

## THE NEW ZEALAND BRAVERY MEDAL (N.Z.B.M.)

### **Stephen ACTON** **Senior Firefighter, New Zealand Fire Service**

Date of action: 22 February 2011

Date of award: 23 June 2014

#### *Citation*

On 22 February 2011 a magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck Christchurch, causing the collapse of the Pyne Gould Corporation building, trapping around 30 people inside. In order to enter the office space of the collapsed building, Senior Firefighter Steve Acton and other firefighters had to break through layers of concrete with hand tools and grinders before tunnelling through office equipment and furniture to reach trapped victims. Acton and a team of three other firefighters located two women trapped beneath a balcony overhang at the rear of the building. The tunnel they created between the collapsed floors ranged from 30 to 70 centimetres high and did not allow for protective gear to be worn. Working in this cavity, Acton utilised his experience as a builder to direct which pieces of debris could be safely moved. One woman was located around five metres inside the tunnel. The firefighters were able to clear an access hole and extract her, with crushed toes. The team then located a second woman pinned to her chair by a concrete beam. Acton was able to free her by sawing the legs off her chair. After approximately four hours, Acton's team was relieved by a second tunnelling team. The rescue efforts of Acton and his team were carried out in unstable, confined spaces under the constant threat of aftershocks.