

## THE NEW ZEALAND BRAVERY MEDAL (N.Z.B.M.)

### Mark Thomas BANCROFT Constable, New Zealand Police

Date of action: 14 February 2023

Date of award: 6 December 2024

#### *Citation*

On 14 February 2023 the severe category three Cyclone Gabrielle hit New Zealand and caused widespread devastation in the Eastern District, with a large-scale civil defence emergency response undertaken. Rivers were flooded, stop banks breached and flooding rose rapidly to envelop buildings and landslides swept away homes, while slips, debris and downed bridges prevented movement along much of the roading network.

Constable Mark Bancroft, along with Constables Patrick Noiseux (now Detective Constable) and Kurt Maney were deployed to Pakowhai Road outside Hastings, navigating floodwaters on foot directing people to evacuate. They came across six people who had jumped from a truck to find another route to safe ground and had been caught in a strong current, as the road had channelled the floodwater like a river. The six people managed to cling to a pole to avoid being swept away, but were stranded in chest-high water.

The constables moved to assist the stranded people, though Constable Bancroft and Constable Maney were then swept away by the current along with the six people, while Constable Noiseux managed to secure himself temporarily. Constable Bancroft was able to get his head above water among some trees and called to Constable Noiseux, who spotted him. Bancroft, Maney and the civilians were clinging to the trees. All three constables and the civilians were then pulled under and swept into a large hedge, before managing to secure themselves as best as possible among the tree branches.

Constable Bancroft called the Police Emergency Communication Centre and relayed their situation. At this time, a large transporter truck with a digger and Landcruiser on the trailer approached. Constable Noiseux stopped the truck and requested use of the digger for a rescue.

Two civilians from the truck piloted the digger boom towards the trees where the three constables and the six civilians were. Constable Noiseux entered the digger bucket and Constables Bancroft and Maney helped people climb into the digger bucket, which moved them one at a time to the truck. The constables were the last to use the digger bucket to join the civilians.

With everyone on board, the truck headed towards the Chesterhope Bridge. The stop bank of the Ngaruroro River breached and a wall of water rushed towards them. The water level rose by two and a half metres over 15 minutes, causing those on the truck to have to climb onto its roof for safety and the roof of the Landcruiser on the transporter trailer. The constables contacted the Police Emergency Communication Centre again for rescue assistance. An Inflatable Rescue Boat (IRB) arrived and took the civilians to safety two at a time, until a puncture reduced capacity to one person at a time. The constables remained on the submerged truck roof until all others had been rescued, before being picked up in the IRB.