

THE NEW ZEALAND BRAVERY DECORATION (N.Z.B.D.)

Anthony Frederick Ronald MILLSOM
Wing Commander, Royal New Zealand Air Force (Retired)

Date of action: 26 April 2008

Date of award: 2 April 2011

Citation

On 26 April 2008 Anthony Millsom, then a Wing Commander serving in the Royal New Zealand Air Force, was at home at Whenuapai when he heard the sound of a small aircraft as it nose-dived into the ground from a low altitude. Looking out of the window, he saw billowing smoke and immediately ran from his house towards the crash site, which was inside the perimeter of the Air Base. As he approached the crumpled aircraft he saw it engulfed in flames. The surrounding grass, which extended to the concrete base of a nearby building, was also burning. Wing Commander Millsom recognised the building as one used to store highly inflammable liquid oxygen.

Grabbing a nearby fire hose he ran to the aircraft and quickly realised that one of its occupants was lying face down half out of plane. The person's legs were burning and flames were licking up their back, melting their shirt. Wing Commander Millsom ran up to the aircraft, but couldn't see all of it because of the flames and smoke. He called out to the accident victim, but did not receive a response. Despite the risk to himself, he attempted to get the occupant out of the aircraft, but was initially beaten back by the flames and heat. He then made another attempt and managed to grab the victim's belt and pull him out and away from the aircraft.

Others had now arrived at the scene and were shouting warnings. The fire had increased in intensity and was getting ever closer to the liquid oxygen store, heightening the risk of an explosion. Wing Commander Millsom therefore had no option but to retire to safety.

In attempting to rescue the occupant of the aircraft, Wing Commander Millsom suffered burns and blisters to both hands and flash burns to the side of his face. He acted selflessly, and with great courage and persistence, not knowing if the person he was attempting to rescue was alive or dead. All the time, he was at risk from the surrounding fire and a possible explosion.