

THE NEW ZEALAND CROSS (N.Z.C.)

Naeem RASHID (Deceased)

Date of action: 15 March 2019

Date of award: 16 December 2021

Citation

On Friday 15 March 2019, Dr Naeem Rashid and his son arrived to attend afternoon prayer at the Al Noor Mosque on Deans Avenue in Christchurch. They entered the main prayer room just before 1.30pm and remained there while the Imam began speaking to the congregation.

Shortly before 1.40pm, a lone gunman armed with semi-automatic shotguns and assault rifles, with several hundred rounds of ammunition, commenced an attack on the Al Noor Mosque. The gunman entered the Mosque, and made his way to the main prayer room, shooting people in the main entranceway and along the corridor.

The congregation attempted to flee from the gunman as he came down the corridor and into the main prayer room. Most of the congregation fled to the sides of the prayer room. Several people directly in line of the corridor were shot.

Dr Rashid, who had been sitting on the floor of the main prayer room, got up and ran to the side of the room where a large number of the congregation were trying to escape through a small window and door. Someone broke the lower pane of the window and several people were able to escape, but others could not, as the gunman was firing at them. This caused a bottleneck to develop and many people were exposed to the gunman's line of fire.

Dr Rashid was at the back of this group. He saw the gunman begin firing shots into a large group of men on the other side of the room. Dr Rashid launched himself from his position and ran at the gunman. When Dr Rashid was approximately one metre from him, the gunman swung the rifle around and shot Dr Rashid in the shoulder.

Dr Rashid collided with the gunman, grabbing him and knocking him to the ground. The impact dislodged one of the ammunition magazines from the gunman's tactical vest. As the gunman fell, he turned the rifle and again fired at Dr Rashid, who was now lying on the floor. The gunman regained his feet and shot the wounded Dr Rashid, killing him, before continuing to shoot others in the main prayer room.

Because of Dr Rashid's actions, the gunman's attention was temporarily diverted from the people trying to escape on the other side of the room. During that time, at least seven people were able to escape through the broken window.

In a situation of extreme danger, Dr Rashid displayed great courage and bravery in challenging the gunman, with complete disregard for his own safety. In so doing, he selflessly enabled others to escape, at the cost of his own life. Without Dr Rashid's brave actions, the loss of life on 15 March 2019 would have been even greater.