

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

Mr Daniel James ROCKHOUSE

Date of action: 19 November 2010

Date of award: 31 December 2014

Citation

On 19 November 2010 a methane explosion occurred at Pike River Coal Mine, killing 29 miners working deep in the mine. The explosion cut the electricity supply to the mine, shutting off lighting and ventilation systems. The mine began to fill with smoke and carbon monoxide.

Daniel Rockhouse was driving a loader approximately 1,700 metres into the main drive of the mine when the explosion occurred and he was thrown to the ground and knocked unconscious. When he regained consciousness Mr Rockhouse put on his self-rescuer (breathing apparatus) and dragged himself to a nearby telephone. He rang Service Control and spoke to the mine manager, who told him to make his way to the fresh air base (FAB) near the mine portal, and contact him again. Mr Rockhouse started making his way to the FAB, following water pipes along the wall. He came across another miner, lying on the ground semi-conscious and disoriented. He attempted to give the miner his self-rescuer, but he could not close his mouth around the unit. Mr Rockhouse dragged him to the FAB, where they found the door open and the FAB full of carbon monoxide. Mr Rockhouse continued to drag the miner towards the mine portal. They were able to breathe some fresh air from compressed air lines along the way, and eventually the miner's condition improved enough to walk. They then supported each other and hobbled out of the mine. The rescue of the other man had taken Mr Rockhouse approximately two hours. By the time he reached the mine exit, Mr Rockhouse was disoriented, and was suffering from the effects of smoke and gas inhalation. Both men were taken to Greymouth Hospital where Mr Rockhouse was treated for smoke and gas inhalation, and carbon monoxide poisoning.

Without Mr Rockhouse's assistance, the other miner would have remained lying in the mine. It is highly unlikely that he would have been able to rescue himself. Mr Rockhouse's determination to rescue him slowed down his own escape from the mine, through poisonous gas and smoke and constantly fearing further explosions.