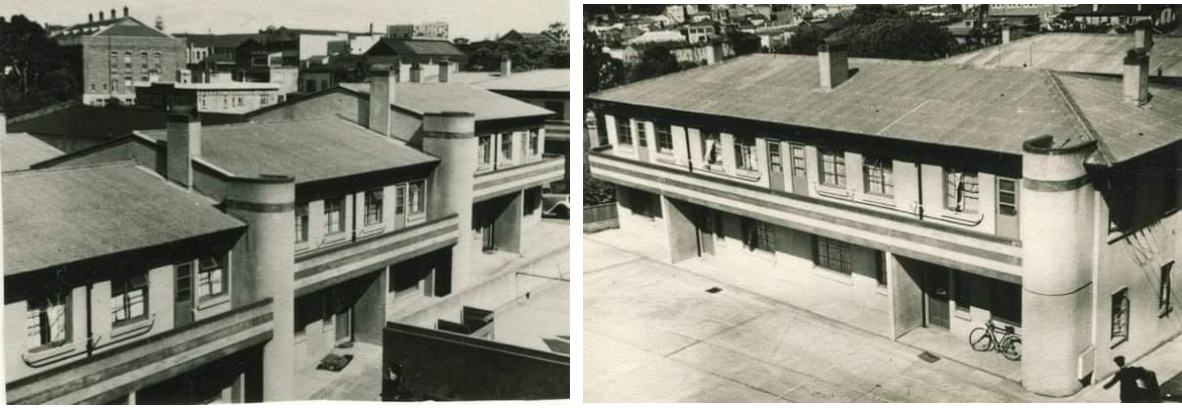
April 22 1983, 14:00, Friday, Fire Service display at Manukau City Shopping Centre, Wiri Station Road car park for Prince and Princess of Wales. The morning was very wet, cleared about mid-day, afternoon quite pleasant. Displays were; vehicle extrication using HRT, rural fire with Dodge tanker in pump and roll, aerial appliances at work [Mack Aerialscope, Mack Snorkel, Grove TTL, two International Thibault Telebooms], mass water display including all aerial appliances. Royal couple presented with model Mack pump, nominally for Prince William, made by Controlroom Supervisor Rodney Adamson. Charles and Diana walked amongst staff on parade at end and had many chats.

The first office computer was purchased on Wednesday 18 May 1983, Wednesday, for the Auckland Area Office. Listed in approved CAPEX programme as a PFA Interface. One turned it on, went and made a coffee and came back and drank the coffee as it still loaded up. Floppy disks, dot matrix printer and all, how things have and will continue to change.

August 1983. Demolition of three blocks of Headquarters quarters commenced. 6 to 11 on the ramp, 16 to 19 and 20 to 21 both at the back, Pitt Street, Newton. Contractor Lendich struggled at first with equipment they brought in, so heavier machinery brought on site which still had a hard job with all the steel reinforcing and heavy concrete. Took about three weeks, six days a week. Site cleared to build new Region Office, a building of three floors, estimated to cost \$3,172,000, occupied mid-1986.



Lendich Demolition demolishing Block 6-12 on the Station Ramp. Courtesy K Rd Heritage



Block 6-12 on the Station Ramp and Block 16-19 facing Ramp with 20-21 Behind Station. Photos Courtesy of K Rd Heritage.



An Aerial View of all the Flats. The Shirt Factory, Greys Ave top left, northern end of Station. The Flats facing Pitt St south eastern end of Station still exist (2023). Photo Courtesy K Rd Heritage.

November 16 1983, Wednesday, Secretary of the Northern Fire Brigades' Union, Arthur [AW] Monk. submitted to the Parliamentary Select Committee studying the Industrial Law Reform Bill. Monk said the efficiency of the Fire Service would be reduced as voluntary unionism would cause dissent among Firemen which would lower the standard of discipline. Monk said that if the bill became law, it might encourage Firemen to defect from the union and become "free-loaders." "If that happens, there is no doubt in our minds that those members who' are continuing to foot the bill for keeping the union going will start to call the freeloaders by insulting names".

December 1 1983, 09:00, Tuesday, Firefighters of Wellington Hot Footers started a relay race from Auckland Central Fire Station to Wellington Central Fire Station. The team were the first to run non-

stop the 647 km, followed State Highway One. Team of twelve runners raced through the main doors of the Wellington Central Fire Station at 08.43. Five charities shared \$15,000 raised.

July 1984, Bob [RG] Sampson appointed Auckland Area Commander [Area 1A] and Auckland Chief Fire Officer. Lived in married quarters at Parnell Station. Started In Wellington FB, to Chief Executive Officer National Headquarters. Replaced Kerry [KJ] Everson promoted Region Commander No6 Region, Dunedin. Replaced by Trevor Bean. Trevor retired as Area Commander, Auckland. Bob Sampson retired as National Commander, Estall Commission.

August 1 1984, Wednesday, new Fire Service badge, sometimes called insignia or crest, on appliances and cap badges changed to eight-pointed star [SERVIMUS] and crossed axes inside fern leaves and Queens Crown. Replaced badges with fern leaves, with either the phoenix or helmet and crossed axes, inside the eight-pointed star. New cap badges again made by Mayer and Toye, Wellington. May 24 1984 approved by Governor General. The New Zealand Queen's Herald at Arms, Kevin O'Shea, presenting then Chairman of New Zealand Fire Commission, Rear Admiral Ted [EC] Thorne with the certificate that gave the right to use and display the Crown. Replaced July 1 2017 when FENZ started, simplified, one Fire Service axa and one rural axe, and without crown at top. The motto SERVIMUS means we serve. The badge's eight-pointed star denotes the eight merits of the motto: strength, efficiency, resourcefulness, valour, integrity. mobility, unity, service.

October 14 1984, 01:30, Sunday, two Firefighters suffered minor stab wounds at Manukau Fire Station, Kerrs Road and Great South Road, Wiri. Senior Fireman Bob Durham [chest] and First-Class Fireman Bill Theobald [back of hand] chased, caught and disarmed George Rerekura [21] after he interfered with crew's private cars at rear of Station. Rerekura also charged with assaulting Police Constable Andrew Gallagher. In 2010, Rerekura was killed near Kaikohe walking while drunk on SH12 at night, hitchhiking, wearing dark clothing.

ICI. December 21 1984, 16:45, Friday, a PFA call then multiple 111 calls were received to major and fatal fire at ICI Riverview Warehouse, Bowden Road, Mt Wellington. End of year barbecue, fire started alongside a pallet of calcium hypochlorite, small spillage reacted with an organic material and ignited. Storeman Robert Graeme Plummer [62] tried to put out fire, became trapped and went upstairs, where he was rescued from a mezzanine floor by staff using fork hoist outside, he died March 16 1985 in Auckland Hospital from severe burns. Large chlorine and ammonia cylinders at rear posed major risk. Fourth Alarm transmitted. Building of one floor and mezzanine, about 70m by 60m, deep seated chemical fire, 7 LPD, 1 HPD, 3 ground monitors, 2 Aerialscope monitors, BA including Drager BG174's in use. Brigade involved until 18:13 hours December 28. Approximately \$124,625 worth uniform and equipment contaminated and destroyed. Site rebuilt and sprinklered. Several reports and investigations into environmental and health consequences of fire.

ICI. Two major reports were generated from the fire.

Report on the fire at ICI New Zealand's Riverview Store, Mt Wellington 1984/New Zealand Fire Service No1 Region (1985); and The Health Consequences of the ICI Fire. Report to the Minister of Health on the Heath of Firefighters in the Fire at the ICI Riverview Store, Mt Wellington Auckland. 21 December 1984. Sian Alias QC, Dr DR Bandaranayake, Assoc Professor IR Edwards, Assoc Professor WI Glass.

Here are the links to the reports:

[Report on the fire at ICI New Zealand... | Items | National Library of New Zealand | National Library of New Zealand \(natlib.govt.nz\)](#)

[The+health+consequences+of+the+ICI+fire.pdf \(moh.govt.nz\)](#)

ICI. On 25 March 1991 a contractor died in Middlemore Hospital after an ammonia tank he was upgrading exploded in Mt Wellington at the ICI plant. NZ Herald 26

PRANK. May 6 1985, soon after 13:00, Monday, Yellow Alert, Queen Street and Victoria Street, City, five drums labelled "cyanide" rolled off the back of a truck. Area cordoned off to traffic and pedestrians, shops and office buildings evacuated for 40 minutes. Capping Week stunt, Auckland University students. Brigade observed the drums contained dry ice and a red jelly-like substance. Each drum had been pierced so that its contents leaked. Five students voluntarily admitted their part to Auckland Police, Chief Inspector Ross Dallow, paid compensation.

July 10, 1985, 23:38, Wednesday, first bomb went off under the forty metre Greenpeace ship MV Rainbow Warrior at Marsden Wharf eastern outer. Second explosion at 23:45 sunk the ship four minutes later. The two underwater limpet mines were planted by French secret service agents and blew two holes in the hull, the first the size of an average car. Some ship's crew went back on board after the first explosion. Photographer Fernando Pereira died on board [drowned] after the second explosion, some escaped, others thrown into the water.

1985, Mangere VFB disbanded, lack of staff. Formed late 1970 by Auckland MFB when new and additional composite staffed Mangere Station opened in Bader Drive on October 6 1970. Last VSO was Bob Price. Last Mangere No2 appliance was the International AACO183V, pump, the 'Baby Inter', to relief fleet.

1985, Manurewa VFB, based at Manukau Station disbanded, lack of staff. The new station at Kerrs Road and Great South Road, Wiri was quite some distance from old station in Manurewa, and in an isolated area. World-wide the economy had slowed, so did property development. Formed July 1939 Manurewa VFB by Manurewa Borough Council, equipment stored at Council yard, Hall [now Halver] Road. First Station built and opened September 1941,

February 21 1986, Friday, new Fire Force Commanders were announced. Wellington Fire Region Commandder Dereck [DA] Varley appointed to Auckland replacing Region Commander Brian [BSA] Armstrong appointed February 7 1986 to Fire Service Commissioner, NHQ [replaced Ivor Wesley]. Dunedin Region Commander Kerry [KJ] Everson transferred to Wellington Region. Bob [RAM] Baillie [NHQ] appointed Fire Force Commander, Dunedin Region.

Mid-1986, new three floor Region building occupied behind Fire Headquarters Pitt Street. Estimated cost \$3,172,000. No official opening. Property Officer, Occupational Health offices, general, equipment, ladder and hose bond stores on ground floor, Area 1A. Region 1 and Pay Offices on first floor, Controlroom, cafeteria, four offices, double office for DO Fire Safety, HR and TLO and meeting rooms on top floor.



Aerial View of New Region HQ Building (Orange Roof). Courtesy K Rd Heritage.

July 16 [?] 1986 Wednesday, Divisional Officer [Fire Safety] Lin McIvor died. On leave, Lin went to the first rugby 'battle of the bridge', Auckland versus North Harbour at Eden Park. Lin parked his car in a back street but sadly never got out. Before he joined Auckland MFB as Fire Prevention [now Fire Safety] Officer Lin was Deputy Chief Fire Officer Papatoetoe VFB and worked for NZ Railways.

February 2 1987, Monday, Firefighter Unions gave Fire Service Commission fourteen days' notice of total two hour strikes in their drive for a pay rise. Labour's Minister of State Services cynically said Firefighters were overpaid because there was no staff wage dissatisfaction creating a shortage of staff. February 24th Union called off threat, 27th progress on most other issues, but not pay.

ICI. October 1987, Occupational Health Nurses appointed in all six Fire Regions following recommendations after the 1984 ICI fire investigations. In No1 Region [Auckland] the first person appointed was Joce Werring. The last was Jan Wills [Wills-Collins]. The Unit was based in house two at the Training Centre, Mt Wellington, later moving to Regional Headquarters. At about the same time Brigade Doctor appointments were made, Jeff Fetherston served until a restructure in 2012.

ICI. On 6 December 1988, Tony Berends wrote in the New Zealand Herald. "An Auckland firefighter's death from leukaemia at the weekend brought renewed calls for a commission of inquiry into the effects of the ICI chemical blaze four years ago. The firefighter, Mr Tony Jennings, aged 35, was diagnosed as having leukaemia 18 months ago – two and a half years after the ICI fire where he spent four hours on standby duty. Fire Commissioner, Mr Brian Armstrong said from Wellington that the Fire Service had already acted on an inquiry into the fire by an industrial medicine expert."

ICI. On 22 December 1988 and article appeared in the New Zealand Herald stating that the firefighting equipment (uniform) developed after the 1984 ICI fire would not get to firefighters until the middle of 1989.

January 24 1989, Tuesday, new Auckland Controlroom commissioned in the Region Building [rear of Pitt Street], floor 3 [top floor], overlooking Myers Park. First fully computerised Controlroom [UK Dowty system, Philips NZ local agent]. Sister system installed in Wellington. Closed 1998 and moved to NorthCom, with Police, Great North Road and Sussex Street, Grey Lynn. Moved to Harlech Building Otahuhu in

In 1989 the VHF radio telephone channels operated by the Auckland Controlroom to Stations and mobiles were - Channel 1 from top Mt Eden [later to Skytower], channel 2 from Mt Otau in the Hunua Ranges, channel 3 from Quinns Road Waiatarua, activated station turnout systems, turned on [even Great Barrier Island], channel 4 on Lonely Track Road at the top of Torbay, channel 5 Paehoka Hill near Helensville, channel 6 at Moir Hill Road on Kraaks Hill, near Warkworth, channel 7 from Tokatea Hill above Coromandel then Region 2's. Later channels were Klondyke near Onewhero, and Te Ahua at top Piha. Channel on top of Brynderwyn linked Auckland to Whangarei. About 2019 all channels changed to UHF, Auckland and Northland permanently linked.

January 24 1989, Tuesday, as part of the new upgraded Controlroom, Auckland made [Audio Comms] MSU's [mobile status units] fitted in all vehicles. An oversized key pad programmable to each vehicle ID enabled crew to radio transmit status messages by tones not voice, K1 to K99, audible "blip blips". These updated the computer system, large map and fire reports. Auckland project driven by Dave Wardley. Units changed as technology improved and more features included. In 2022 a combined emergency service replacement project.

April 1989, Divisional Officer [Fire Police] Dick Reid retired after long service including EFS during WW2. Replaced by Ric Carlyon who resigned 1993 to go overseas with TVNZ work. Ric returned to Fire Police on return to Auckland, attained Deputy Chief Fire Officer Operational Support. November 29 2011, Auckland Volunteer Fire Police name changed to Auckland Operational Support Unit, a volunteer Brigade.

May 3 1989, late Wednesday morning, Recruit Firefighter John Perry Opini Scott [23] died during BA training at the Auckland Training Centre, Mt Wellington. Scott had not declared he suffered asthma, he had trouble breathing, took face mask off in very hot conditions. During 1988 Scott did not finish recruit course due to knee injury and surgery.

1989, Titirangi VFB [with Laingholm, Waiatarua and Piha], Glen Eden VFB and Henderson VFB [with Te Atatu] VFB's incorporated with Auckland Brigade.

Mid-1989. computerised Chemdata hazardous substance information system commissioned on standalone computer in Regional Controlroom. UK NCEC [National Chemical Emergency Centre] emergency services database system widely used around world. Closely linked to Hazchem hazardous substances emergency plate information and emergency action code system.

November 1 1989, Wednesday, another Local Government reform and mergers created seven enlarged local councils across Auckland. They were Rodney District, North Shore City, Auckland City, Waitakere City, Manukau City, and strangely, very small Papakura District and Franklin District. Auckland Regional Council remained. They were all replaced November 1 2010 by single Auckland Council.

Many thanks again to Cliff Mears who has tirelessly recorded the AFB history from log books, Fire Board Reports, Newspaper Cuttings and other sources making our job so much easier.

DMN August 2023