

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

### **Joshua James KUMBAROFF** **Firefighter, New Zealand Fire Service**

Date of action: 22 February 2011

Date of award: 23 June 2014

#### *Citation*

On 22 February 2011 a magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck Christchurch, causing the collapse of the Pyne Gould Corporation building, trapping around 30 people inside. Firefighter Josh Kumbaroff was part of a team of firefighters who tunnelled into a space of around 30 centimetres between the building's collapsed floors to rescue a trapped woman. The cramped conditions meant that no breathing apparatus or helmets could be worn. Kumbaroff was joined by two other firefighters and as the smallest team member he led the crawl through the tunnel, clearing a path through office equipment and furniture with hand tools. The woman had previously called for help on her cellphone and the firefighters arranged to have her cellphone called to help locate her. Kumbaroff located the woman trapped in a space behind an immovable large concrete beam. As the firefighters left the tunnel an aftershock hit and the team reported feeling concrete pressing simultaneously against their chests and backs. An engineer was consulted and advised that the beam was not safe to move. Urban Search and Rescue personnel had arrived by this point and a plan was formulated to tunnel down to the woman from above. Kumbaroff then crawled back to the woman to let her know how the USAR team planned to extricate her. The woman was rescued by USAR later that day. Josh Kumbaroff was a new and relatively inexperienced firefighter and this was his first experience of tunnelling. He carried out his rescue efforts in cramped and unstable conditions under the constant threat of aftershocks.