

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

Shane Allan COWLES **Constable, New Zealand Police**

Date of action: 22 February 2011

Date of award: 23 June 2014

Citation

When the 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck Christchurch on 22 February, Constable Shane Cowles was one of the first Police officers in attendance at the collapsed Canterbury Television building. A fire had ignited in the lower levels of the building, complicating rescue efforts. Constable Cowles worked with three other Police officers on the roof of the building to conduct several rescues amongst the rubble of the building's lift tower. Their lives were at particular risk during the first hour when they were working under the precarious lift tower that was disintegrating with each aftershock. They were initially able to free a woman and two children. The Police officers then searched for audible tapping or voices and managed to pinpoint the locations of at least eight survivors. Where possible, the officers dug down to the survivors they located, and using stretchers sourced from the nearby Inland Revenue building, carried the survivors to waiting medical personnel. They heard a woman calling for help in the burning area of the building and made several attempts to reach her from the outside of the building, with only wet clothing wrapped around their heads to protect against the heat and smoke. This occurred before the Fire Service had arrived on the scene. Due to a brief change in wind direction, they were able to climb down inside the building, reach the woman and pull her free. The efforts of Shane Cowles and the other Police officers rescued at least six people from the CTV site.