
MINI-PROFILE:

RAY SMITH

SERVICE SUPERINTENDENT, GAWLER

A WAY OF LIFE FOR SMITHY

(Courtesy "The Bunyip")



He has a tough exterior, admits he is a "stirrer", but he has a heart of gold, according to his superiors. They also say that Ray is one of the most co-operative people and is very highly regarded in the St. John organisation.

Ray was born at Naracoorte and because his father was employed by the (then) S.A. Railways, moved house many times, attending a number of schools along the way. When the family moved to Adelaide, he completed his secondary schooling at Norwood Technical High.

There followed a wide range of jobs, including selling groceries, stooking hay, carting wheat and welding. Eventually a job came up with the Railways and Ray jumped at the chance to follow in his father's footsteps. For the next 12 years, he worked at Hansborough, Sutherlands and Morgan as a ganger.

Through the Railways, Ray became interested in First Aid, taking courses and competing in First Aid competitions. This led to instructing others. His first involvement with St. John came in 1958 when he joined the Waikerie Ambulance Service. Still employed as a railway ganger, Ray travelled up to three times a week from Morgan to Waikerie to train as a volunteer member with the Waikerie Division, eventually rising to Divisional Superintendent.

During the seven years he lived at Morgan, Ray became the local St. John representative and was often called by police and others to attend accidents. He was also trainer to the Morgan Football Club. "Riverland footy matches are excellent training for your practical First Aid!", he says.

In 1962, Ray joined the Loxton Ambulance Service as their second officer. They worked seven days a week and Ray's wife, Shirley, became an extra "member of staff". From the Smith home, she ran what amounted to a complex home base radio station — in touch with ambulance, fire and police services. She was so busy that during one period, she did not actually leave the house for three months!

During this time, Ray was responsible for starting the Loxton Ambulance Division and soon after, the Pinnaroo Ambulance Division.

Early in 1965, Ray was appointed Officer-in-Charge at Loxton. The Centre was pretty primitive for a time — a complex of two sheds end-to-end with an ambulance in each and an "office" in the middle. Ray says they used to sit at their desks with rubber boots on at certain times of the year because the floor was under water! "In summer we got bogged in sweat and in winter, bogged in flood waters!"

Ray soon became heavily involved in leading a drive for funds to build a new Centre. This was eventually achieved — in fact, they also raised enough money to build two houses for the fulltime ambulance staff.

In 1973, Ray was transferred to Gawler as Officer-in-Charge. He was not impressed with the conditions he found and made his feelings very clear in a front page story in *The Bunyip*. Setting to work with the same drive and dedication he had shown in Loxton, he spearheaded a fundraising push which saw \$50,000 raised in five years and resulted in the new St. John Centre at the southern end of Murray Street — now described as the finest Centre of its type in the State.

Ray said that when he started at Gawler, the Service was spending about \$85 a month on petrol — today they are up to \$5,000 a month. The number of patients transported have grown from 45 a month to about 700, the vehicles are up from two to six, and the fulltime staff have quadrupled to eight.

Ray was admitted to the Order of St. John as a Serving Brother in 1970 and promoted to Officer Brother in 1980. He has received several other medals in recent years — including one for long service. One medal worth mentioning was presented at a Service Superintendents Conference soon after the Barossa Valley floods. One of the two Gawler ambulances which worked in the Barossa during that period became hopelessly bogged and eventually sank under water. State Operations Manager John McGreevy presented Ray with the "Sink or Swim Medal"!

Today, Ray Smith is still wearing two hats — as a fulltime staff officer and as a Brigade volunteer. He works most weekends and at least four nights a week, in addition to his paid duties. Since coming to Gawler, he has also taken on the job as liaison officer attached to the St. John Ambulance Training Cadre, which takes him all over the State assisting in arranging competitions. For a number of years, he has served on the executive committee of the State Country Ambulance Services.

Asked if he had any hobbies, Ray said — "Yes — St. John!" — but he did admit that he enjoyed playing around with pot plants in his spare time . . .