

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

Steven David SMYLIE
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. In order to enter the office space of the collapsed building, Senior Firefighter Steven Smylie and other 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. Smylie and a team of three other firefighters located two women trapped beneath a balcony overhang at the rear of the building. 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. The firefighters were able to clear an access hole and extract her, 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, Smylie's team was relieved by a second tunnelling team. Steven Smylie's tunnelling efforts were carried out in unstable and confined conditions under the constant threat of aftershocks.