

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

Maxwell Allan LEWIS
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 Auckland. Police were called to Muriwai to assist Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) with evacuation of residents and to search for two missing firefighters who had been buried under a massive landslide.

Constable Maxwell Lewis arrived on the scene and joined Constable Joshua Head in the search for the missing firefighters. The night-time conditions were treacherous, with heavy rain, high winds, flooding and multiple slips. Constable Head located one of the firefighters, who was well buried and barely visible. Constable Lewis then worked with FENZ and Urban Search and Rescue to free the firefighter. Constable Head remained with the firefighter, holding his hand and providing reassurance.

They worked solely by FENZ lighting illuminating the area, with the rest of the environment in pitch darkness. The earth continued to shift and slip around the area. At one point, a crack and rumble resounded and one of the Urban Search and Rescue team yelled for people to evacuate as a slip pushed a house down the cliff in their direction. Constables Lewis and Head remained with the firefighter and braced themselves, as the slip passed by six metres away.

After a considerable period, the firefighter was extracted and taken to hospital, dying from his injuries several days later.