



# New Zealand Gazette

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## SPECIAL HONOURS LIST 2013

### NEW ZEALAND GALLANTRY AWARDS

The Queen has been pleased to approve the following New Zealand Gallantry Awards.

### NEW ZEALAND GALLANTRY DECORATION (NZGD)

*To receive the New Zealand Gallantry Decoration:*

### NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE

The late **Lance Corporal Leon Kristopher SMITH**  
(T1002840), 1 New Zealand Special Air Service Group

*Note:* Lance Corporal Smith was killed in action in Afghanistan on 28 September 2011.

### Background

Lance Corporal Smith enlisted in the New Zealand Army on 23 August 2005. He completed NZSAS selection in 2006 and became a badged member of the NZSAS in 2007.

Prior to the events described below, he had served on Operation Watea over the period January – October 2010 and started his second tour of duty in early August 2011.

### Citation

On 19 August 2011, Lance Corporal Smith, as a member of the NZSAS Task Force, responded to an insurgent attack on the British Council Offices in the centre of Kabul, Afghanistan. Five insurgents used a Suicide Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device to gain entry into the British Council Offices. Having made entry into the compound they manoeuvred themselves into a strong defensive position where they could rain down small arms fire and rockets and ultimately detonate suicide vests against the rescue force. This incident was complex in nature. Not only was the

enemy determined and well-equipped, five British nationals were also isolated within the compound.

Lance Corporal Smith arrived on the scene with other members of the NZSAS who were supporting the Afghan Crisis Response Unit (CRU). As part of a supporting plan Lance Corporal Smith moved into an over-watch position 30 metres away from the insurgents' stronghold. The NZSAS personnel, including Lance Corporal Smith, began to prepare a plan to rescue the hostages and to assist the CRU to clear the compound of insurgents.

At approximately 11.35am (local time), Corporal Grant, another member of the Task Force, moved across the backyard of the target building to link up with other NZSAS members. Whilst rushing up a stairwell Corporal Grant was mortally wounded by insurgent fire. Initially it was not known where Corporal Grant had fallen or what condition he was in.

With no concern for his personal safety, Lance Corporal Smith pushed into an exposed position to view and confirm Corporal Grant's exact location. Lance Corporal Smith saw Corporal Grant lying inside a small structure slightly above him at the top of some stairs. Without hesitation Lance Corporal Smith requested to move to Corporal Grant's position in order to render first aid, but was told by his Troop Commander to wait for a ballistic shield. During this period Lance Corporal Smith's position was receiving a significant volume of insurgent machine gun and rifle fire.

Once Lance Corporal Smith received the ballistic shield, he took two deep breaths, gave his Troop Commander a positive nod and the 'GO' call was issued. Covering fire

from over-watch positions was directed towards the insurgents as Lance Corporal Smith jumped into the fray. Once again without thought for his personal safety, he leapt over a wall and across exposed and open ground and up the same stairs where Corporal Grant had been shot. All the while, insurgent bullets were impacting around him. Lance Corporal Smith threw himself into the room where Corporal Grant lay and then, with cool and professional resolve, began providing immediate medical treatment. Corporal Grant was not yet confirmed dead and Lance Corporal Smith, an SAS medic, applied first aid to the wound and commenced CPR, which he continued to administer until Corporal Grant was evacuated from the building in the care of the Task Force medic. To evacuate Corporal Grant safely, Lance Corporal Smith had to call for other Task Force members to knock a hole in the brick wall of the building that he and Corporal Grant were in. Lance Corporal Smith then calmly returned to the fight. During this stage he again exposed himself to enemy fire so that he could engage the insurgents effectively. He then took part in blowing a large hole in the outer wall of the compound so that he and other members of the Task Force could minimise the open ground they had to cover to get to the panic room where the British captives were hiding. Lance Corporal Smith then provided covering fire as the captives were rushed to safety through the compound wall.

Throughout the entire incident Lance Corporal Smith displayed extreme calmness under pressure, tremendous personal bravery, and the utmost professionalism whilst under continuous insurgent fire. As a result of Lance Corporal Smith's actions Corporal Grant received the best medical treatment possible, the Task Force was able to recover all five British nationals alive and the insurgent threat was neutralised.

#### **NEW ZEALAND GALLANTRY MEDAL (NZGM)**

*To receive the New Zealand Gallantry Medal:*

#### **NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE**

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

#### **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.

#### **NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE**

**Staff Sergeant** (then Acting Warrant Officer Class Two) **Dean Maurice RENNIE** (D993143), Royal New Zealand Army Logistic Regiment (The Duke of York's Own) (Retired).

#### **Citation**

From October 2010 to April 2011, Staff Sergeant Rennie (then in the acting rank of Warrant Officer Class Two) served in Afghanistan in the Combined Explosive Exploitation Cell at Regional Command-East situated at the Forward Operating Base Salerno in Khost Province. He was the only non-US serviceperson attached to the US Brigade that operated from this base. This was Staff Sergeant Rennie's second tour in Afghanistan.

Staff Sergeant Rennie was heavily involved in dismounted patrols supporting special coalition task forces deployed from the Base in searches of high risk compounds. His particular role was to provide advice on Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) and, where a device had been activated, to determine its type, construction, and means of initiation, from the results of the explosion and the recovered components. He attended many incidents of this type and often came under enemy fire. From the information he gathered on these patrols, which included over 450 individual pieces of evidence, he was able to identify individual builders of IEDs by their different construction methods, and the different patterns of placing these devices. This intelligence led to the detention and prosecution of many insurgents for possession of illegal weapons and IED construction materials, and the lessons learned were able to be shared throughout the theatre.

Staff Sergeant Rennie frequently took part in route clearing patrols. These dangerous missions were specifically designed to locate and deal with IEDs, and on numerous occasions his patrol was struck by these devices or came under direct fire from insurgents. In one of the most active IED environments in the world, and in one of the most dangerous appointments in the theatre, Staff Sergeant Rennie constantly placed himself at risk in order to protect Coalition forces and local civilians, and to disseminate potentially life-saving intelligence about insurgent operations in Afghanistan.

Dated at Wellington this 20th day of April 2013.

MICHAEL WEBSTER, Acting Clerk of the Executive Council.

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