



THE BEACON

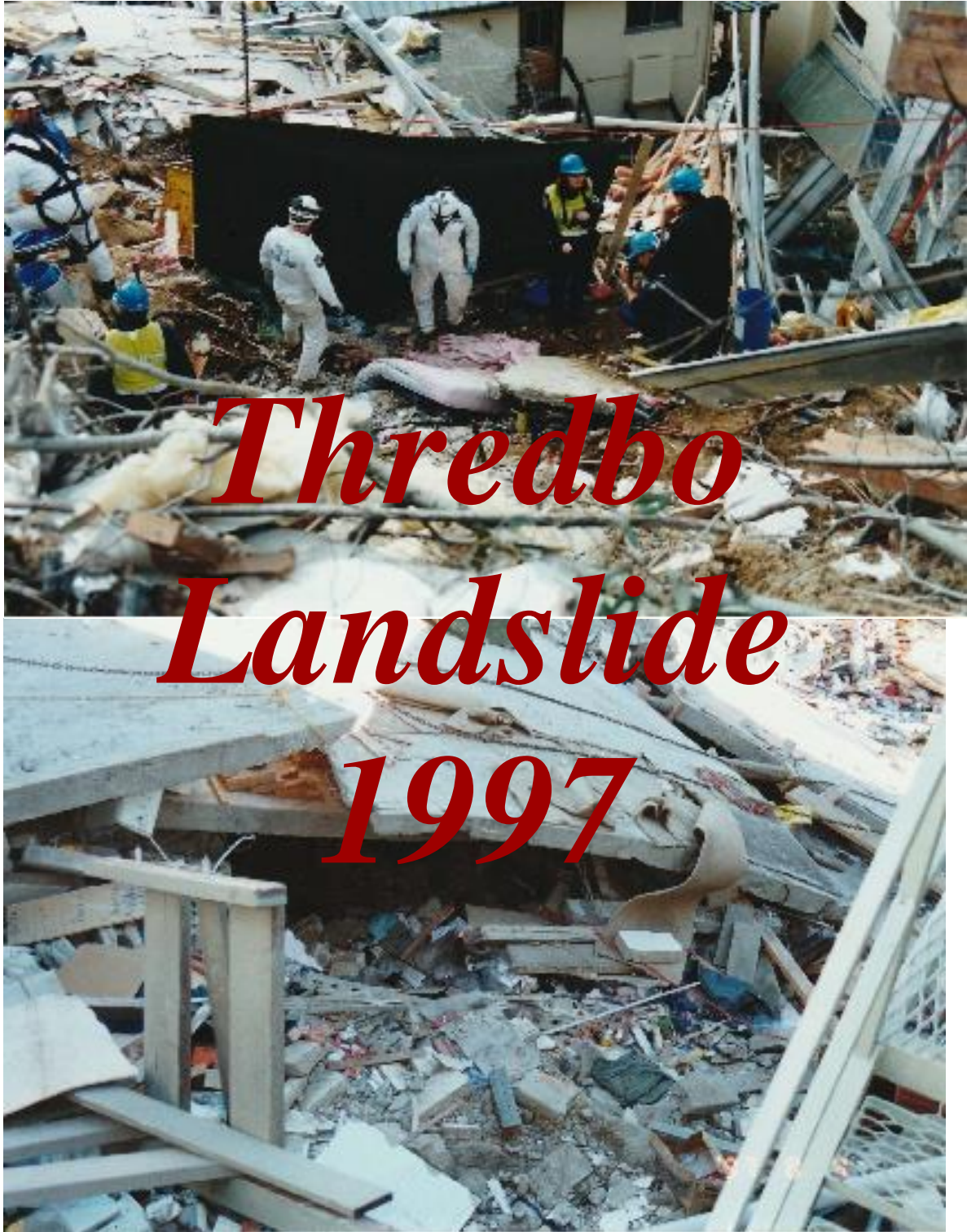
OFFICIAL QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE AMBULANCE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA

Ambulance Victoria Museum

21st Edition – Summer 2022



\$4.00





The Curator's Desk

I am very pleased to start this report on a positive note! a pleasant change from prior reports.

The past weeks have seen groups returning to our museum with a good calendar of further bookings. Also, at the time of writing, eight vintage ambulances are making their way to Hanging Rock for display at **'Macedon Car Club Show & Shine'**.

It seems with these activities some degree of normality is returning to our operation, and hopefully Covid 19, with its long-term misery, may be beginning to fade behind us, I suppose only time will tell.

Talking of time, it is something that continues to move forward for all of us, none less than myself carrying me forward imminently to 84 years of age and realistically I imagine the time will come eventually to consider a succession plan for my position of Honorary Museum Curator. With my experience of 17 years as Honorary Curator, which also encompasses establishing our two museums, Thomastown, and Bayswater, I feel it prudent to outline what this position entails for the potential successors.

The role is time-demanding, however most rewarding. The museum needs to be attended Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of each week, 0900 to 1300 hours, with odd attendances on other days, some including weekend group visits, or special openings, these hours can be designated if desired, however I prefer to personally attend and also offer personal phone access 0700 to 1700 hours, seven days a week.

Our museum operates most efficiently with the dedication of a small group of volunteers. Virtually, we have self-run departments of designated volunteers, mechanical, electronics, vehicle restoration, catering, our own quarterly publication, The Beacon, and most other aspects of the day-to-day operational requirements of the museum with Ambulance Victoria contributing excellent support. Our museum volunteer base is exceptional with a family-like atmosphere. Leadership retaining this unique volunteer base is central to the continuing success of the Ambulance Victoria Museum. This is a brief scope of the Honorary Curator's role which I hope is informative.

Our **C.E.O. Tony Walker** visited the Ambulance Victoria Museum on December 6, 2021. Tony arrived at 0900 hours to meet the volunteers and also have a meeting and personally present all the museum volunteers with a medal of appreciation for their dedication. It was a most welcome and informal visit, with Tony having a good look around and mingling with the boys for a yarn. A number of questions were put to him regarding our museum during the meeting, with Tony answering all directly and in true perspective. It is pleasing to note there is a very keen interest in the preservation of our state ambulance history at the top level, particularly through Tony and **Chief of Staff, Kerry Douglas**.

Please don't forget our A.G.M. at **1030 hours on March 13, 2022**, at the Museum. Your attendance is vital for the election of all office bearers and planning the year ahead. Looking forward to seeing many of you there.

Chas Martin - O.A.M.

Hon. Curator





Message from the C.E.O.

Hi everyone,

Hope this finds you all well and enjoying the sunshine and freedoms of early 2022.

Some of you may have listened to 3AW's Neil Mitchell this week. Neil asked me if I thought we are through the pandemic- I responded that things are starting to settle and there appears to be a light at the end of the tunnel. Whilst the last 3 months of 2021 were the busiest ever recorded at AV, we appear to be on a genuine downward trajectory across some key COVID-19 metrics, including positive test rates, case numbers, and hospitalisations. We are still seeing 200 COVID cases each day, crews are still busy, but we are hopeful that without any new variants, workload might commence settling. Our levels of furloughing of staff are easing and we are still well supported by our surge workforce. Staff are fatigued. The recovery from the pandemic will take time and resources across all health services and we must also continue planning and preparing for the unexpected.

Our response performance is improving but we are still under pressure. Offload times at hospital remain challenging but our specialist teams are supporting hospital transfer times. I am pleased to see the return of elective surgery, representing a stabilisation of our health services, and providing relief to many members of our community who have been waiting to have health issues addressed.

At the time of writing, 85% of our staff at AV have had their COVID booster shots and I encourage you all to follow up as soon as eligible. The pandemic has most certainly been a marathon and checking in with family, friends and former colleagues is important, as we are all impacted in different ways.

I am really pleased to hear that the Ambulance Museum has re-opened its doors with a COVID-safe plan in place. Thanks again to the team, led by Chas Martin OAM, who dedicate so much of their time and energy to preserving our history.

Take care and stay well.

Tony

Professor Tony Walker ASM
Chief Executive Officer
Ambulance Victoria



AmbulanceVictoria

Important Members' Note!

We are updating our members' contact file, and require information, particularly **Phone** and **Email Addresses**. **This update will ensure members receive important notifications.**

Could all members please email these details to Barb Dent – vintambos@bigpond.com
A.S.A.P.

We urgently require your assistance with this request.



From the Editor – Summer Beacon 2022

Welcome to our 5-year anniversary (21st) edition of The Beacon. It seems only yesterday we produced our first copy of this publication, and for those readers interested, Barb and I have put together a short story on how The Beacon came about, and now appears to be well accepted amongst our members.



Being straight from the shoulder, I am disappointed that there has been no response to date of my request for input and information on our wives' and partners' role during our service to ambulance, mainly pre-female paramedic era. These women played a major role both in our ambulance service and ambulance life, and many of us may not have survived those years without their untiring support 7/24. So, to write them into our ambulance history is not a privilege, but a well-earned and justified inclusion. We now formally recognise our wives and partners in the event of ill-health and, in cases, passing from our ambulance family. Therefore, it would be a most fitting tribute for the selfless contributions of these women given to partners and our ambulance service, to be acknowledged and recorded into our ambulance history.

Thanks to the ambulance Facebook site, 'Signal 8', we have uncovered a host of vital Ambulance Victoria history. After posting a request on this site for untold history, I was delighted with the response, both of major events as well as personal experiences. To add to this, these magnificent contributions are complemented with photographic descriptions, news clippings, and all and sundry. We will present events to you in The Beacon, initially prior to being preserved in our State Ambulance history. Many thanks to **Tony Pearce**, Thredbo Landslide 1997, **Shaun Whitmore**, Black Saturday Fires, 2009, **Eric Lee**, Bendigo Siege, 1999, and **Ted Van Dyken** for posting this request. I also believe there is more history to evolve from this post.

Whilst on Signal 8, it is pleasing to note members communicating on this site regarding the bite of the 'Black Dog'. Unless one has personally suffered this debilitating affliction, its creative devastation to victims is an unknown, a legacy encompassing loved ones, family, and friends. If you can locate a trustworthy confidant in the same situation, cross reference, and discussion between is a most valuable and beneficial resource.

You may also wish to visit '**Code 9 Foundation**', an organisation supporting past and present emergence service personnel in need of assistance.

Peter Dent

Editor



New Members: We welcome the following new members to our museum family and hope you enjoy being a part of this great Victorian heritage for the present and future generations.

A.J.C. Clarke	Benjamin Dunmall, Bentleigh East.	Barry Hayes, Burwood East.
Greg Hopper, Berwick.	Ian Johnson, Hamilton.	Tanith Macreadie-Day, Coalville.
Steve Mulligan, Dromana.	Ted Van Dyken, Salamander, NSW.	

*Please join in our museum activities. We are a family-like organisation offering a friendly atmosphere and companionship. We take part in both internal and external events city wise and throughout regional Victoria. History contributions are always welcome. Also, all members, please let me know of **special events**: Wedding-anniversaries, birthdays, milestones, bereavements, etc.*

5 Years of The Beacon – The Story

At the completion of the museum move from Thomastown to Bayswater in 2014, Chas Martin was handed the keys to a large, vacant, commercial building, 1/55 Barry Street, Bayswater, his task to create a state-worthy museum for the people of Victoria and beyond to visit. The building consisted of a ground-level garaging area, a ground-level office, mezzanine, mess room/kitchen.

With his small but dedicated team of volunteers, Chas began putting this project together, quite an undertaking.

However, within a period of four to five weeks our newly re-located museum was up and running. The next phase was to create public awareness to attract visitors and A.H.S. Museum membership. Although publicity items and brochures existed, it was discussed whether an informative and ambulance history bearing regular publication would be attractive to members and other readers, hence getting the word out about our Bayswater Ambulance Museum as well as other benefits.

Some time prior to this suggested initiative, I had mentioned to Chas Martin about a newsletter, and offered to provide this if ever required as I had considerable experience within this avenue. Having this in mind, Chas approached me regarding bringing to life a regular A.H.S. Ambulance Victoria Museum communication and asked of my advice as to the process. I came back to Chas with a recommendation we publish a newsletter quarterly, solely hard copy in keeping with Chas's strong commitment to provide the publication to our members age group, given many may not be computer literate. With this now in place, the birth of The Beacon began. –

Firstly, we needed to establish a suitable name for the publication. Many were tossed around, and finally we came up in agreeance of 'The Beacon', representative of the domed ambulance rotating emergency flasher, synonymous to the Service. Following this a publication 'Masthead' was to be designed. This was a very significant element, so the task fell to our experienced son, Paul who came up with the final and long-term design as seen in today's publication.

With this stage complete, we headed to Officeworks in Albury with an indicative budget agreed to by Chas. We had our own lap-top computer and A4 printer only, so much was required to establish and print this new publication. Luckily, I had obtained previous experience of this type of production, and Barb is literate with the electronics side of the project. After discussing our needs with the Officeworks 'expert' salesperson, we purchased a Brother duplex A3 inkjet printer, paper, ancillaries, and also a long-arm manual stapler to staple the copies by hand when printed, the stapling part of the operation was hand-balled to me supposedly a privilege due to my 'outstanding technical ability and experience' (or experience in manual labour).

Arms full, Barb and I returned home, and Barb went about setting up the newly acquired equipment in our study (which became our printing department). My expediently acquired and extensive electronic knowledge was required to assist in this role, which I was happy to expend in full and turn on the power switch at the wall for Barb.

We were now set up to compose the publication content, type it, format it, add images etc. and, when ready, print the product. Suddenly there was a reality check! Where do I get this content to go into The Beacon? After a while, ideas emerged and I came up with enough script for an eight-page edition for our first attempt of The Beacon, January 2017.

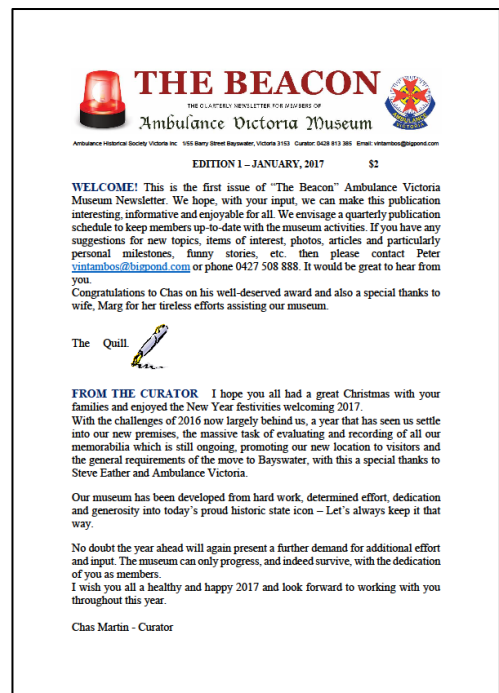
After two or three more weeks of sourcing content, design typing, laying out artwork etc. we were ready to do our first printing run. In a very short timeframe we established that the performance of this A3 printer was not quite as stated by the salesperson, 'a couple of minutes each print', actually turned out to be about six and a half minutes, and that was only two x A3 sheets of paper (8 pages printed), also this is notwithstanding paper jams, ink smudges, together with the print quality, and so on, and we were printing approximately 125 copies of The Beacon on our first publication, however at this rate I did not have to hurry hand stapling the copies. After three long days and a few bottles of red, the final printed and stapled product was packed and shipped off to Chas Martin in Melbourne for posting out to members. The next quarterly issue we planned to take to a 12 printed page publication, the content became somewhat easier, however our printing problems remained with us and it was clear that if we were going to continue with The Beacon project then we needed to investigate alternative printing facilities, either in, or out of house, as The Beacon was quickly developing by four printed page increments to 20 A4 pages of news and history.

Chas Martin appeared very happy with The Beacon project, particularly with the reader feedback, given its infancy, so we began the process of sourcing alternative printing facilities and as it turned out a solution arose by sheer chance. At this time, I was a Board Member of an organisation and at a Board Meeting, financial approval was sought for a new commercial-grade photocopier lease/purchase for the main office as this entity printed various publications for members and clients.



Subsequently, I raised a question as to the disposal of the unit to be replaced and advised in return it would be sold by tender. At the termination of this meeting, I went to the office and inspected this particular unit, a Ricoh, large commercial photocopier which looked as though it could do anything except fly. It also had just been serviced and all printing toners replaced new at a cost of around \$600. The end result was that I purchased this unit for A.H.S. at \$500 plus \$200 freight to our home office, and when delivered it stood in splendour hoping Barb could navigate this machine and set it all up to our computer. She moved directly into this task. I assisted her the best way I could with my computer programming skills, hopped in my 4WD and went out to nearby Lake Hume to have a quick fish.

With the set up complete by Barb, we were ready to do our first print on the Ricoh, this being a 20 printed page issue of The Beacon, just 12 months down the track from The Beacon beginning. We set the printing mode at 25 copies of 5 A3 sheets, 20 printed pages x 200 copies, and began printing. A fast, smooth quality result took place at approximately two minutes or less a complete copy, ready to staple, the print quality excellent, so has been the continuing journey of this printing project of The Beacon, a team effort of just two of us, Barb and myself in our different roles, mine writing, sourcing, designing, and stapling, Barb's typing, artwork, layout design, folding, 'technical chief' and anything else needed.



Setting aside printing and technical problems, I think the biggest hurdle we faced in this process of publishing The Beacon, was the provision of a varied range of articles and stories to utilize. I know that I keep banging on about this hidden ambulance history. There must be so many priceless stories out there that are untold and therefore will not be recorded and shared by others due to nature taking its course with ageing. So sadly, history lost forever, the same applies to photographs and other historic memorabilia. That said however, there are persons that constantly find and contribute what they can to be preserved for future generations. These people will know who I am referring to without naming. As always, today's events are tomorrow's history, and what you may think is irrelevant is a great history item to others.



On the other side of the coin, the communications that arise with various people via The Beacon are priceless and many of these contacts restore faith in the fact that there are mostly good, genuine people around us. These communications range from obituaries, seeking persons, information, and so on, and on many occasions ongoing, creating a story for publication. Regular contact develops between us. This is also notwithstanding the friendly associations that are established in the course of sourcing articles for The Beacon, particularly with our emergency service counterparts, and also on occasions with persons or organisations overseas.

We have been exceptionally well-supported in this project by Chas Martin and the Ambulance Victoria Museum team, and none less by Tony Walker, C.E.O. Ambulance Victoria, and Kerryn Douglas, Chief of Staff. Kerryn being my immediate Ambulance Victoria contact responding expediently in support of all requests, also The Beacon is edited in free-will context with the primary objective of preserving our ambulance history.

In summary, bringing this publication to life has been a most pleasant challenge with the ongoing result an enjoyable and worthwhile pastime for us both. It also illustrates what you can achieve with determination. Thank you to all who assist and support us.

Well, there it is. 'The story of The Beacon', hardly a world-first shattering news item, but hopefully one of interest.

Pete & Barb Dent



Words of Wisdom

*Real love is never perplexed, never qualifies, never rejects, never demands
It replenishes, by grace of restoring unlimited circulation.
It burns because it knows the true meaning of sacrifice
It is life illuminated.*





Police and Ambulance crews come under gun fire.



Kangaroo Flat Siege – 1999 – Four Police shot.

*The nightshift at Rural Ambulance Service, Bendigo Headquarters on 1st October 1999, began normally for **Eric Lee** and his colleague **Phil Callahan**. For Eric, 15 years a Paramedic and MICA qualified, the ensuing shift would present a major challenge in his career.*

*Called out to a family assault case, their nightshift would quickly deteriorate from that point. This initial call would be the catalyst for a very dangerous and eventful shift for Eric and colleague Phil Callahan, back-up crew, **John Cowling** and **Kevin Walsh**, and attending **Victoria Police**.*

Here is Eric's account of that event on this tragic night during the 19-hour siege.

Early in the night, our shift.... around 2000hrs, Phil Callahan and I responded to a case of a father potentially bashed by the son with a cricket bat at Kangaroo Flat. He was conscious but had severe multiple head injuries, reported to ambulance by son **John Wason**, as a heart attack. We quickly established otherwise, and en route, advised control that the son was in possession of a firearm. I believe the father subsequently was flown to Melbourne but later died from his injuries.

Police attended the scene, Snr. Const. **Peter Eames** and Det. Snr. Const. **Craig Millar** from VicPol. They were shot by the offender, and we were called to attend to them. Unbeknownst to us, Eames I believe was taken to hospital by a motorist driving past the scene before the main highway into Bendigo was closed and secure. Millar had been shot in his chest which pierced his right lung, and then again shot in the leg. He was in a very serious condition, coughing up blood, however managed to crawl into a ditch which protected him from further gunfire. We were unable to see him when we returned later on.



This photo is reported to be Det. Snr. Const. Millar being taken into Emergency by Bendigo Ambulance Crew

After that, together with our back up crew, Cowling and Walsh, we were called to attend the same scene with details that, I think from memory, two police had been shot. We were the first car at the scene and our back up crew pulled up behind us. More police arrived in a Divi van with two officers as well as Sgt. **Lukaitis**, and subsequently Insp. **Ulf Kaminski** arrived by instruction of Chief Superintendent **David Mansell**, to take charge of the scene. The two were in close proximity to us. Kaminski and Lukaitis were discussing, I imagine, operational matters, and whilst that was occurring Kaminski was shot and fell to the ground and Sgt. Lukaitis also was shot. Kaminski managed to crawl into a nearby ditch for protection and Sgt. Lukaitis ran over to us whereby we took shelter from the gunman from behind our Ambulance vehicle.

During this chain of events our back up crew was able to reverse out of the scene to safety. We weren't as fortunate.

We remained there using the ambulance as cover and were able to develop a plan which saw Insp. Kaminski crawl along the ditch to a place where we could get him.... although that meant we had to move our vehicle slightly to afford us some coverage whilst we loaded him onto our stretcher.

We reversed out of the scene and took Insp. Kaminski to hospital.

We cleared and returned to the scene, our back up crew was in attendance whilst the siege was unfolding.

Det. Snr. Const. Millar was still on the scene awaiting extraction. Police command in the interim had secured the services of the local armour guard armoured car and they used that to find Millar and bring him to the command post where ambulance officers Cowling and Walsh treated him and transported him to hospital. We stayed at the scene as an ambulance resource if required. Subsequently VicPol SOG arrived to take control of the siege.

I believe Det. Snr. Const. Millar was attended to in the ditch by a bystander until the arrival of the armoured car that removed him/them to safety.

We left the scene I think at the end of our 14hr nightshift once relieved as the siege was still active.

S.O.G. Police arrived at the siege, and, on entering the residence, found that the gunman John Wason had taken his own life.



Inspector Ulf Kaminski

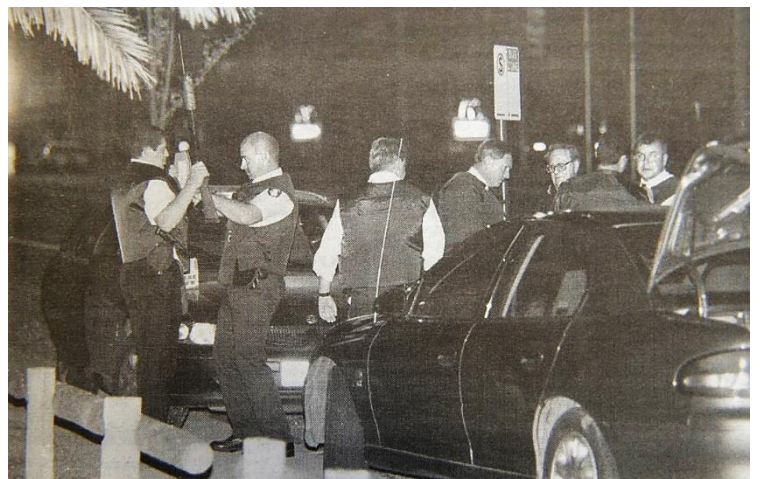
Sadly, Insp. Ulf Kaminski was diagnosed three years later with a brain tumour and passed away 14 months after diagnosis, aged 52 years.

In summary, that night four police officers were shot, fortunately they all survived, a father and son perished. The significance is that to date that is the highest number of police that had been shot at one crime scene in Victoria.

For our part later Vic Pol presented Paramedic Phil Callahan and myself a framed 'citizen award' for our bravery. R.A.V./ A.S.V. sent us a letter.



R.A.V. Bendigo Ambulance Unit on standby at the siege. It was also utilised as protection.



VicPol S.O.G. Unit prepares for entry and potential confrontation within the gunman's residence.

Membership is a gift! - Purchase a *3-year* Ambulance Victoria Museum membership for a family member or friend as a Christmas, birthday, or gratuity gift for just *\$25.00*. Includes quarterly posted copies of *The Beacon* plus member benefits.



Profile

Max (Hoss) Beeson – 21st May 1927 to 15th January 2022 at Beaufort.

V.C.A.S. 1962 - 1975

Maxwell George Beeson was born at Coburg. He attended East Coburg Primary School and Preston Technical School. At the end of WWII in 1945, Max joined the Royal Australian Navy where he served from 1946 to 1949 with the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in Japan. For this service Max was awarded the **Peace Keeping Medal** and **Service Outside Australia Medal**. His engagement with the R.A.N. ended in 1952. In 1962 Max joined V.C.A.S., stationed at Ringwood. 1975 saw him take a position with N.E.D.A.S. at Wangaratta, continuing until 1985 when Max was forced to retire due to a back injury. An avid musician, Max played in the R.A.N. Band, C.A.S. Band, and many local bands including Ballarat and Albury. In his late retirement years, he was a maker of the Ballarat Vintage Band and at 93 years of age regularly entertained patrons in nursing homes until only a few months prior to his passing.

Max lived his life in full, setting a standard for others to follow. He is survived by sons Graeme, Neil, and Geoff.

‘Farewell, ‘Hoss’. You will be missed and always fondly remembered.’

~~~~~

## Profile

**John Russell Langford – 4<sup>th</sup> December 1932 to 29<sup>th</sup> November 2021 at Ferntree Gully.**

Victoria Police Force Snr. Sgt. (Ret.) 1956 to 1976 – Badge No. 12600

John was a member of our Ambulance Victoria Museum and previously held a connection with rural ambulance activities whilst posted at the single-man police station at Yarra Junction, Victoria in the period circa 1960/1970s.

During this time John assisted the Upper Yarra voluntary ambulance officer **Bill Shalders**, resident also within the Yarra Junction area. In these years, on many occasions John drove the ambulance whilst Bill tended the patients en route to hospital. These persons were mainly victims from motor vehicle accidents where John would be in attendance in the course of duty. On his retirement, John continued to live in Yarra Junction rearing his family and remained there until his passing in November 2021.

I knew John personally. He was both a good family man and respected policeman. John is survived by wife Rica, son David, and daughter Melinda, and two grandchildren.

*‘Tenez Le Droit’ – Rest peacefully John.*



**Bereavements:** The Beacon attempts to record and pay tribute to all past and present Victorian Ambulance personnel and their wives/partners who pass away. This is history, and a recognition of service. Whereas the R.A.A.V. Secretary provides basic details of members passing, for our publication of tributes more information is required.

The key details I require for these tributes are **Date of Birth, Date of Death, Place, Full Name**, and **Service history** and **Family details**. This information is not normally available to the RAAV Secretary, so please contact me directly by email, [vintambos@bigpond.com](mailto:vintambos@bigpond.com). Without these details we are unable to place a tribute. All who have worn our uniform with pride deserve to be remembered in respect for their service.



*Sadly, we also farewelled our following colleagues in this period*

*(Limited information provided)*

### **John Parkinson – S/O (R.A.V.)**

Formerly of Port Fairy/Ballarat, John was a keen photographer and provided The Beacon and the Museum with photographic history.

### **Peter Henry Skiller – (M.A.S.)**

Peter served most of his ambulance career at Lilydale. He was a popular identity amongst his colleagues.

### **Stephen Jennings – A.S.V./ Q.A.S.**

Stephen began his career with Ambulance Service Victoria prior to transferring to Queensland Ambulance Service. He is survived by wife **Susan** and daughter.

### **James Jones – A.S.V. (L.V.A.D.A.S.) – Passed away 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022**

Jimmy commenced his ambulance career at Moe, later transferring to Morwell for the duration. (See Jimmy's profile in the next edition of The Beacon)

### **John Ellerton – A.S.V. (C.V.D.A.S.)**

John served in the Central Region of the State. He passed away 9<sup>th</sup> February 2022, aged 86 years. John completed 35 years of service. He is survived by wife **Julie**, sons **Andrew** and **Paul**. His granddaughter **Lisa** proudly carries on our ambulance tradition as a paramedic at Eaglehawk.

*~ Nulla Vestigia Retrorsum ~*



## *Museum Workshop Report – by Terry Brooks*

Bill Redpath removed the door from the Mainline to refit new door rubbers and found surface rust so has sanded back each frame in preparation for the new rubbers, he is seen below with



**Bill Redpath and Gary Dole (R)**

Gary removing the front headlight surround to have the paint matched.

John Clancy returned with the Fairlane after attending a funeral, and noticed a water leak from the radiator, so Bill took it out with John assisting (Bill is still using a crutch due to recent surgery on his knee) He does get stuck in. John is going to take it to his mechanic who did a clean out and test on it last year, when there for repair.

I am sorting out the Club registrations on the Ambulances which were taken over by AV and we are having some teething issues.

Tomorrow I will attempt to get in the queue at Vic Roads to register the latest Toyota Land cruiser Ambulance that has just been refurbished and had a RWC certificate issued.

### **Rusty Spanners and the Nuts in the Workshop**

## *Thredbo Landslide 1997*



### **Death strikes in darkness, mud, and ice. – M.A.S. participation.**

Bravery, selflessness, and the putting aside of personal safety and risk, hallmarks this incredible rescue feat under seemingly insurmountable odds in our mountains' roughest and unforgiving terrain.

At 2330 hours on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1997, most guests in Thredbo ski lodges, Carinya and Bimbadeen, had retired to bed in the tranquillity of snow-covered terrain at the base of Crackenback Mountain. Within ten minutes, and without any prior warning, there came a deafening rumble and approximately 1000 tonnes of rock, mud, trees, and ice cut a deadly pathway down the slope from the roadway above, sweeping away these two lodges, taking the lives of 18 of the 19 guests, burying them in the destructive landslide residual. Only one person, **Stuart Diver**, 25 years of age, would survive, enduring a horrifying 65 hours trapped and pinned before being rescued and taken to medical care. His young wife, **Sally** lay dead beside him having drowned, and both entombed in an average airspace of 400 mm (18") high under a slab of concrete on a mattress. The chilling thought on all minds – 'What if the destructive pathway of the landslide had been wider, and taken out more lodges and lives?' What if it slips again?

In this nightmare situation, frustration and despair overwhelmed as rescue work in earnest could not begin until first light with a late winter dawn. When this dawn breaks, and over the duration, some 1000 dedicated persons will play a vital part in rescue operations at this Thredbo disaster.

M.A.S. participated in this disaster by invitation of N.S.W. represented initially by **Tony Pearce**, M.A.S. Manager Operation Manager, then at later intervals by **Justin Nunan**, and C.S.O. **Ian Clarke**, both USAR accredited. All three played major roles in the Thredbo rescue operations.

## *M.A.S. – U.S.A.R. Involvement at the Thredbo Landslide Site*

A personal account by then M.A.S. Manager Operations Support, *Tony Pearce*, now Inspector General for Emergency Management, Victoria.

### **Background:**

In 1996 the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) under the leadership of Chief Officer Geoff Godfredson commenced multi-agency discussions aimed at developing a state-wide Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) capability. I was asked to be the Metropolitan Ambulance Service representative in that development process. Importantly, the same process was occurring in NSW and QLD as this was also part of a National process to develop a National capability with the eventual aim of Australia becoming part of the internationally deployable capability coordinated by the Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the United Nations.

Development of this capability would see each state pay to implement and maintain its training needs (to international standards) and the Commonwealth agreed to pay for the establishment of USAR heavy classification specialist equipment caches in each state. By the time that the Thredbo land slip occurred in July 1997 each jurisdiction had a reasonable if somewhat still immature capability in place. It's important to note that each jurisdictions USAR equipment caches were identical based on the United Nations standard.

On the night that the event occurred Victoria was advised by NSW and asked to consider what capability it could send if requested and provided that information both relative to equipment and trained personnel.

Whilst no request was made initially Victoria was invited to send an observer team seeing as this was to be the first formal USAR deployment to a major structure collapse (caused by the land slip). That team included myself and three trained MFB USAR operators.

When we arrived, some 14 hours after the event it became apparent to us that the NSW compliment were already tiring. We were not permitted to function in an operational capacity even though our NSW counterparts were desperate for assistance.

Jurisdictional politics were at play and whilst the MFB Chief Officer had made a number of offers of our assistance they were each knocked back by the NSW leadership. Eventually, based on intelligence provided by us the MFB Chief spoke to his ACT counterpart and got agreement for a Victorian USAR Taskforce to be staged in the ACT not far from Thredbo so as to be readily deployable if NSW agreement could be reached.

Eventually our small 'on-site team' was invited on to the slip to be integrated into NSW multi-agency teams, and eventually after much debate between Victorian and NSW leadership the Victorian Taskforce was despatched from the ACT to support the response and again were integrated into NSW teams.

It was pure luck that myself, and MFB Officers Mark Treverton, Mick Goland, Gary Egan, and Mark O'Connor ended up being part of the Stuart Diver rescue team. Our multi-agency rescue team was on a late shift and late into the evening our teammate NSW Firefighter Steve Hirst thought he heard a voice from under the rubble. Eventually after a significant amount of effort it was confirmed that there was someone alive under the slabs, that person obviously was Stuart Diver who revealed that he was trapped along with his wife Sally.

We worked for a number of hours to try and get to him but due to the dangerous nature of the rubble pile there were multiple times where the tunnelling approach needed to be revised. We were relieved at around 2.00am and handed over to another team. By mid next morning we were back on site and Stuart had still not been recovered and the NSW Police site leader decided that it was appropriate for us to take over the rescue once again.

The story is now history and we got Stuart out in the early afternoon. After over 60 hours trapped under multiple concrete slabs in cold but relatively mild conditions for the time of year. He had suffered reasonably minor injuries and was transported to hospital. Unfortunately, and sadly, Stuart's wife Sally was deceased, and it took some further hours to eventually retrieve her body.





**Massive task:** search crews bring in heavy earthmoving equipment to clear debris. Picture: BRETT FAULKNER

# Survivor was the 'spur': rescuers

By Louise McFarlane

WERRIBEE ambulance officer Mr Tony Pearce was sent to watch the search for survivors of the Thredbo landslide tragedy and became part of the team that found the sole survivor — Mr Stuart Diver.

Mr Pearce worked alongside Steve Hurst, Paul Featherstone and Geoff Courtenay, of the NSW Fire Brigade, and Mark O'Connor, Michael Goland, Mark Treverton and Bruce Pfeffer, of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

The rescue operation had been underway for more than two days before they discovered Mr Diver.

"There was an adrenalin rush at the thought of a survivor but I was also a little sceptical. Then, I could hear Steve's conversation with Mr Diver."

Although the team were due to finish work at 7 am, they did not want to stop the search and the authorities allowed them to stay longer, hoping Mr Diver would be released during their shift.

"We were very tired and cold but finding a survivor gave us a spur," Mr Pearce said.

"We became so adrenalised that when we were stood down at 10 am for a meal and a sleep, we couldn't sleep. We walked around Thredbo to use the time up before we were back on the site at 3 pm."

While the conditions at Thredbo were tough on the rescue workers, Mr Pearce believes they were

**"All the chainsaws were going at once and Steve ordered a shut down of the site when he heard a noise that wasn't normal"**

"blessed" that the weather did not worsen.

"Normally, the village would be blanketed in snow at that time of year," he said.

"But it didn't snow until the last victim was out a week later. It was cold, about six or seven degrees during the day but sunny.

"At night, the temperatures dropped to minus 12 degrees. We were not used to working in those conditions and had to acclimatise."

Mr Pearce added that the site was extremely dangerous and it was difficult to tell the angle of the rubble they were working on.

"If you weren't standing straight on the rubble, you had to dig your heels to flatten a section otherwise your Achilles tendon and ankle killed," he said.

Mr Pearce said the experience would help the MAS review its disaster preparation and analyse plans, equipment and training against a real event.

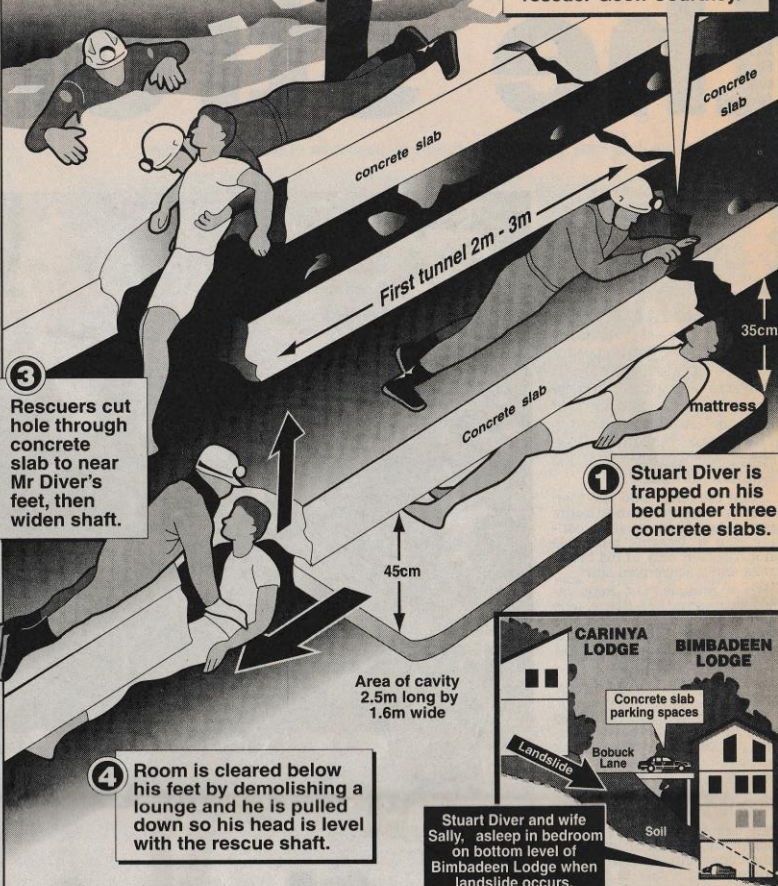
"I also learnt a lot about myself and people and why they do what they do under pressure," he said.

"A lot of people who worked at the site changed in some way."

## THE RESCUE OF STUART DIVER

**5** Mr Diver is dragged to the surface. Mission accomplished.

**2** Rescue workers tunnel under the second slab through debris to a crack above Mr Diver's head. He shakes hands with rescuer Geoff Courtney.



**3** Rescuers cut hole through concrete slab to near Mr Diver's feet, then widen shaft.

**1** Stuart Diver is trapped on his bed under three concrete slabs.

**4** Room is cleared below his feet by demolishing a lounge and he is pulled down so his head is level with the rescue shaft.

Stuart Diver and wife Sally, asleep in bedroom on bottom level of Bimbadeen Lodge when landslide occurs.





# METROPOLITAN AMBULANCE SERVICE

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## MAS INVOLVEMENT WITH THREDBO DISASTER

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Manager-Operations Support, Tony Pearce went to Thredbo last Thursday at the invitation of the NSW rescue headquarters. He was a member of an ESO observation team at the site. During Saturday's rescue operations Tony became involved as a safety adviser to the MFB Urban Search and Rescue Instructors active at the site. Tony returned Monday.

CSO Justin Nunan flew to the site as a member of a multi agency team on Saturday. Justin is one of several MICA Paramedics who have undertaken training with the MFB over the past 12 months to be accredited in Urban Search and Rescue (USAR). Justin went as part of an MFB coordinated team. CSO Ian Clark, also USAR accredited, departed for Thredbo today, Tuesday, with an MFB Urban Search and Rescue contingent.

MAS was first advised of the Thredbo incident shortly after it occurred. A call from NSW Air Ambulance to the Duty Team Manager, sought advice on resources available. It was suggested there were up to 100 persons trapped on the mountain. The Victorian Emergency Medical Response Coordinator was advised and he sought advice on MAS ability to assist and offered that support to his NSW counterpart. Fortunately the numbers were not so high that significant MAS involvement was required. However MAS has been able to provide expertise in Tony, Justin and Ian. Other USAR accredited officers may respond as requested. Their willingness to respond to the Thredbo environment is very much appreciated by all at MAS.

As we have watched this tragedy, and Mr Diver's rescue, unfold I am sure most at MAS would be filled with admiration for the expertise and professionalism which has gone into the rescue effort.

I am sure it has helped many people, including members of the public and the media better understand the complexities of response to a major incident, particularly one as difficult and prolonged as Thredbo.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Olszak".

PETER OLSZAK  
Chief Executive Officer

August 5, 1997

## *Former MICA Paramedic plays a major role in the development of break-through, life-saving technology.*

*During his sixteen years as a MICA Paramedic with Ambulance Service Victoria (M.A.S.), John Haines responded to countless emergency cases. Many of these cases were cardiac arrest victims, sadly beyond medical assistance due to no prior defibrillation pre-ambulance arrival. Dismayed and frustrated with this on-going chain of events John's thoughts began to focus on developing a range of simple innovations for the public to access in an emergency.*

*In a selfless sacrifice, John decided to forgo his ambulance career and pursue existing and new technologies that could be adapted or developed into user-friendly, and easily accessible innovations. Ranging from 'smart' books, the 'First Aid Fast' app, which is FREE amongst a larger mix, but with the ultimate dream of a small sized defibrillator being developed within price reach of the wider community, easily carried, stored, and operated, and ready to save a life whenever this emergency arose. In 2016 he joined with two engineers, placing all the resources of his company at their disposal enabling what is now known as the CellaED® to be supported during its vulnerable infancy through to the present time.*

*Here is John's personal story of the beginning of this special journey:*



**John Haines**

As a MICA paramedic, I spent much of my working life turning up to corpses.

In many cases, we knew a successful resuscitation would be dubious. Every minute we spent travelling to the patient meant their chances of survival were running out.

Sudden cardiac arrest is one of the world's most common causes of death, affecting young and old alike. Globally, it kills greater than six million people a year, and average global survival rates are less than 1 per cent. In most major Western cities, survival rates are only 4 -5 per cent.

As the name implies, it is sudden – and for every minute without early CPR and defibrillation, chances of survival drop 10 per cent.

That gives paramedics, at best, 10 minutes to turn up for any chance to revive a sudden cardiac arrest patient. Fighting through traffic, trying to beat the clock to save a life, it's no wonder that many cities have an average response time of 10 minutes or more.

The best scenario is when someone has seen the sudden cardiac arrest, called emergency services straight away, started CPR early, and used an AED.

An AED – automated external defibrillator – is the best treatment for sudden cardiac arrest. These devices save lives.

The problem is that AEDs are not easily accessible in most instances, are very expensive for families in settings where most sudden cardiac arrests occur, and are intimidating to many, leading to a lack of confidence to use them.

This problem became an obsession for me many years ago.

I was a paramedic for more than 16 years. Since then, I've dedicated my life to emergency response training, creating some of the simplest tools for people to access from anywhere in the world. My business has trained hundreds of thousands of people, and my "smart" first-aid books have sold many copies.

I don't say this out of conceit, the opposite is true. In all that time, the survival rate of sudden cardiac arrest in Australia has not improved to what I'd call any acceptable degree. For all that training, sudden cardiac arrest remains one of Australia's most insidious killers.

AEDs save lives – when they're used. The fact is, there not enough of them, and they're not where they truly need to be in order to effectively combat sudden cardiac arrest.

Where they need to be is in people's homes and workplaces.

When I learnt a few years ago that a start-up technology business in Sydney had figured out how to create a small, low-cost personal defibrillator called CellaAED, a saw it had a solution to this problem.

It just needed support, which is why I was the first to invest and lend resources and team members, particularly during the project's embryonic stage.

Like fire extinguishers, every house should have an AED.

But right now, a single AED costs thousands to buy and hundreds to maintain every year, putting them well out of reach for most households.

The fact is you're more likely to survive a sudden cardiac arrest in a supermarket or airport where there are public access defibrillators than if it happens in your home.

Australians should be proud that a tiny homegrown business has achieved what the world's biggest medical device manufacturers have failed to do.

The CellaAED personal defibrillator they have created is easy to use, lifesaving technology that is also up to a 10<sup>th</sup> the price of existing AEDs. It presents the best response to sudden cardiac arrest I've seen in more than 40 years as a medical professional.

This achievement is only the first step, however.

Now that CellaAED has been invented, Australia's governments and businesses have an opportunity to lead the way and improve public and personal access to defibrillation.

Ultimately, we should reach a point where AEDs are as common in our homes as fridges and washing machines.

The law has ensured that every home has a smoke detector. If we're going to improve everyone's chances of surviving sudden cardiac arrest, every home should also have an AED.

Without AEDs in homes, we will never improve the chances of surviving sudden cardiac arrest.



The background of the entire page is a photograph of a massive bushfire. Bright orange and yellow flames are rising high into the air, consuming trees. In the lower foreground, a red fire truck is parked, its front facing left. The truck has 'CFA' and 'COUNTY FIRE AUTHORITY' visible on its side. The scene is dark, with the fire providing the primary light source.

**Next Edition**

***Black Saturday  
Bushfires  
2009***

*Untold personal accounts and  
images of Ambulance Victoria  
involvement.*