



MEDIA RELEASE

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CFA VOLUNTEER RECOGNISED AFTER MORE THAN 60 YEARS

Jack McGennisken was always a hero in the eyes of his daughter Judi Pymer, and now more than 60 years after his death, the Wonwondah volunteer firefighter is being formally honoured for his service and heroism.

After a campaign lasting almost 20 years, volunteer firefighters have ensured Mr McGennisken's name will be added to the Victorian Emergency Services Memorial.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) district 17 state councillor Maurice Dumesny said it was a fitting tribute for Mr McGennisken who was accidentally killed during a roadside burn-off on December 9, 1957.

To Mrs Pymer the recognition is something to cherish, to his fellow CFA volunteers it's well-deserved recognition for a fallen colleague.

Mrs Pymer said being a volunteer was a big part of her father's life.

"He was very involved with all the community. To me he was my hero, whether he was on the footy ground, driving the trotters or helping the fire brigade," she said.

Mrs Pymer was adopted when she was four and a half and Mr McGennisken died when she was 10.

"I didn't know him that long but I was always proud of him, whatever he did," she said.

"The older I get, the more I recognise what Mum and Dad did for me."

Some of her great memories of her father centre on his CFA volunteer work. "After the fires in the summer of 1956, I remember a couple of days later going out with him to check that all the stock lying around were actually dead.

"If he found any alive, he would have humanely put them down. He was a big man but a very gentle man...a gentle giant."

Mrs Pymer said she was proud that his name was being added to the memorial.

"There was a thanksgiving service in Horsham in 2005 and because it was a burn-off, not a fire, they recognised him as being in service, not dying in the line of duty," she said.

"Mum would be so proud that he has been recognised this way. He was only 43 when he died and Mum had to raise me while trying to hang on to the farm, which she did."

The accident happened on the Henty Highway south of Horsham during a roadside burn in conjunction with the Country Roads Board (CRB), now known as VicRoads.

An empty fuel truck heading to Portland clipped a CRB patrol vehicle and overturned onto Mr McGennicken and a CRB worker, who also died later in hospital.

A campaign to formally recognise his contribution was started in the early 2000s by former Wonwondah brigade member Jim Heard who was at the scene when Mr McGennicken was killed.

“When Jim Heard was writing the history of the brigade, he started the campaign to have Jack’s name added to the memorial wall on behalf of the brigade,” Mr Dumesny said.

“At the time it was deemed by the CFA to be a road accident but we kept pushing for it and we’re honoured that he has been finally added,” he said.

A plaque in the Wonwondah Hall also recognises Mr McGennicken, who was captain of the brigade at the time of his death.

Born Phillip, Mr McGennicken was known as Jack from his middle name Jackman, and lived his life on his family sheep and cattle farm Girvan Lea.

The plaque is being prepared and will soon be added to the memorial. Mr McGennicken’s name will also be forwarded to the national memorial in Canberra.

The new memorial was completed last year and is a tribute to fallen members from CFA, Forest Fire Management Victoria, MFB, VICSES, Ambulance Victoria, Live Saving Victoria and Marine Search and Rescue.

VFBV CEO Adam Barnett said Mr McGennicken’s addition to the honour roll alongside 79 other CFA firefighters was an important tribute to his family, friends and loved ones and recognised those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty on behalf of their communities.

“I thank the local community, brigades and VFBV District Council 17 who all assisted in the long advocacy for Jack to be recognised.”

“Mr McGennicken’s addition to the honour roll is a fitting tribute to a CFA firefighter who has selflessly given their lives to protect the lives of other Victorians.”

“CFA volunteers play a critical role in fire prevention across the state, and roadside burns like the one being undertaken by Mr McGennicken’s crew have no doubt saved countless lives as part of Victoria’s fire prevention works.”

“Mr McGennicken tragic sacrifice will forever be remembered, as we mark our respect and deep sorrow for each of the precious lives lost in service of their community.”

A memorial service on May 2 where Jack McGennicken was inducted to the honour roll also recognised the loss during the 2019-20 fire season of three Victorian firefighters from Forest Fire Management Victoria; Bill Slade, Mat Kavanagh and David Moresi, three New South Wales firefighters from the NSW Rural Fire Service; Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O’Dwyer and Samuel McPaul and North American firefighters; Ian McBeth, Paul Hudson and Rick DeMorgan Jr.

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