

On August 22, 2022, the Forrest City Fire Department was dispatched to the 246-mile marker west bound on interstate 40 for an accident involving fire and 18 wheelers. Upon arrival they were met with a very chaotic scene. There were at least 6 vehicles on fire. The fuel load was enormous. All the vehicles were carrying an average of 300 gallons of diesel and class A combustibles. One flammable liquids tanker was also involved and on fire. It was apparent that this was going to be a scene that required a lot of water and a lot of manpower. Chief Shane Dallas made the decision to request mutual aid from several departments from 2 different counties. As Chief Dallas was doing a 360-degree survey of the scene, he determined that there would be fatalities, but there was one person who was still trapped, and the flames were quickly heading that way. He devised a plan to use the available water to keep the fire off the trapped victim as best they could as well as suppress the fire. However, the flames were being fed by the diesel and were rapidly approaching the victim.

As other departments started arriving, assignments were given by Chief Dallas. Marion and Crawfordsville arrived around the same time. Marion brought their heavy rescue truck which carried equipment designed for heavy extrication. Lieutenant Ashton Heard and Firefighter Will Lancaster from the Marion Fire Department as well as Firefighter Hudson Hallum from Crawfordsville joined forces with Division Chief Jeremy Sharp from Forrest City and devised a game plan on the west side of the bridge. Forrest City Firefighters Demarcus Hunter, Keaton Sandage, Cordell Haynes along with Marion Firefighter Hayden Spears, placed 1 ½" hose lines between the flames and the truck with the trapped victim to try to slow the fire spread. Lieutenant Heard and Firefighter Hallum tunneled their way into the severely trapped victim. They made a rapid assessment and determined that the only chance for survivability was rapid extrication and transport. As Lt Heard and FF Hallum started the extrication on the inside of the vehicle, they conferred with Battalion Chief Zach Jumper who was in charge of the rescue operations and asked that a crew be assigned to making a way from the outside of the vehicle while they worked to free him from entanglement on the inside where the motor was basically in his lap. Division Chief Sharp and Firefighter Lancaster started this task. To add to their problems, it was pouring rain and the accident occurred on top of an older bridge with very little fall protection.

It became apparent that the fire could not be extinguished any time soon, so all firefighting efforts were switched to the protection of the crews that were extricating. As more fuel tanks became involved, the fire became more intense, to the point that the interior of the truck became hot to the touch and began to smoke. Flames from

multiple vehicles were feet away from the firefighters as they worked tirelessly to free the entrapped victim. Hose lines could not be advanced around the accident due to the wreck taking up the entire bridge. There were multiple vehicles between crews extricating and the hose lines. This made it difficult to slow the fire progression. A decision had to be made due to impending flames as to stay and continue rescue efforts or postpone rescue operations until the fire was brought under control. If they were to go, the victim would surely lose his life. Chief Jumper asked the others if they wanted to stay and give it a try. Knowing the dangers, they faced and without hesitation they all said yes with the impending flames rapidly approaching.

Although these firefighters had rarely, and in some cases never trained together, they came together as if they had just trained on this scenario the day before. Rams were set in place, cuts were made from both the interior and exterior of the vehicle and just as the fire was reaching them, he was freed and removed. But this is just half of the story, the victim was a large man which under normal circumstances would be a problem, but in this situation was a major problem. The victim could only be removed from one side in order to avoid falling from the edge of the bridge. The firefighters raced to remove the victim while trying to shield him from the burning flames.

Without the bravery and unselfish sacrifice made by these firefighters, the victim would not have had a chance at survival. When asked, they could have easily and justifiably left. But because they stayed, after a lengthy hospitalization the victim made a full recovery.

Due to these Firefighters exhibiting bravery, self-sacrifice and complete disregard for their own safety under extreme fire conditions, I am nominating the following firefighters for the Arkansas Firefighter of the year award:

Division Chief Jeremy Sharp - Forrest City Fire Department

Battalion Chief Zakk Jumper - Forrest City Fire Department

Lieutenant Ashton Heard - Marion Fire Department

Firefighter Will Lancaster - Marion Fire Department

Firefighter Hudson Hallum - Crawfordsville Fire Department

These firefighters showed exemplary bravery and courage and demonstrated the excellence of our Arkansas Fire Service.