

Borehole Rescue

On Friday 18th January 1957, Mandurah witnessed one of the most dramatic events in its history. Two boys, 2 ½ year old Graham Davies and his 6 year-old brother Robert were playing outside on a summer's evening at about 6:00pm near their Father's friend's house in Ward St when Robert jumped into a hole and out again.

Graham jumped down another and disappeared. He was trapped 17ft (5m) down a narrow 14inch (35cm) borehole. Robert raced back to the house to tell his parents, Bert and Kathleen Davies.

His parents, police, a doctor and neighbours began their rescue attempt by dropping ropes over his shoulders, although one rope was attached to Graham's wrist, he was too tightly wedged to be dislodged. Teams of men were quickly on the scene and began to sink a shaft beside the borehole but this was abandoned when it hit solid rock and a cave in was feared. Machinery was needed.

Doctors pumped oxygen to the boy and vacuum cleaners were converted and used to suck the foul air from the hole until an air compressor was available. Telephone calls and radio broadcasts were made and a message was flashed across the open air picture screen appealing for people with mining and excavation experience and machinery to come and help. Within minutes of hearing about the accident volunteers offered to help. Local men and women came from the pub, the theatre and the hall where the Junior Debutantes Ball was being held.

They volunteered to help in any way they could from digging with their bare hands to providing food and clothing. People from different government works departments from Perth came. Shift workers arrived from Kwinana, goldminers holidaying along the coast offered their services and coal miners from Collie travelled to the scene.

Meanwhile Graham slipped further down the hole to 23ft (7m), where he remained trapped. When the compressor units for the equipment arrived, volunteer teams began the task of digging out an open cut with the aid of rock drilling equipment. Using jack hammers, shovels, picks and earth moving equipment they dug to a depth of about 25ft (7.6m) and then began to tunnel horizontally towards the spot where Graham was.

A bulldozer and a front-end loader were used in the gigantic task of clearing away more than 50 tons of sand and stone from the open cut.

Through the night the rescue attempt continued without knowing if Graham was still alive. The men struck a rock shelf which slowed their progress, gradually the shelf weakened. The hammers and drills after working all night started to overheat and needed replacing. Rest periods had to be made to clear the fumes from the shaft caused by the hot drills.

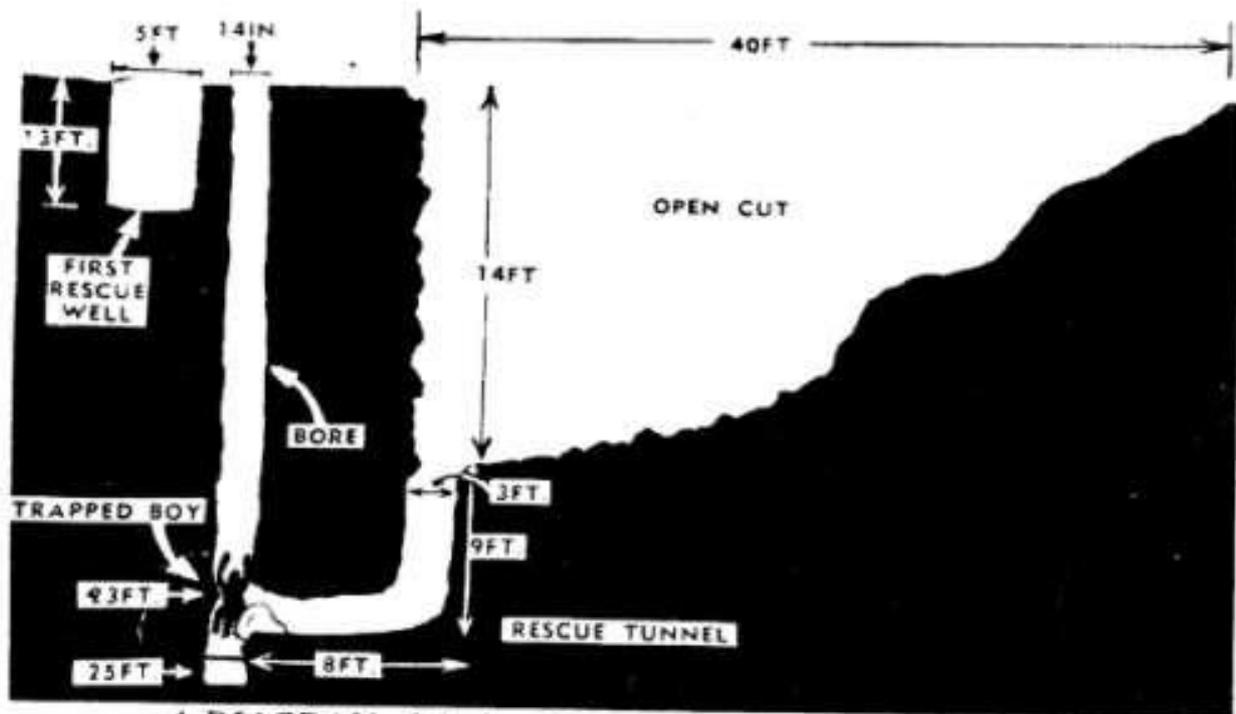
The first indication that Graham was still alive was a movement on the rope at 9:00am on Saturday 19th. At 12:45pm Graham was heard to cry out. His sudden cry broke through the noise of the jack-hammers, pneumatic drills and other equipment. The last few feet were extremely difficult and frustratingly slow as they got closer to Graham.



Borehole Rescue cont'd

They had to be cautious and accurate to reach him without harm. There was always the risk of a cave-in or a pick striking him as the tunnel neared the borehole. After 23 hours Graham was rescued at 4:45pm on Saturday 19th January 1957. He was taken to Murray Districts Hospital at Pinjarra. He had bruises, swelling and scratches. The pressure of the rope on his wrist had pulled back the skin from his hand like a glove.

A skin graft was performed and was successful with no permanent injury. The family were very grateful to everyone for all they did. The rescue operation was a collective community effort by many people who came forward spontaneously to give their combined and determined cooperation to achieve a rescue under the most hazardous conditions.



A DIAGRAM of the borehole and the large open pit which was sunk beside it. An 8 ft rescue tunnel was driven in towards the hole at the 23ft level.

