



August, 2018

MEDIA RELEASE

CFA VOLUNTEERS COMMENDED FOR RESCUE

Ballarat Fire Brigade captain Mark Cartledge and his fellow volunteers are trained and prepared for just about any scenario...but how do they react when they have to rescue a mate?

Around 3am on April 21, 2106 the brigade found out the hard way when paged to a road rescue on the outskirts of Ballarat.

On route they were told a CFA member was trapped in a car which had rolled several times after being hit by a motorist who had run a give-way sign.

For Mr Cartledge arriving at the scene was an emotional challenge – the trapped and seriously injured man, Bill Cook, was not only a fellow volunteer from the neighbouring Sebastopol brigade but his mate and boss at work.

“You train to be prepared to act professionally whatever the circumstances,” Mr Cartledge said. “I’ve cut a few mates out over the years but it’s never easy.”

The extraction was a success and more than two years later Mr Cook is on the road to recovery. The brigade’s efforts were this week recognised with a commendation from CFA Chief Officer Steve Warrington.

Mr Warrington said the circumstances of the accident were dreaded by firefighters.

“While we are trained to do the job and we provide the same level of outstanding care to all those involved in the incidents we respond to, tending to people we know, friends and colleagues takes a special type of leadership, professionalism, skill and courage,” he said.

“The character displayed by the crews in responding to this incident is worthy of recognition and gratitude.”

The Chief Officer commended the crews on the Ballarat tanker, Ballarat rescue and Ballarat support units.

The brigade’s actions also received high praise from Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV).

VFBV CEO Andrew Ford said this was another example of the capacity of CFA brigades to respond when needed and the professionalism and dedication of volunteers.

“This typifies the spirit and camaraderie of volunteers and illustrates how they are trained and prepared for any situation,” Mr Ford said.

Mr Cook was part of the Sebastopol LPG crew responding to a house fire at the time of the accident.

“We work very closely with the Sebastopol brigade; we train and meet together and work together at road crashes and other incidents,” Mr Cartledge said.

“Bill has been a long supporter of the brigade. He’s my manager at the City of Ballarat emergency management department and I class him as a mate.”

Mr Cartledge said successfully freeing his friend from the car was a “great team effort”.

“It was a combined effort between many brigades, volunteers and district staff and without that fantastic work from all involved the task may have been more difficult,” he said.

Mr Cook has been a CFA volunteer for 35 years.

“We’d been called out to assist the brigade at Linton. We’d come through Ross Creek. Captain Joe Jansen was in the front seat, noticed the car coming on the left. They never braked and went straight through the give-way sign and cleaned us up. We rolled a couple of times and finished up back on our wheels.”

The three passengers escaped but Mr Cook was unable to open his door and felt soreness in his neck when he tried to reach the passenger door.

Mr Cook broke his C2 and T 4-5 vertebra and squashed his C-4,5,6 vertebrae.

A staff member from Ballarat City Brigade supported Mr Cook’s neck while waiting for ambulance and rescue crews to arrive.

“I was more worried about Mark and how he’d react,” he said. “When he found out it was us, it was pretty hard on him but he did his job and then took time to collect himself.

“Everyone worked in well together to get me out.”

“I’ve been a CFA volunteer for 35 year so it was interesting being on the other side of it.”

After a slow recovery, Mr Cook returned to work in July. Joe lost his job because of his injuries. Both decided not to seek re-election to their senior roles in the Sebastopol brigade because of their injuries, but they remain members of the brigade.

VFBV CEO Andrew Ford said this was another example of the capacity of CFA brigades to respond when needed and the professionalism and dedication of volunteers.

The 100 per cent volunteer Ballarat Fire Brigade responds to about 500 incidents each year, including an increasing number of traffic accidents.

...Ends