

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

### **Mervyn Raymond NEIL Senior Firefighter, New Zealand Fire Service**

Date of action: 5 April 2008

Date of award: 2 April 2011

#### *Citation*

At 4.00 p.m. on Saturday 5 April 2008 two Hamilton fire crews responded to a monitored smoke alarm at the cool store complex in Tamahere. Senior Firefighter Mervyn Neil was a member of one of those crews. Immediately after the crews gained entry to the cool store a massive explosion occurred with flames and debris propelled tens of metres into the air. The officer in charge was killed in the explosion and seven other firefighters were severely injured. The most severely injured survivor was Senior Firefighter Neil who received burns to 73% of his body.

Nearby citizens, including several qualified medical personnel, ran to the scene to assist the victims. They tended to the victims' injuries and, unaware of the increasing danger to which they were exposed, helped remove firefighters trapped by the debris.

Senior Firefighter Neil, though grievously injured, was aware of the developing danger and quietly and professionally took charge of the situation and led people away from the danger area. Despite being urged to rest and receive treatment, he continued to work to ensure the safety of his colleagues and their rescuers, cooling the burns sustained by his colleagues with a fire hose and showing others how to do it. When support appliances started to arrive some 11 minutes after the explosion, the officer in charge of the first appliance to arrive was directed to the scene by Senior Firefighter Neil, who was still assisting with operations despite his life-threatening injuries. He finally left the scene by ambulance some 40 minutes after the explosion and subsequently spent 10 weeks in a coma.

Senior Firefighter Neil's actions between the time of the explosion and his evacuation to hospital were examples of exceptional bravery and professionalism of the highest order and contributed substantially to the safety of members of the public and of his own injured colleagues in the critical period immediately following the explosion.