

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

Thomas Deane O'CONNOR
Constable, New Zealand Police

Date of action: 12 August 2013

Date of award: 1 August 2016

Citation

On the evening of 12 August 2013, shortly after 6pm, a vehicle travelling on the Maungatapu Causeway Bridge towards Mount Maunganui crossed the centreline and into the path of an oncoming van. The van and its two occupants spun into the railing of the bridge, crashing through it and dropping five metres into the Tauranga Harbour. The van then sank rapidly to the harbour floor with both occupants in the vehicle. The driver was trapped in the van and did not survive. The passenger managed to force his way out and was floundering in the water, where there was a relatively strong incoming tidal flow that was taking him away from the bridge further into the harbour. Constable Dean O'Connor was the first Police unit to arrive at the scene. He assessed the situation and stripped down to his underwear, jumped into the harbour, and swam out approximately 150 metres to the passenger who was extremely distressed and panicked. Constable O'Connor grabbed the passenger and rolled him onto his back, supporting him on his chest and communicated with him to calm him down. Constable O'Connor then towed the passenger, rescue fashion, for some 40 minutes in the dark to the opposite shoreline. Both men suffered from hypothermia and were taken to hospital for treatment. Constable O'Connor placed himself at risk to provide assistance to the passenger, who given the conditions would have been unlikely to rescue himself.