

THE NEW ZEALAND BRAVERY STAR (N.Z.B.S.)

Peter James DEAM

Date of action: 9 April 2000

Date of award: 29 January 2005

Citation

On the morning of 9 April 2000, two brothers aged 13 and 14 years at the time were fishing in the Waihao River around an area known as the "box"; so-called because of its wooden boxed internal waterway channel. While walking alongside the box structure they began sinking into the stones, but managed to get away. The younger boy lost a gumboot during the incident, so the older boy went back to retrieve it and became trapped. The younger boy ran for help and found Mr Deam in the nearby car park. By the time Mr Deam reached the box, the older boy was buried up to his chest in the stones. Mr Deam unsuccessfully attempted to pull him out by using his jacket as a rope. He then instructed the younger boy to hold onto the end of the jacket while he ran to get a rope from his car. He looped the rope under the sinking boy's arms and shoulders, however, the boy continued to sink. Mr Deam then drove to the nearest house, but the occupant had no telephone so both men returned to the boy who was by then up to his neck in the stones. Pulling on the rope only seemed to hasten the sinking, so the second man went to a nearby farm to call for help and upon his return could only see the boy's hands. Mr Deam had continued with his efforts to rescue the boy, including trying to dig him out, keeping his head above the water and his mouth free of shingle. Another man arrived to help and Mr Deam decided to enter the box channel from the opposite end and try to push or pull the boy from underneath. He removed most of his clothing and entered the dark, confined and extremely dangerous channel, pushing against the strong current and moving shingle. He located the correct position by knocking and calling out to the third man and was able to find the boy's leg to try and push him free. At this time a member of the Fire Service arrived to assist wearing a wetsuit. Mr Deam was taken away for medical attention shortly afterwards suffering from the extreme cold. Heavy equipment was later called in to remove the boy, who had by that time drowned.