

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

Cory John STEWART 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. Firefighter Cory Stewart carried out search and rescue efforts inside the second floor of the building with a fellow firefighter. The space they searched was too confined for the firefighters to wear helmets or protective clothing. Stewart made use of his building background to make sound judgements on which parts of the collapsed building were safe to move. Stewart had heard two survivors call out near his location. The first survivor located was an injured woman hemmed into a tight space around 50 centimetres high, four metres into the building. The two firefighters shifted rubble out of the way allowing the woman to be rescued. A second injured man was located pinned behind air-conditioning equipment and was freed using a hacksaw. Stewart also tunnelled into different areas of the collapsed structure to try to establish access points. He relayed this information back to the officer in charge who could direct resources accordingly. The rescue efforts of Cory Stewart were carried out in unstable, confined conditions under the constant threat of aftershocks and falling masonry.