

Real heroes - the Police Bravery Awards

The Police Federation's Police Bravery Awards, held in association with The Sun newspaper, recognise the work of police officers who carry out courageous acts every day. Tina Orr Munro highlights the stories behind some of the nominees in the second of a series of articles leading up to the award ceremony, to be held at The Dorchester Hotel in London's Park Lane on July 10.



When PC Eric Wells from Sussex police discovered a burning house with people trapped inside he knew that time was not on his side and every second would count. It was the early hours of Saturday 28th of April last year and the dog handler was on routine patrol in Brighton when he smelt burning. The thirty-seven-year old officer followed the trail of smoke that led to a house in a residential area of Brighton. He called for assistance and raised the alarm, a man rushed out of the house, but the door locked behind him.

By now smoke and flames were pouring out of the building when the faces of two distressed women appeared at an upstairs window. They banged on the glass in a desperate attempt to smash it to allow their escape, but it failed to break.

With no time to lose, PC Wells kicked the front door open and was confronted by a burning stairwell. He tried to reach the first floor, but was beaten back by the flames. Determined to reach the women, PC Wells went back outside and grabbed a nearby ladder, propping it up against the wall.

He climbed the ladder and smashed the window, clearing away the glass with his baton. He told the women to lay a quilt on the window frame to prevent cuts from glass fragments. Then one by one, he helped them down the ladder.

Once he had led them to safety, the officer was then told there was another person at the rear of the house so he ran to the back door which was also locked. For a second time, he had to break the door down. By now, the fire had taken a hold on the building and the officer had to battle flames and black smoke as well falling debris. But realising that



Photography: Alamy

the open back door was fuelling the fire, the officer closed it behind him in a bid to prevent the fire spreading, even though he would have known this could hamper his own escape.

In the thick dense smoke, he called out to the other occupant. A woman answered him and said that she was unable to reach him or get to the front of the house. He instructed the woman to stay close to the rear bedroom window, but he was driven back by the heat and was unable to reach her.

The officer returned to the front of the house to fetch the ladder, just as the fire service arrived to take over. PC Wells who suffered minor cuts and burns was able to tell them the woman's exact location so the firefighters could rescue her.

She was taken to hospital where she spent two days in intensive care. She and the other occupants of the house have since made a full recovery. All of them believe that had it not been for PC Wells' bravery their injuries would have been far worse, and possibly fatal. One of them later wrote to the officer: "Thank you for your quick thinking and for saving both our lives. We were both giving up hope really as the window just would not smash and we were starting to struggle to breathe. You are a hero in our eyes."

Chief Superintendent Paul Pearce added that PC Wells' actions were "in the finest tradition of the British Police service. A lot is made of performance figures and statistics but the saving of life remains our highest priority."

Chairman of Sussex Police Federation, Brian Stockham, also emphasised PC Wells' coolness under fire in closing the front door behind him, preventing easy escape as "absolute bravery in that Eric was under pressure but performing at the highest level to minimise risk. Eric is

quite simply a real role model to younger officers as to what we stand and truly fight for."

PC Wells, 37, who has been an officer for 18 years, insists it all happened so quickly that he just did not have time to think.

"It had been a fairly quiet night before all this happened. I just tried to use my logic and common sense. I'm a little embarrassed by all of it as anyone would have done the same thing. I am just glad nobody was seriously hurt and I was able to help."

Nominees from the second three regions:

Region 7

Gwent Police Constable Keith Seagrim

North Wales Police Constable Nathan Monshin

South Wales Police Constable Sara Treharne

Region 8

Metropolitan Constable Mark Rudd
 Detective Constable Neil Fearn
 Det. Constable Tony Fitzpatrick
 Sergeant Kris Wrigh
 Constable Peter Dack
 Constable Imran Patel