

THE NEW ZEALAND GALLANTRY DECORATION (N.Z.G.D.)

Allister Donald BAKER (Q1018707) **Lance Corporal, Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment**

Date of action: 3 August 2010

Date of award: 1 October 2011

Citation

Lance Corporal Baker (then in the rank of Private) was the turret gunner in the lead vehicle of a New Zealand Provincial Reconstruction Team patrol when it was ambushed by insurgent forces near the town of Chartok in Bamyān Province, Afghanistan, on 3 August 2010. The insurgents set off an improvised explosive device, which immobilised his vehicle, and then began firing at all four vehicles with small arms fire and shoulder launched rockets, in an engagement that was to continue for some 35 minutes. He immediately sought to return fire but the machine gun, which he had been manning at the time of the ambush, had been blown off its mount and another weapon, a general-purpose machine gun, was also badly damaged. As he leant down inside the turret to recover his personal weapon, he saw that a fire had broken out in the rear of the vehicle and that the patrol commander, Lieutenant O'Donnell, was slumped forward in the front passenger seat. Although suffering a broken ankle, incurred in the initial explosion, he extracted himself through the top of the turret and, while under direct observation and fire from the enemy, climbed down from the vehicle and made his way around to the front passenger door to provide assistance to his patrol commander. On opening the door of the vehicle, Lance Corporal Baker noticed that driver Corporal Ball was not moving, and he shouted for him to get out of the vehicle to assist him. Corporal Ball soon joined Lance Corporal Baker. For the next five minutes, while under continuous fire from the enemy, both soldiers took turns to try and recover their commander's body, by one holding the door while the other reached inside to try and extract Lieutenant O'Donnell, whose body was constrained by part of the damaged vehicle. As they persevered, enemy fire intensified and the vehicle was hit by two rockets, one exploding against the driver's door and the other against the bonnet. The fire inside the vehicle began to spread and the heat became so intense that Lance Corporal Baker had to put out Corporal Ball's hair when it caught alight. He also suffered burns to his shoulders. It was only when ammunition stored inside the vehicle began to explode that both soldiers were forced to withdraw and seek shelter in a dry creek bed some 40 metres away.

In order to reach the creek bed, Lance Corporal Baker, because of the injury to his ankle, had to crawl across open ground in direct observation and fire from the insurgents, with Corporal Ball crawling alongside him. On reaching the relative safety of the creek bed, communication was established with the remainder of the patrol. A decision was made for both soldiers to remain where they were and wait for support to come forward and reach them. This occurred some 20 minutes later, during which time they continued to be targeted by the enemy.