

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

Jaime Eliza STEWART

Detective 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.

Detective Constable Jamie Stewart and another Police officer were deployed to rescue people in the Pakowhai area, outside Hastings. They learnt of a fellow Police officer who was trapped on the roof of a shed at her property along with her 4-year-old son and baby. The officers drove to the Pakowhai Road address, before having to continue through rising floodwaters on foot.

When they reached the property, the water was at chest height. They moved through the strong current to find the stranded officer and her children on the shed roof. The other officer lifted down the 4-year-old, passing him to Detective Constable Stewart. Once the mother and her baby were off the roof, the group travelled carefully back through the waters to their Police car.

Detective Constable Stewart and her fellow officer then focused on worsening conditions at Chesterhope Bridge. They spotted an older couple stranded around 200 metres away, trying to cross the floodwater. Detective Constable Stewart used the Police vehicle loudspeaker to instruct the couple to approach the stop bank, but they did not respond. Stewart then entered the water and made her way to the couple, manoeuvring them to a submerged fence line where the other officer met them and reached the woman. They established that the woman was exhausted and not a good swimmer and the man was unable to swim. The floodwater had now reached the top of the stop bank.

Detective Constable Stewart helped keep the man afloat and his head above water to cross to safety. They were often unable to touch the ground and, when the man went underwater, Stewart dived under and lifted the man up. Detective Constable Stewart and the other officer then wrapped their arms around the woman and carried her to safety. The area in which the officers undertook these rescues was later fully flooded, with houses submerged.