

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

### Cameron Joel WHITTAKER Constable, New Zealand Police

Date of action: 27 January 2023

Date of award: 6 December 2024

#### *Citation*

On 27 January 2023 heavy rainfall hit Auckland causing unprecedented flooding and destruction, with thousands of homes damaged by flooding and landslips. 245mm of rain fell within 24 hours and four people lost their lives during this period.

Constable Cameron Whittaker was working a nightshift with two other colleagues at the time. That evening they responded to a family trapped in their Warkworth home with the surrounding ground slipping away. The family comprised three adults, an 18-month child and a 6-week-old baby. Constable Whittaker and his colleagues could not get their vehicle any closer than 150 metres from the house, approaching the remaining distance on foot.

The landscape was precarious, and they traversed through multiple slips and waist-deep mud to reach the house. Constable Whittaker formed a human chain with his colleagues and passed the children to safety for a distance of around 200 metres over an unstable slip. The adults were then able to evacuate, reaching safety just before the slip suddenly shifted and moved further down the hill.

Later that night, Constable Whittaker responded to a person trapped in rising floodwaters in Kaipara Flats. The man had attempted to cross the water to land several times, but the current was too strong, and he kept being pushed back into a tree. Constable Whittaker waded around 100 metres through chest-deep water to locate the man, finding him separated by a 30 metre stretch of treacherous water.

Constable Whittaker sourced a lifejacket, some rope and a boogie board and entered the fast-flowing water, swimming the 30 metres to reach him. The rope became stuck in debris as he swam. By this point, the man had been stuck for two hours and was showing signs of hypothermia, at risk of falling unconscious. Constable Whittaker managed to get the lifejacket onto the man and encouraged him onto the boogie board. At this time a firefighter had swum over to Constable Whittaker with another rope. Working with the firefighter, Constable Whittaker was then able to remove the man to safety.