

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

Abdul Aziz WAHABZADAH

Date of action: 15 March 2019

Date of award: 16 December 2021

Citation

On Friday 15 March 2019, Mr Abdul Aziz was attending Friday afternoon prayers at the Linwood Islamic Centre on Linwood Avenue in Christchurch, along with his four sons aged between six and 19 years.

Shortly before 1.50pm, a lone gunman dressed in full camouflage gear and armed with semi-automatic shotguns and assault rifles, with several hundred rounds of ammunition, commenced an attack on the Linwood Mosque.

Mr Aziz became aware of multiple gunshots being fired outside. At the same time a worshipper in the front row of the prayer then said someone had been shot through the window from the driveway and some worshippers attempted to leave the Mosque.

Mr Aziz went to the door of the Mosque to investigate and saw the gunman in his camouflage clothing running back to his car, which had been parked in Linwood Avenue blocking the driveway to the Mosque to prevent any vehicle entering or exiting the property. The gunman discarded a rifle in the driveway and retrieved a loaded semi-automatic rifle from his vehicle.

Mr Aziz left the Mosque without hesitation with the intention of chasing the gunman away. He yelled at the gunman and to defend himself he grabbed an EFTPOS machine from near the entrance of the Mosque. He ran after the gunman and threw the EFTPOS machine in his direction. When Mr Aziz was around 15 metres away, the gunman fired at least three shots at him with the semi-automatic rifle. Mr Aziz ducked down between parked cars and made his way through the vehicles towards the rear of the Mosque. On his way to the rear of the Mosque, Mr Aziz noticed bodies of worshippers on the ground and the discarded lever action rifle, which made him realise the gunman had a new firearm. He checked to see if the lever action rifle was loaded but it was not. Hearing more shots from inside the Mosque, Mr Aziz took the empty discarded rifle and made his way towards the front of the Mosque, yelling to get the gunman's attention.

Mr Aziz shouted provocations at the gunman to get him to refocus his attention on Mr Aziz, with the intention of preventing further loss of life. The gunman saw Mr Aziz carrying the discarded rifle, dropped his gun and ran to his car. Mr Aziz chased after him and, while the gunman was sitting in his car, threw the gunman's discarded rifle at the back left window of the car, smashing it. The gunman drove off, with Mr Aziz continuing to chase him for a time down Linwood Avenue.

The situation in which Mr Aziz found himself was extremely dangerous. In challenging the gunman he displayed great courage and bravery, and complete disregard for his own safety. Mr Aziz's brave actions deterred the gunman from re-entering this Mosque to kill and maim others and ultimately forced the gunman to flee the Mosque.