

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

Christopher Mark JOWSEY (W1005419)
Sergeant, Royal New Zealand Air Force

Date of action: 16 February 2004

Date of award: 23 October 2005

Citation

Sergeant (now Flight Sergeant) Jowsey was the winch man on an RNZAF Iroquois helicopter conducting rescue and evacuation tasks on 16 February 2004, following catastrophic flooding throughout the Manawatu, Rangitikei and Wanganui regions. His aircraft was informed that two men were caught in the floodwaters of the Whangaehu River, near the township of Kauangaroa. On arriving at the scene, the first man was quickly located chest deep in water. Sergeant Jowsey was winched down and the man safely recovered. The aircraft captain then spotted the second man being swept downstream. The aircraft was quickly positioned above the man, who was attempting to cling to a fence, but the force of the water was such that the fence ripped away. The crew realised that this could be a one-chance rescue as the man was being quickly swept away and the river was full of debris including trees, hay bales, dead stock and other debris. The aircraft was then positioned downstream and Sergeant Jowsey was winched into the river. As the man came within reach, Sergeant Jowsey caught hold of him, but a combination of his weight, the force of the water and the tension from the winch cable dragged both men under water. At this point, while he was completely submerged, one of Sergeant Jowsey's boots became snagged on an underwater obstruction. He managed to kick free of the obstruction and, having maintained a firm hold of the survivor throughout, placed him in the rescue strop. This is not a simple exercise on land, and in these circumstances required great presence of mind and determination. Sergeant Jowsey then assisted the survivor to the aircraft.

Had Sergeant Jowsey not been winched clear of the water, the man would very likely have perished. Also, as Sergeant Jowsey well knew, if the winch cable had snagged while in the water, it would have to be cut away, placing the rescuer himself in grave danger. Sergeant Jowsey subsequently completed three more rescues that day. Throughout the day he displayed courage, professionalism and great compassion for the people he rescued.