

PROFILE

Neil Copley

Most members of St. John can quite clearly remember some specific act or incident that motivated them to join the Brigade, and Neil Copley, the Officer in Charge of the St. John Ambulance Service at Port Augusta, is no different.

In 1954 and 'confined to barracks' with a broken leg, Neil, for something to do, read a 1927 edition of the St. John Ambulance Association First Aid Manual and his interest was sufficiently aroused for him to put together his own first aid kit. At about the same time, a mate of his who was a St. John Cadet told him 'I go to a place where we teach First Aid'.

So commenced a career with St. John that has spanned 27 years. First as a Volunteer and then as a member of the Regular Staff, to his present position of Service Superintendent. He passes his experience on to the members of the Division by assisting in training sessions and is also a member of the S.J.C.A.S.A. Executive.

After leaving school, Neil commenced his working life as a Cadet Industrial Chemist with the Electricity Trust of S.A. at the 'Port', but after four years, and with St. John in his blood, he joined St. John as a full time Officer in his home town 17 years ago.

Life with St. John is rarely dull and allows little in the way of spare time for other interests or community involvement and yet Neil seems to fit so much into his life.

In the field of Community Service, he has given service to the Port Augusta Fire Service (an Auxiliary Station of the South Australian Fire Brigade) since 1961 and is currently second-in-command.

Neil has received the Order of Australia Medal for Ambulance and Fire Service and the Order of St. John Service Medal. He is also a Serving Brother in the Order of St. John.

He was appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1968 (one of the youngest ever appointed) and is one of two local Coroners in the town. As Coroner, he is required to have reports prepared for all fires, sudden deaths or death as a result of motor vehicle accidents. Since the appointment of a resident Magistrate in Port Augusta, the amount of time he sits on the bench has been reduced, nevertheless, he still plays his part.

Many of us know Neil as a hail and hearty fellow who is always ready to spin a good yarn, but there is a quiet side to him which obviously comes from listening to some of the sad cases which he has heard from the Bench — 'the poor destitute man who would give himself up to the Police as he had nowhere to live, and would be charged with insufficient means of support'. Fortunately, this type of case does not occur now, since the Department of Community Welfare has accepted responsibility for these less fortunate people.

Another type of case which obviously has had an impact on Neil is to have six children from one family before him charged with being neglected children — the fault not being their own.

Of course, not all of the cases Neil has heard have been tragic — there have been the humorous and some which he related to us during the interview were real 'screamers', but because of the tone of reporting we attempt to maintain in 'Spotlight', can not be printed.

However, the effects of hearing some of the sad cases as a J.P. on the Bench have obviously rubbed off on Neil as he is a very proud father and a strong supporter of the family unit.

Other interests include being a member of the Port Augusta High School Council, and he has been a member of the



Neil Copley wears two hats — one as Officer-in-Charge of the St. John Ambulance Service, and the other as Second-in-Command of the Port Augusta Auxiliary Fire Brigade.

Kindergarten Committee and the Port Augusta Hospital Board.

Although not a great sportsman, he was the recipient of a trophy — he won an alarm clock for being the unplaced club member in one swimming event and gained distinction by sinking in the 'Port Pirie Swim Through'.

Perhaps Neil may not have been a Champion Sportsman, but his family have certainly earned their places. His wife plays A Grade Netball and Basketball and is coach for the junior teams, whilst his two daughters and son are all keen on sports.

His 13 year old daughter is currently attending school in Adelaide as she is a member of the State Under 16 basketball team and recently played in the Australian Championships.

There is no doubt that Neil Copley is very proud of these achievements. Obviously, his hobbies centre around his family, but in true 'Copley' fashion, he says he has one other — 'carting rubbish out of the back yard and keeping fit'. It makes one wonder, the order in which he places these two priorities.

When asked his ambitions, Neil replied, 'To do the job professionally'. His philosophies are very basic, but very important, 'To do the best you can with what you've got' and 'To have standards which must include family life'.