

Final call



AUSTIN JACKSON/WCMESSENGER

TOMMY'S GEAR — Salt Creek Volunteer Fire Department Lt. Tommy Gowers died Jan. 25 from COVID-19. He served the department for eight years.

Volunteer firefighter dies from COVID-19



SUBMITTED PHOTO

TOMMY GOWERS**BY AUSTIN JACKSON**

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The American flag outside the Salt Creek Fire Department whipped at half staff this week.

The department lost one of its own.

On Jan. 25, Lt. Tommy Gowers, who served the department for eight years, died from COVID-19 at Wise Health System. Gowers was 54.

His battle with the illness lasted about 20 days after he tested positive Jan. 9.

Inside the rural volunteer fire department Wednesday, Salt Creek Fire Chief Ken Vise and Capt. Robert Allen stand between brush trucks that Gowers helped weld and outfit.

To their back is a row of bun-

ker gear, with Gowers' red helmet and gear hung up like it has been for the better part of the last decade. They haven't moved it off the rack yet. It hasn't felt right.

"We were so hoping it wouldn't get to this point," Allen said. "It's rough when it does."

In a winding conversation that shifted fluidly between tears and hearty laughter, the two reflected on Gowers, who was not only a fellow firefighter but one of Allen's close friends.

"He loved to fight fire," Allen said. "I would drive and he would be on the back of the brush truck and we would tear it up. That's one thing I'm going to miss. I'm going to miss my right hand man."

Vise described Gowers as an even keel jokester who could

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