

BAR TO THE BRAVERY MEDAL (BM and Bar)

Mr David KEY BM, PO Box 2132, Sunbury Vic 3429

In the late afternoon of 7 February 2009, during the 'Black Saturday' Victorian bushfires, Mr David Key (then a Sergeant in the Police Air Wing, Air 490 helicopter crew), assisted in the rescue of four people as fire approached the community of Kinglake West.

Sergeant Key and two Police Air Wing crew members flew their helicopter to Coombs Road in Kinglake West in response to reports that four people were trapped due to the firestorm surrounding their property. On arrival at the scene the crew observed a large wall of smoke and flames approaching the property from the north and north east. Fire had cut off the driveway to the property and flames were approximately thirty metres from the house.

Despite the aircraft being buffeted violently by the strong winds, Sergeant Key, in his role as a 'down-the-wire' crewman, was immediately winched down to the lawn near the house. As he was preparing to winch a woman and a dog to safety they were hit with a very hot wind gust and embers which then caused the dog to panic and run off. Sergeant Key then released the woman from the winch and she went to retrieve the dog.

As the fire closed in, the helicopter crew were forced to abort the rescue and Sergeant Key disconnected himself from the wire, remaining on the ground. He then set about reassuring the four people. He gathered them into three vehicles, one with a horse float attached. They drove away from the property, with another horse held by the reins, running beside one of the vehicles. With the smoke and fire affecting their visibility, the helicopter flew above and guided the convoy away from the fire to a clearing about two kilometres away. Later, it was found that the blaze had spared the house.

Sadly, eleven people died and many homes were destroyed on Coombs Road.

By his actions, Mr Key displayed considerable bravery.