

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

George William WHITE **Sergeant, New Zealand Police**

Date of action: 17 – 19 January 2005

Date of award: 14 October 2006

Citation

On 17 and 18 January 2005 there was a riot at Yandina in the Solomon Islands during an industrial dispute. On 17 January Constable Bertrand had been assaulted during an incident and Sergeant White, then an Acting Inspector, together with another officer went to her assistance, using pepper spray to force a number of strikers to withdraw. They were punched and kicked while doing so. An arrested person was placed in the police cells after which some 300 angry strikers attempted to storm the Police Station. After several hours of skirmishing with the strikers the latter were pushed back to the market area and talked into staying there to allow the Police to process the prisoner, who was bailed once calm had been restored.

The following day, 18 January, at about 10.30 a.m. large rocks were propelled at Police lines, which were preventing access to the wharf area where copra was being loaded. Peace was restored temporarily but a riot developed at about 11.30 a.m. Police lines were attacked, as was the Police Station. Every police officer present received injuries from rocks and one Royal Solomon Island Police member received a large rock though his shield and helmet visor, which knocked him out, broke his nose and cut his forehead. Tear gas and pepper spray were both deployed at this stage, with some 500 rioters being present. By 3.30 p.m. the rioters had been pushed back from the Police Station and the ship had departed, however the police by now had no more tear gas and were low on pepper spray.

On 19 January a list of identifiable offenders was compiled and arrests were made, resulting in some 150 strikers coming back to confront the Police Station. After a long stand-off and some negotiations a number of people gave themselves up to police and by early afternoon the number of arrests had risen to 57. These prisoners were successfully removed from Yandina, after which the Police spent the rest of the day out in the community talking to people, trying to settle the situation down to ensure their own safety, the safety of the local Royal Solomon Island Police members and those workers who had tried to load the ship.

Throughout these incidents, Sergeant White displayed exceptional bravery and leadership in the face of an overwhelming number of rioters armed with slingshots and rocks. He coordinated defensive positions as well as leading repeated forays made up of untrained Royal Solomon Island Police personnel against the rioters, in efforts to disperse them. His leadership, determination and resolve over the two days of rioting led to the successful quelling of the riots and the arrest of over 50 offenders. The Police response was undertaken with very limited manpower and resources, without respite for rest or replenishment and in circumstances which had the potential for the loss of life.