

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

John Joseph McNAMEE

Date of action: 11 July 1997

Date of award: 23 October 1999

Citation

Mr McNamee, an employee of Alpine Guides Ltd, was guiding one of two groups on 11 July 1997 when he and four skiers in his party were buried in an avalanche five kilometres from Mt Cook, in the Southern Alps. Mr McNamee managed to free his pack, get his shovel out and then dig himself out in a very short period of time. With a quick scan of the area, he spotted visual signs of two of his skiers who were completely buried except that each had a hand visible. The priority was to free these skiers to the extent that they had clear airways and could breathe. Once this was accomplished, he located the other two skiers, one of whom had stopped breathing. Mr McNamee administered CPR by which time four other guides, who had been working nearby, had been summoned by Mr McNamee when the avalanches first started, had arrived and they were followed by other rescue personnel. All those buried by the avalanches were suffering to some extent from hypothermia and with the possibility of undetected injuries, it was decided to fly three of the skiers to Christchurch Hospital. All were released the next day. There is no doubt that if Mr McNamee had not managed to free himself and the others in such a short period, there would have been multiple fatalities.