

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

### JONES, Heath Courtenay, NZBD **Detective Sergeant, New Zealand Police**

Date of action: 14 February 2023  
Date of award: 13 December 2025

#### *Citation*

On 14 February 2023 the severe category three Cyclone Gabrielle hit New Zealand and caused widespread devastation in the Eastern District, with a large-scale civil defence emergency response undertaken. Rivers were flooded, stop banks breached and flooding rose rapidly to envelop buildings and landslides swept away homes, while slips, debris and downed bridges prevented movement along much of the roading network.

Detective Sergeant Heath Jones and another Police officer were deployed to rescue people in the Pakowhai area, outside Hastings. They learnt of a fellow Police officer who was trapped on the roof of a shed at her property along with her 4-year-old son and baby. The officers drove to the Pakowhai Road address, before having to continue through rising floodwaters on foot.

When they reached the property, the water was at chest height. They moved through the strong current to find the stranded officer and her children on the shed roof. Detective Sergeant Jones climbed on a submerged fence to lift down the 4-year-old, passing him to the other officer. Once the mother and her baby were off the roof, the group travelled carefully back through the waters to their Police car.

Detective Sergeant Jones and his fellow officer then focused on worsening conditions at Chesterhope Bridge. They spotted an older couple stranded around 200 metres away, trying to cross the floodwater. Jones walked along the stop bank towards the couple while the other officer used the Police vehicle loudspeaker to instruct the couple to approach the stop bank, but they did not respond. Jones entered the water to swim out to the couple, navigating a submerged barbwire fence line to reach them. The other officer entered the water and met Jones and the couple at the fence line. They established that the woman was exhausted and not a good swimmer and the man was unable to swim. The floodwater had now reached the top of the stop bank.

Detective Sergeant Jones spoke to the couple about getting to the riverbank, crossing the flowing water being the only possible route, with the other directions impassable. Jones and the other officer helped the couple cross over the submerged barb wire fence. Due to the depth of water on the other side, no footing was available which meant being taken by the current for a short distance. Jones stayed with the woman while the other officer swam the man to the riverbank, being carried around five metres by the current.

The other officer returned to Detective Sergeant Jones and the woman. The officers wrapped their arms around the woman and carried her across the current to safety. The area in which the officers undertook these rescues was later confirmed to have been fully flooded, with houses submerged.