

BOOK REVIEW

With Spirit and Courage: the extraordinary life of Paul Featherstone

By Paul Featherstone with Ian Heads. Publisher: Pan Macmillan Australia Recommended Retail: \$30.00



With spirit and courage: the extraordinary life of Paul Featherstone is the autobiography of rescue paramedic, Paul Featherstone, who recently received worldwide attention as the rescuer of Stuart Diver, the sole survivor of Australia's Thredbo landslide.

Featherstone takes the reader inside some of the most dramatic moments in Australian life in the last 30 years including the Thredbo landslide, the Granville train disaster and the Nyngan floods.

In this inspirational and thoroughly captivating book, Featherstone tells of the spirit and teamwork that he believes makes Australians special. 'Feathers', as he is known in paramedic circles, describes the national sense of team spirit he encountered when the volunteer team extricated Stuart Diver from the crush of concrete and rock at Thredbo.

Recounts of exhilarating access operations in the book reveal the natural and human elements that may work against a rescue attempt. Featherstone talks of how his aircraft was inverted due to the unpredictable turn of a water tornado direction during a sea rescue of lost fishermen. He also tells of a surfer who placed a rescue mission in jeopardy because he wanted to have his surfboard winched up with him when stranded in rough seas.

He also describes the many dangers of rescue missions including descending from a helicopter winch into a violent sea storm during an ink black night, encountering a black snake while plucking a victim from the Nyngan floodwaters and crawling under a potentially unstable train to access an injured victim.

As well as his historical recollections of some of Australia's major disasters, Featherstone follows the institution of the Australian Paramedic Unit from its inception in 1976 to its

current world-class status and his formation of the Specialty Casualty Access Team (SCAT) in the eighties.

The feats of courage and endurance described in the book illustrate why Featherstone advocates SCAT members need to be multi-skilled. SCAT access operations often need medical and physical capabilities for feats that are not only extraordinary but also often heroic. He says that training and the ongoing tests of physical and mental endurance are crucial to SCAT operational effectiveness especially given the unpredictability of access circumstances such as pounding seas, cliff ledges or caves.

Featherstone also talks of the human qualities necessary for a rescue paramedic. He believes paramedics need confidence to place their lives in their colleagues' hands because in their profession, the likelihood is that they inevitably will.

With so many additional factors working against the volunteer like violent weather, poor visibility, tight spaces and unstable surfaces a common theme emerging from this book is the importance of teamwork.

Reviewed by Giovanna di Natale, Reference Librarian, Emergency Management Australia.

AUSTRALIAN DISASTERS CONFERENCE

Safer Sustainable Communities – 2003

The 2003 Australian Disasters Conference hosted by Emergency Management Australia (EMA) has been rescheduled. The Conference will now be held in Canberra from 10–12 September 2003.

EMA recognises that the success of the Conference will rely heavily on the quality of speakers and the material presented. The Conference Committee invites the Australian emergency management community and other prospective participants to submit abstracts for presentation at the conference. Conference planners expect the length of each presentation will be 30 minutes including time for questions/discussion. The Conference Committee seeks abstracts for papers addressing one or more of the Conference themes and streams listed below. Papers will be selected based on innovation, relevance to the conference theme/streams and author's expertise, and clarity of reasoning criteria.

The theme for the Conference is 'Community Safety is Everyone's Business'. In this context, the Conference streams are:

- Working with Communities
- Understanding Risk and Uncertainty
- Consequence Management (Response and Recovery)
- Sustainability
- Critical Infrastructure Protection/The Role of Business
- Information and Communication

For a copy of the Initial Announcement and Call for Abstracts brochure, contact Susan Stevens,

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or the Conference Secretariat,

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