

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

Conor Liam O'LEARY

Date of action: 24 April 2009

Date of award: 2 April 2011

Citation

At 3.55 p.m. on 24 April 2009 Mr Conor O'Leary, aged 15 years, was a rear seat passenger in a car driven by his father, off-duty Inspector Michael O'Leary on State Highway One some 17km north of Taupo when the vehicle in front of him, a Toyota van, collided head-on with a black sedan coming the opposite way. The Toyota, which contained six people, flipped into the air, landed on its rear, and rolled four times before going off the road and down a grass embankment and bursting into flames.

As his father went to the aid of the victims, Conor controlled the traffic flow approaching the accident scene, before getting someone else to continue with this task and going to assist his father.

Seeing his father run towards the burning Toyota, Conor decided to help and followed him down the bank and over the wire fence. By the time he arrived, his father had already rescued a child from the wreck and was taking him to a safe place in the nearby paddock. As Conor looked at the burning Toyota, he could see a man moving inside, but he was unable to help due to the intense heat and flames. When his father returned to the Toyota to attempt to rescue a second child, Conor went to assist. Conor, his father and Mr Peter Booth tried to pull the child free of the vehicle. All the time the child was yelling out "Help me, I'm burning". Eventually, Inspector O'Leary was able to cut away the seat belt holding the child inside the vehicle and pull him free.

Once the child was free and his clothes extinguished, Conor looked after him and tended his injuries until help arrived.

Having seen the trapped man inside the burning vehicle, and been beaten back by the heat and flames once already, Conor O'Leary put aside any fear he may have had and went to help his father rescue the second child. In doing so he displayed levels of fortitude and bravery that are beyond those expected of a 15 year old.