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TRIBUTE

First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson
1st Lt Rick DeMorgan Jr
Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr



About 300 local firefighters, emergency services personnel, United States and Australian dignitaries and community members attended a memorial service at Peak View on Saturday January 23 to pay their respects and honour the sacrifice of Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, the three American airmen who perished in the crash of the C-130 Hercules water 'Bomber 134' while fighting the Good Good Fire on January 23, 2020.

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Remembering the US airmen of



The Peak View and Jerangle Rural Fire Brigades pay their respects to the three fallen airmen.

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The event was organised by James and Julie Barron and the Peak View Rural Fire Brigade, who have remained in contact and become close with the families of the 'Bomber-134' air crew, and saw the unveiling of two memorials - one at the crash site itself and the other at the Peak View Community Hall and Fire Shed - which were designed and worded in consultation with the airmen's families.

Those in attendance for the

memorial included US Air Attaché to Australia Lt Col. Andrew Cunnar, US Embassy Charge d' Affaires Mike Goldman, Governor of NSW Margaret Beazley, Resilience NSW Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, RFS Commissioner Rob Rogers, Deputy Premier John Barilaro, Minister for Police and Emergency Services David Elliot, Senator Jim Molan, Member for Eden-Monaro Kristy McBain, Bronnie Taylor MLC, SMRC Mayor Peter Beer, RFS Chief Superintendent Goetz Graf, Superintendent Jim Darrant, representatives of Coulson Aviation and many more.

US Air Attache Andrew Cunnar acted as Master of Ceremonies for the event, providing a touching eulogy for the three men and commending the support of Australians in the wake of the tragedy.

"All three of these men had distinguished military careers and were hardened combat veterans," Lt. Col Cunnar said.

"Men who spent their entire adult lives serving others. Men who saw danger and ran towards it. Men who demanded excellence

from themselves and everyone they surrounded themselves with.

"I first met Ian 21 years ago. Ian and I were in a very heated competition to win the trophy as the number one graduate of our training class. Ian was a meticulous, driven and incredibly talented natural aviator, he directly contributed to my success as an aviator and I will always be thankful for that. Ian, my friend you are missed.

"While Rick DeMorgan Jr and I never met, we ran in the same circles as Air Force Special Operations Air Commandos and we deployed in the same operations in Afghanistan. We literally were in squadrons across the street from each other for eight years and all accounts suggest that Rick and I would have been great friends. The stories I've heard from his friends and colleagues describe Rick as the same kind of perfectionist that crews love as an engineer, coupled with a crazy streak that would make the toughest man blush.

"Paul Hudson, Paul was a Marine. My colleague and friend Lt Col Mark Weinrich reminded me of the Marine ethos, "once a Marine, always a Marine." Paul and Mark never knew each other but had flown with some of the same air crew over the years and likely shared the same air space while conducting combat operations in Iraq. I think Paul, Mark and I would have been good friends as well, as Paul was described as the kind of man who would always be there for you,



James and Julie Barron laid a wreath in honour of the three US aircrew.



US Air Attache Lt Col. Andrew Cunnar.



The Cooma Fire and Rescue team pay their respects.



'Bomber-134' and their sacrifice



Superintendent Jim Darrant (fourth from left) and Monaro Team RFS officers lay a wreath at the memorial.



Peak View RFS volunteer and local musician Ernie Constance wrote a touching poem for the service.



Members of the Coulson Aircraft compant laid a wreath in honour of the three US aircrew.

no matter what, to share a beer or a round of golf. As Marines say, "Semper Fidelis" or "Always Faithful."

"In the aftermath of this tragedy it was amazing from an Americans perspective, to see the incredible outpouring of support from so many Australians. Hundreds of letters poured into the US Embassy expressing their grief and their sorrow for our loss. One letter in particular caught my eye, from Peak View resident and former Australian Diplomat Mr Alan Sweetman, who saw Bomber-134 flying over Peak View that day.

"After a tragedy like this, everyone involved processes and grieves differently. We all continue to search for answers. We need to be reassured they died for a worthy cause. Mr Sweetman suggested that the opinion of the locals around Peak View is this, 'Their efforts and sacrifice were not in vain. They provided the impetus and spearhead of a massively redetermined follow-up firefighting offensive which honoured their efforts, provided inspiration and saved several homes and lives.' They laid down

their lives for those in danger, and I think we can all agree that's truly a worthy cause."

An acknowledgement of country for the memorial was provided by Superintendent Jim Darrant and Ms Judy Gibson sang both 'Star Spangled Banner' and 'Advance Australia Fair'. Prayers were conducted by RFS Senior Chaplains Majors Ian and Kerry Spall. A poem about the three men was read by local firefighter Ernie Constance, whose words are engraved on the memorial at the site of the crash. The Last Post was performed by Bugler Jackson Boyd followed by a fly-over from 'Bomber-210.'

Former RFS and Resilience NSW Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons spoke of the tragic loss of life in last summer's bushfires, the 26 people including the three American airmen and seven firefighters who perished.

"As has been said by so many, we owe a debt of gratitude to these extraordinary men and indeed their families. A debt of gratitude that we simply can never repay," Mr Fitzsimmons said.

Deputy Premier John Barilaro also made an address, paying

his respects to the three men and speaking of the significance of the tragedy for the local community.

"It's very hard for a regional community like Peak View or Cooma or the Monaro when individual lives are lost. Families and family names are significant in this region. 12 months ago, three new family names have become part of the story of who we are," Mr Barilaro said.

A reception was held after the ceremony at the Peak View Community Hall and Fire Shed with catering from the Cooma Lions Club and wreaths were also laid at the memorial there.

In all, the memorial served as a touching tribute to the sacrifice of the three men, a sacrifice that resonated with people across the world and is perhaps best encapsulated in the words of Ernie Constance that are engraved upon a plaque on a great boulder at the place where the men lost their lives.

"We will never get to thank them
 For the sacrifice they made
 We owe a debt of gratitude
 That can never be repaid"