THE NEW ZEALAND GALLANTRY MEDAL (N.Z.G.M.)

Benjamin Mark PRYOR (R1001757)
Squadron Leader (then Flight Lieutenant), Royal New Zealand Air Force

Date of action: April and May 2012
Date of award: 20 April 2013

Citation

During April and May 2012, Squadron Leader Pryor (then in the rank of Flight Lieutenant) served as a helicopter pilot on secondment to the Royal Air Force in support of the British Forces in Afghanistan.

On 22 April 2012, Squadron Leader Pryor was captain of the lead aircraft (a Chinook medium-lift helicopter) of an eight-ship aviation assault with the Special Forces Support Group. During a complex multi-ship formation landing in very challenging environmental conditions, with almost-zero visibility at times, his aircraft came under intense enemy fire. Squadron Leader Pryor abandoned his initial approach after his aircraft was hit three times in the vicinity of the cockpit, but elected to make a second approach in order to get his troops onto the ground in support of their colleagues. Showing remarkable courage in the face of extreme danger, he landed the aircraft in the same area and effected the safe disembarkation of his troops whilst directing effective suppressive fire from the aircraft's weapon system.

During May 2012 Squadron Leader Pryor took part in a number of casualty evacuation missions. One in particular took place on 23 May 2012, when he was required to conduct the emergency evacuation of a casualty who had suffered a traumatic gunshot wound to the neck during a fire-fight in the Green Zone of the Southern Helmand province. While the casualty was being prepared for evacuation, the Chinook came under heavy enemy fire at the emergency landing site. Despite this, Squadron Leader Pryor kept the aircraft on the ground until the medical team was able to recover the casualty onto the aircraft. After informing the crew of his intentions, he directed the number two crewman to engage with the enemy with one of the aircraft's weapon systems. While still under sustained fire, Squadron Leader Pryor extracted the aircraft from the landing site, and returned the casualty to the safety of medical facilities at Camp Bastion. This was the second time in as many months that Squadron Leader Pryor had displayed calmness, courage, and professionalism in a situation of intense pressure and while under enemy fire.