

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

James Iain CHRISTIE

Date of action: 25 September 2007

Date of award: 2 April 2011

Citation

At 8.23 p.m. on 25 September 2007 Mount Ruapehu erupted. The eruption caused boulders, rocks, mud and other debris to smash through the Dome Shelter near the summit of the mountain, where Mr James Christie and his climbing partner, Mr William Pike, were asleep. Mr Christie was able to free himself from under the debris when the floorboards gave away and the water receded, but Mr Pike was buried up to the waist and had also sustained a compound fracture to the lower right leg.

Mr Christie immediately went to the aid of his friend. In the dark, and dressed in only thermals, he tried to pull the rocks off his friend's body. When his hands were too cold to continue, he tried using a shovel and an ice pick to remove the material that covered him, while at the same time trying to keep him conscious. Because the rocks were too big and heavy, he could only free his friend's left leg. All the while, the mountain was continuing to erupt intermittently and the ground was shaking, causing debris to land on and around the Shelter. Unable to free Mr Pike from the debris that entrapped him, Mr Christie realised he would have to leave his friend and go to get help.

After tying a tourniquet around Mr Pike's broken right leg, he proceeded down the mountain to get help, in the dark, dressed only in wet thermals, wet jacket, and boots with no socks, and carrying an ice axe. After 40 minutes of running down the mountain, avoiding potholes made by the rocks blown from the crater, and slipping over in the icy conditions, Mr Christie came across a snowcat driver, who contacted emergency services.

Had Mr Christie decided to remain with his friend, it is likely that both men would have died from hypothermia before help could have arrived. Mr Christie's courageous decision to leave his friend and the relative safety of the Shelter resulted in both men surviving the ordeal.