

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

### George Allan STEWART Senior Sergeant, New Zealand Police

Date of action: 10 November 2006

Date of award: 3 May 2008

#### *Citation*

Senior Sergeant Allan Stewart was deployed as part of the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste for a six month period between October 2006 and April of 2007, where he was the Sub District Commander of the Becora area as part of the United Nations Police (UNPOL). He commanded 140 staff over one of the biggest sub districts of Dili where the Metanaro Internally Displaced Persons Refugee Camp (IDP) was based that contained 7,000 refugees.

On 10 November 2006, a group led by a UN co-ordinator and six other UN employees were working at the Metanaro IDP Refugee Camp. There was festering anger and unrest amongst the camp residents over perceived delays in the provision of rice and other food stocks from the UN Non Government Organisation (NGO), and after a heated exchange over the allocation of food and water with the camp management, the UN co-ordinator and the other UN employees were taken hostage by a large group of hostile, armed male residents. When the employees tried to leave the camp by vehicle, a large crowd of young men physically threatened them with rocks and other weapons and seized the vehicle keys, telling the UN hostages that they could not leave until they (the refugees) had been given what they wanted.

The hostages attempted to seek help from the nearby local Timor-Leste Defence Force (FFDTL) Military Camp and although the F-FDTL soldiers came to assist them, the soldiers were unable to resolve the dispute or convince the offenders to release the hostages. The hostages then requested UNPOL to be contacted. Senior Sergeant Allan Stewart responded to the request from his headquarters in Dili and accompanied by a fellow Portuguese officer acting as his interpreter, he began a tense negotiation with the offenders and other IDP militants.

He entered the camp alone (with the interpreter) and was fully aware of the hostility the residents had towards UNPOL and that more assistance was some distance away. He was also aware that the offenders were armed with a variety of weapons and a hostile crowd had formed. After calming the tense atmosphere and checking on the status of the hostages, he began the negotiation for the release of the hostages. He sat amongst the agitators for some 20 minutes listening to their concerns whilst at the same time advising them that their actions were unacceptable and that the hostages must be released. Several times over this period, the crowd became agitated and aggressive and twice threatened to break off talks with Sergeant Allan Stewart.

On both occasions, he managed to calm the offenders down and finally arranged the return of the vehicle keys so the hostages could leave while he remained to hear the resident's grievances.

No injuries resulted from this incident, but there was real potential for violence and attacks against the hostages, which was evidenced in the unrest which followed the next day. Throughout this incident, Senior Sergeant Allan Stewart displayed tact and negotiation skills, which together with his bravery and professionalism secured the release of the hostages and prevented them from further injury or even death.