

## One of the Best

It was the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1935, a stifling hot day. It had been a great harvest for our district. The harvest was over and a good time now for the farmers to take a rest. The paddocks were covered in dense stubble and plenty of feed for the stock, but this was a very hot and lazy day. As usual there is always work to do, and just as my brother and dad were going off to the shed the phone rang and dad answered it. "Yes, we'll be there in 20 minutes."

"What is it?" asked my mother anxiously.

"Fire at Uncle Joe's place. The! you round up all the stock from the back paddock, and put them all in the 30-acre paddock, they'll be alright there" Dad replied.

"May (my mother) you take the baby down behind the dam, if it gets too close, you'll be ok there. But don't wait too long. Must go now, come on Ken." And off they went. The water tank was already on the truck full of water and several wheat bags. The only way farmers could put out fire was to be if possible, was to stand in front of the fire with his wet bags and stamp out the fire. But this was stubble and unfortunately for this farmer it was not a good harvest and the stubble was not dense, but still it was fire and a risky job was ahead of the men.

My job was to put all the stock in the 30 -acre paddock. I was just a kid, turned 9 years old. I had always followed my brother not yet 11years old. He went with dad to the fire. I was for the first time on my own. I was not used to listening to dad's orders to Ken: I just followed, but this time I'm on my own. I wasn't sure where the back paddock was, but I did know where the stock were, so I came to the conclusion that was the back paddock. The 30 acre was safe, so that would have to be the paddock just ploughed. That is where they would be safe. So off I went in a hurry on my wonderful little pony, with dad's sheep dog following she went everywhere with me fortunately. The back paddock was about ½ mile from our home, at the end of the laneway that I had just ridden. I opened the gate of the 30-acre paddock, brought the gate (all wire) back to close off the laneway so that the stock had no option but to go into the 30 acres. We were now in the back paddock; the north end was covered in fairly heavy timber this is where the sheep would be in the shade. I now gave orders to Lassie the dog. I tried to think of what would my father do, so I did not send her straight into the timber. The boundary of the property was in the east so with my right arm stretched out and pointing to the boundary the far end of the timber, so I did not send her straight into the timber I ordered Lassie "Way back Lassie, bring them home". Off this little dog ran. Right out to the boundary before she turned and went into the timber. These words were the only orders given to the dog.

Off I went south to get the horses. These were dads precious work team, resting after a heavy harvest, and a couple of ponies. Then further out to get the cows.

In the meantime, Lassie worked on her own, she had rounded up 1200 sheep and lambs by herself, some 20 minutes work alone brought them to the gateway to the 30-acre paddock.

The horses had already gone through, and now the cows were about to go through. Lassie knew that cattle and sheep will not go through the gate together. The sheep will scatter and go in all directions. Without orders she went anticlockwise around the sheep to turn their faces away from the gate that she had brought them to, kept going around them in a tight circle, until all the cows had gone through the gate. Now she went clockwise (without orders) to make them face the gateway. She waited for the front leader to go through but she only looked, hesitated too long for Lassie. She barked once and waited. The sheep still hesitated. The dog barked twice; the sheep then started slowly to go through the gate. Lassie then ran back around the mob to make sure there were no break a -ways. She kept them tightly packed till all went through then she came back to me looked up at my face and appeared to ask "Did I do what you wanted me to do?" I bent down and patted her and I said "good girl Lassie, you did a real good job"

With the stock shut away and safe I hurried home to see how my mum was going, she was fine and happy they had the fire under control.

All my life I have never forgotten that wonderful sheep dog and how clever she was, and today I'm just 94 years old.

*Thelma Spiegel*

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