

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

Matthew John BALL (X1015655) **Corporal, Royal New Zealand Corps of Signals**

Date of action: 3 August 2010

Date of award: 1 October 2011

Citation

Corporal Ball (then in the rank of Lance Corporal) was the driver of the lead vehicle of a New Zealand Provincial Reconstruction Team patrol when it was ambushed by insurgent forces near the town of Chartok in Bamyán 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 was stunned by the initial explosion and only regained full consciousness after being shouted at by Lance Corporal Baker, the vehicle's gunner, to assist in helping extract their commander, Lieutenant O'Donnell, who was slumped forward in the front passenger seat. On regaining consciousness, he became aware that a fire had broken out in the rear of the vehicle, which was still being hit by enemy fire, and his right leg was impaled on the vehicle's engine housing. After pulling his leg free, he then extracted himself from the vehicle in full view and under fire from the enemy only 45 metres away, and made his way around to the front passenger door to assist 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 as Corporal Ball leant in to the vehicle, his hair caught alight and had to be put out by Lance Corporal Baker. 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, Corporal Ball crawled alongside Lance Corporal Baker, whose movements were significantly restricted due to a broken ankle, across open ground and in direct observation and fire from the insurgents. Corporal Ball, in addition to the wound to his leg, had also received shrapnel wounds to both legs and both arms, muscular damage to an ankle and burns to his head and face. 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 to reach them. This occurred some 20 minutes later, during which time they continued to be targeted by the enemy.