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Brave officer honoured at award ceremony

Congratulations, Geoff



By Tony Wetton, chair of Derbyshire Police Federation

It was a privilege and honour to accompany Geoff Marshall and his wife, Jennifer, to the national Police Bravery Awards 2021.

I am delighted that Geoff's selfless and brave acts were recognised on the national stage, and he was a very worthy winner of the regional award.

All the officers nominated for the bravery awards had shown exceptional courage in the face of adversity but what really stood out for me was that so many of the nominees were faced with a situation in which they had little alternative but deal with what they were confronted with.

I do not seek to detract from the bravery that takes.

However, I will say that in Geoff's circumstances, he could easily have stood back and let someone else put themselves in harm's way. But, even having time to think about it and considering the fact that his mission could end in almost certain death, Geoff put himself forward and even argued that he should go in the place of colleagues with young families.

On behalf of Derbyshire Police Federation, I would like to congratulate Geoff on his success in the awards, but also thank him for his dedicated service to Derbyshire Constabulary. A career constable, with just two years left until he reaches his 30 years' service, I believe he intends to remain in a frontline role and continue to serve our communities. We wish him all the best.

Cover photo: (left to right) Tony Wetton, chair of Derbyshire Police Federation, Rachel Swann, Chief Constable of Derbyshire Constabulary and Jennifer and Geoff Marshall at the award ceremony. Photo courtesy of Anderson Photography.

Geoff wins bravery award after critical role in plugging dam



Photo courtesy of Anderson Photography

National Federation chair John Apter with PC Geoff Marshall (centre) and Paul Griffiths, president of the Police Superintendents' Association.

The Derbyshire PC who played such a critical role in protecting Whaley Bridge from disaster during the Toddbrook Reservoir crisis has been presented with a regional award at the national Police Bravery Awards.

Geoff Marshall was overwhelmed at the recognition.

"To win a national police bravery award is absolutely fabulous and very humbling. There are so many incredible stories from lots of officers all trying to do the right thing. It's just fantastic and I never expected it or even thought of it," he said.

Tony Wetton, chair of Derbyshire Police Federation, congratulated Geoff on the award.

"Geoff is a very worthy winner of this prestigious award. He put his life on the line to protect others, volunteering to carry out a role that was obviously extremely dangerous. He plays down what he did, and quite rightly points out that he was part of a huge team effort, but I really do believe that what he did

was exceptionally brave and this recognition is very much deserved."

The awards ceremony in London on 12 October, also attended by Chief Constable Rachel Swann, followed a Downing Street reception hosted by Home Secretary Priti Patel where Geoff and his wife Jennifer met the other 92 nominees for the 2020 Police Bravery Awards. The awards were delayed last year due to the pandemic.

While in Downing Street, Geoff was introduced to Ms Patel who said she remembered the events at Whaley Bridge. Afterwards Geoff and Jennifer said the afternoon had felt surreal.

Geoff was put forward for the bravery awards by the Force's Operational Support Department and selected as its nominee by the Branch Board of Derbyshire Police Federation.

The tense and dramatic events at the reservoir began on Thursday 1 August 2019 and were played out across the world's media.



Geoff and his wife, Jennifer at the gates of Downing Street.



Geoff with policing minister Kit Malthouse.

Photo courtesy of Anderson Photography

Days of heavy rain had sent water raging over the dam wall, taking with it a huge section of the structure.

Engineers estimated it was likely that the entire 250-metre long dam would fail sending billions of litres of water onto the town.

The emergency operation kicked in with officers in the potential flood area evacuating 1,000 people in the middle of Whaley Bridge from their homes and businesses.

At the dam, it was critical that sandbagging was completed to try to prevent the structure from collapsing. As heavy rain continued to fall, a plan was drawn up to put hundreds of sandbags in place to divert water away from the damaged section.

Tony explained: "The sandbagging needed to be performed by a member of staff on the actual spillway and others on a metal bridge passing the bags down.

"Engineers briefed the police officers and several volunteer members of mountain rescue that should certain tell-tale signs be visible either on the water or on the

downstream side, that they would have between 45 seconds and a minute to evacuate the entire area before the dam wall would collapse beneath their feet.

"In reality, were the dam to have failed it is highly unlikely any of those involved in the sandbagging operation would have survived. The control measures such as ropes and personal flotation devices provided some protection in the event of an officer falling into the water rather than the dam failing.

"All the officers present elected that they could not stand by and risk the death of around 2,000 people, including colleagues, without doing something."

Geoff volunteered to work on the spillway and secured himself with a rope while his colleagues passed the bags down.

For around two hours, officers and mountain rescue worked to place sandbags on the wall and buy enough time to temporarily secure the reservoir.

As he worked on the dam, colleagues who were looking out for signs the dam was

beginning to breach suddenly shouted at him to get off.

Tony said: "At this point, Geoff was positioned on the spillway, secured with a rope and was at significant risk and there was a delay in him being unsecured so he could make his way off safely."

He added: "Actions of officers completing the sandbagging operation on the spillway undoubtedly reduced further erosion to the dam wall and prevented a devastating breach.

"There were many officers involved in the incident and I would like to acknowledge their bravery and outstanding efforts too but Geoff went over and above the call of duty while thankfully supported by his colleagues."

The following morning an RAF Chinook helicopter was deployed and, over the next five days, 530 tonnes of aggregate were used to reinforce the dam wall.

After a tense seven days, the dam wall was repaired and the water pumped out.

Geoff has also received a Chief Constable's commendation for his brave actions.

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Home Secretary singles out Geoff at Downing Street reception



Photos courtesy of Anderson Photography

Geoff and Jennifer chat with Home Secretary Priti Patel inside No 10.

Geoff chats with award host Mark Durden-Smith at the ceremony.

Standing within the walls of No 10 Downing Street drinking champagne and eating canapés on a Tuesday afternoon in October was already quite surreal for Derbyshire PC Geoff Marshall but the experience was to get all the more dreamlike.

Geoff and his wife, Jennifer, then heard that the Home Secretary Priti Patel had asked to speak to them.

"The highlight of the whole bravery awards experience was being inside No 10,"

said Geoff, "It was just fantastic but then when the Home Secretary asked to be introduced to us and chatted to us about the incident well that was just something else.

"She explained that the Toddbrook Reservoir crisis was the first time she had chaired the Government's COBRA meeting and that it was an incident that had really stuck with her. She actually said she would remember it until the day she died."

Later that evening, Geoff was also approached by Kit Malthouse, the policing minister, who congratulated him on the regional award and praised him for his part in saving the town of Whaley Bridge, saying what he had done was "phenomenal".

During the awards, Geoff himself was impressed by the bravery shown by colleagues across the country and he has also had time to reflect on his own actions.

"The risks involved in what I was doing were explained to me and I knew that if it

went wrong it would not be a case of being injured, I would have been killed," said Geoff, "But I didn't want any of the rest of the team, some of whom had quite young families, to put themselves in harm's way.

"You don't do these things with one eye on getting an award, you do them because it is the right thing to do. Just going to the bravery awards is an honour in itself, so getting the regional award was a really lovely bonus."

On the day of the incident, however, Geoff did find himself in hot water with Jennifer. He responded to a call for officers to turn in for a shift to deal with the crisis but in doing so left the couple's three dogs for longer than usual.

"I think she has forgiven me now," says Geoff.

Away from work, Geoff and Jennifer are involved in rescuing ill-treated dogs and often take them in for foster care.