

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

Austin Bernard HEMMINGS (Posthumous)

Date of action: 25 September 2008

Date of award: 2 April 2011

Citation

At 5.14 p.m. on Thursday 25 September 2008 a woman, Ms Nonu, went outside the rear of the office building in which she worked in Mills Lane, Auckland, to have a coffee break. As she left the building she saw a man she recognised as the ex-boyfriend of one of her work colleagues. This man approached Ms Nonu and backed her into the corner of the building in a threatening and aggressive manner. At this time Austin Hemmings was making his way from his office building to his car park, which was close to where the man and Ms Nonu were standing. Ms Nonu saw Mr Hemmings and called out to him for assistance saying "Excuse me, Sir, can you please help me. Can you call the Police.?" Mr Hemmings went straight up to them to see what was going on and was told by the man to get out of the way as it was none of his business.

Mr Hemmings then positioned himself between them, with his back to Ms Nonu. The man again told Mr Hemmings to get out of the way if he didn't want to get hurt. At this, Mr Hemmings turned to Ms Nonu and told her to run. As she moved towards the building and the lift, Mr Hemmings kept himself between the man and Ms Nonu, stepping backwards in a guarding motion until she reached the car park entrance. The man followed. When he was about five metres from Ms Nonu he suddenly turned back towards Mr Hemmings. Walking quickly towards him, the man raised his jersey, pulled out a large knife and in one quick motion stabbed Mr Hemmings in the chest.

After stabbing Mr Hemmings the man caught up with Ms Nonu as she was entering an elevator. He punched her several times and attempted to stab her before turning and running from the scene.

Meanwhile, Mr Hemmings managed to stagger about 100 metres from the area before collapsing to the pavement and dying.

In going to Ms Nonu's assistance, Mr Hemmings unknowingly walked straight into a dangerous situation. As soon as he confronted the offender, however, it would have become apparent to him that he risked assault and possible serious injury. At this point he could have left the scene, probably unharmed, but he deliberately put himself in danger and continued to protect Ms Nonu until he believed she had reached a place of safety. This outstandingly brave decision ultimately cost him his life.