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MEDIA RELEASE

CFA VOLUNTEER TO FORGE FRENCH CONNECTION

The connection between volunteer firefighters in Australia and France will be honoured during a war memorial service next month.

Jim Kelly will present a Volunteer fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) plaque to Villers Bretonneux Fire Brigade in France as part of the Le Hamel centenary commemoration on July 4.

The plaque recognises the brigade's ongoing commitment to fire protection and occupational, health and safety.

The brigade is based 7km from the commemoration site and will be on active duty on the day.

VFBV CEO Andrew Ford said the presentation was an example of the importance of collaboration between volunteers.

"Volunteers are a vital part of every regional Victorian community and indeed around the world," Mr Ford said.

"As one of the most fire-prone places in the world, Victorians can be confident that with almost 60,000 volunteers and 1000 paid firefighters, we're professionally trained and equipped for all fire risks and our huge volunteer numbers mean we can step up and respond anywhere in the state in times of disaster."

Mr Kelly, who volunteers with the Belgrave Heights and South Fire Brigade, said the Villers Bretonneux brigade was one of many based near European battlegrounds who continue to help visiting Australians.

"We have contact with various brigades where the boys fought, the most notable being in Belgium at Ieper where the volunteer brigade bugler is responsible for playing at the Last Post ceremony every night" he said.

He also recalls local fire brigade volunteers helping during an interment ceremony at Fromelles in 2012.

"It was a stinking hot day, well over 30 degrees and a lot of people were collapsing in the heat. The local brigade was there for welfare handing out bottles of water and checking on people, as well as fire protection," he said.

"The same will happen on July 4."

Mr Kelly, whose uncle fought at and survived Gallipoli, Belgium and France, said the Villers Bretonneux brigade had indicated it would be honoured to receive the plaque.

“We have a French-born member in our brigade who helped to arrange contact with Villers Bretonneux,” he said. “It’s a good thing to do; volunteers don’t usually get much recognition.”

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