

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

Peter Winston BOOOTH

Date of action: 24 April 2009

Date of award: 2 April 2011

Citation

At 3.55 p.m. on 24 April 2009 Mr Peter Booth was driving north on State Highway One 17km outside of Taupo when he was overtaken by a vehicle which then crashed head-on with a Toyota van coming in the opposite direction. The van, which contained six people, flipped into the air, landed on its rear and rolled four times, before landing off the road, rolling down a grass embankment and bursting into flames.

Mr Booth stopped his vehicle and, seeing that the engine compartment of the Toyota was on fire, grabbed a small fire extinguisher. He emptied the fire extinguisher onto the blaze but this had little effect because by this time the fire had intensified, some nearby vegetation had been set alight and there were sounds of small explosions coming from inside the burning vehicle.

It was at this time that he saw Inspector Michael O'Leary, who had already saved one child from the burning vehicle, trying to rescue a second child. Without hesitation he went to assist.

As the van filled with dense black smoke, Mr Booth, Inspector O'Leary, and Inspector O'Leary's son, Conor, tried to pull a boy out of the vehicle, but could not do so. Realising that a seat belt was restraining the child in the car, Inspector O'Leary called for a knife. Fortunately Mr Booth had one in his pocket and Inspector O'Leary was able to cut the belt that was restraining the child and they pulled the child from the wreckage to safety. The intense heat, dense smoke and flames prevented any further rescue attempts from being made.

Mr Booth displayed bravery in going to the assistance of Inspector O'Leary in his rescue of one of the children in the Toyota. There was an ever-present danger of the fire engulfing them both as they stood beside the vehicle attempting to affect the rescue.