

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

Simon James PAYTON **Senior 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. Senior Firefighter Simon Payton initially worked for about two hours up a ladder with a kango hammer to create access holes into the building. Payton then moved to the rear of the building where he joined three other firefighters tunnelling to reach two women trapped beneath a balcony overhang. The firefighters had to break through layers of concrete with hand tools and grinders before tunnelling through office equipment, furniture and debris to reach trapped victims. The tunnel they created between the collapsed floors ranged from 30 to 70 centimetres high and did not allow for protective gear to be worn. One woman was located around five metres inside the tunnel. Payton moved into a void beside the woman to reassure her as another firefighter worked on clearing an access hole. The woman was eventually extricated with crushed toes. The team then located a second woman pinned to her chair by a concrete beam. The legs were cut from her chair allowing her to be rescued. After approximately four hours, Payton's team was relieved by a second tunnelling team. Simon Payton's rescue efforts were carried out in unstable and confined conditions under the constant threat of aftershocks.