

NZSAR Gold Award

This was awarded for the most significant contribution to search and rescue in the New Zealand Search and Rescue region in 2012.

Alan Deal, Andrew Cronin, Jayden Strickland, and Phil Dwyer, from the Taranaki Rescue Helicopter Trust

**For their outstanding efforts during the Paritutu Rock incident, on 8 August
2012**

The Taranaki Rescue Helicopter Trust's response to the tragic events unfolding at Paritutu Rock on 8 August began with an exceptional turnaround from a routine hospital transfer.

Arriving at the scene within minutes the crew were confronted with massive surging and dumping seas, an unknown number of people missing, and ten people clinging to the side of Paritutu Rock. At the direction of the Police, the crew – pilot Alan Deal, winch operator Phil Dwyer, and crewman Andrew Cronin – conducted a search of the shore and surf line for the missing people.

After 30 minutes of searching, the crew started the rescue of the survivors stranded on the rock face. They were being pounded by the incoming waves and were clearly distressed. Fatigue and hypothermia were now of real concern. One of the survivors had already fallen into the water, but had managed to make his way back onto the rock.

In carrying out the rescue of the ten survivors, the crew had to deal with a number of issues including the weather, hazardous environmental conditions, bird life, the locations of the survivors, and a confusing scene. The crew carried out ten double lift winches bringing the survivors into the helicopter and then handing them over to the St John's team at a nearby staging pad. The winch recovery was coordinated from the ground by crewman Jayden Strickland. It was also noted as one of the most difficult operations that the crew members had ever been involved in.

After completing the rescues from the rock, the crew conducted two further searches for the missing people until the search was called off for the day, due to fading light and deteriorating conditions.

NZSAR Certificates of Achievement

These were awarded for an important contribution to search and rescue in the New Zealand Search and Rescue Region, either during 2012, or over an extended period.

LandSAR Wanaka and the Wanaka Police SAR Squad For their efforts during *Operation Latta*, on 1 January 2012

On 1 January 2012, the Wanaka Police SAR Squad and Wanaka LandSAR teams were alerted to the predicament of 15 year old Dion Latta, who was stuck in a waterfall in the Motatapu Gorge.

Dion was trapped by the ankle while swimming in the gorge with his friends. His foot was caught between boulders in an awkward position on the edge of a three metre waterfall, leaving him upside down and fully submerged, but able to breathe via an air pocket.

When the team arrived on the scene, the initial attempts to reach Dion's trapped leg made it clear that freeing him would be dangerous and difficult. The work at the gorge involved demanding and technical rope rigging to ensure rescuer safety. One team member was in the water holding Dion's hand and communicating with him throughout the entire rescue operation.

To rescue Dion volunteers created a 'human dam', to break the water flow, so that another team member could go under water and free the trapped leg. By this stage Dion had been trapped for three hours, was suffering from hypothermia, and had lost consciousness. The team was now operating in darkness using head torches and handheld lights. Dion was eventually rescued alive, but in a critical condition. He tragically died later in Dunedin Hospital.

Operation Latta ran over several hours in exceptionally difficult emotional and physical circumstances. It required a high-level of personal commitment, teamwork, discipline and skill.

Cape Egmont Sea Rescue, Coastguard South Taranaki, Opunake Boating Club, Opunake Surf Life Saving Club, and the Taranaki Police SAR Squad For the rescue of two fishermen at Opunake, on 22 February 2012

On 22 February 2012 two fishermen were rescued from their stricken boat approximately 700m off the South Taranaki Coast near Opunake. The rescue was carried out in horrendous conditions -during the middle of the night. The crews of the three vessels that went to their aid faced considerable risk conducting the rescue, which has been described as one of the most perilous runs within the Central Police District in recent years.

Cape Egmont Sea Rescue were deployed to assist with the search, in particular providing back up to the South Taranaki CRV during the rescue.

Coastguard South Taranaki provided an On Scene Coordinator to control and monitor the rescue response. The South Taranaki Coastguard Rescue Vessel (CRV) eventually rescued the two fishermen, undoubtedly saving their lives.

Opunake Boating Club provided expert local knowledge to the Incident Management Team, as well as shore-based lighting and communications for the rescue vessels.

Opunake Surf Life Saving Club deployed their IRB, but the crew was forced to turn back due to the severe weather conditions. At one stage they got to within 10 metres of the stricken fishermen.

Taranaki Police SAR coordinated the overall incident response.

This rescue exemplifies the 'One-SAR' approach. All of those involved demonstrated outstanding skills, cooperation, and teamwork. Those on the water demonstrated exceptional courage. Without the assistance of the shore-based support, this rescue would not have been successful.

Bruce Joy, Mark Cannell, Russell Clarke, and Steve Oliver from the Auckland Rescue Helicopter Trust

For their efforts during the *Frolic III* rescue, on 3 March 2012

On 3 March 2012 the Rescue Coordination Centre received a mayday from the yacht *Frolic III*, which was caught in a massive storm. The lone sailor tried to sail the vessel into safer open water, but, despite being under sail and motor, he couldn't make passage. He became very fatigued after days of enduring the storm weather, and his yacht was becoming less controllable due to weather damage. The Auckland Rescue Helicopter Trust was sent to rescue the stricken sailor.

During the planning for the rescue, the crew decided that, due to the conditions, they would add a second pilot to the crew required for this type of operation. The crew that responded were pilot Steve Oliver, co-pilot Bruce Joy, hoist operator Mark Cannell, and advanced paramedic & rescue swimmer Russell Clarke.

It wasn't until they arrived at the yacht's location that the full extent of the sea swells and weather conditions became clear to the crew. Even though the yacht had its drogue deployed, there was significant movement on multiple axes, and some very violent heading changes.

The crew instructed the sailor to deploy his life raft, as that would provide a safer winching option. Within seconds of severing the tethering line, the yacht overtook the life raft, putting it dangerously close to the drogue line. Russell was winched onto the life raft, where he secured the sailor to the rescue harness. They were then both winched back up to the helicopter.

The winching operation was very challenging as they needed to make sure the hoist line did not become shock loaded or fouled. The exceptional teamwork of Bruce, Mark, Steve and Russell ensured that the rescue was carried out safely in the very dangerous conditions.

The yacht washed up just south of Port Waikato Sunset Beach, totally destroyed, a few hours later.

Russell (Sherp) Tucker, from NZ Police

For his services to search and rescue in New Zealand

Sherp began his lifelong passion for SAR, in particular finding better ways to assist missing people, 49 years ago. He has an innate ability to inspire others and a strong compassion for the missing - whom he refers to as 'Johnny and Jenny' - to remind people they are not just statistics.

Highly regarded amongst his SAR colleagues across the country, Sherp has been on the cutting edge of better practice -whether that be at the forefront of stamping out parochialism and bringing people together to work more effectively, or in leading the development of the WandaTrak system.

At the regional level, Sherp was instrumental in setting up Tasman SAR, from which many innovative initiatives were born. He formalised debriefs following SAROPs, and ensured changes were made to reduce the incidents of people going missing when common causes -such as misleading signage - were identified.

He was a pioneer in the use of computer technology in SAR operations, which led to improved data capture, intelligence gathering, search planning and mapping. SAR groups across the country attribute many of the training programmes and search methods Sherp has introduced to helping them save lives.

Training has also played a large part in Sherp's drive for effective search and rescue. He was involved in setting up the training system that was rolled out to thousands of SAR volunteers across the country. He was also known to seek out the odd cold case and use it as an opportunity for a SAREX, using today's techniques and science to resolve yesterday's search.

For about 10 years Sherp was employed as the Assistant Police SAR Coordinator for the Tasman District; the only non-sworn position of its kind in New Zealand. He was renowned for working many more hours than he was paid, due to his dedication to SAR. The role was disestablished in 2012.

Many people have been found, and numerous SAR operations have been successfully run, because of Sherp's enthusiasm and commitment for 'Johnny and Jenny.'

Gerard Prins, from NZ Police

For his services to search and rescue in New Zealand

For more than 20 years Gerry has dedicated his career to ensuring the SAR system in New Zealand is the best it can be. Working with Police staff and SAR volunteers alike, Gerry has focussed on constantly finding ways to improve the effectiveness of the system.

As a Sergeant on the Wellington Police District SAR Squad, Gerry coordinated many land and marine SAROPs, saving numerous lives and rescuing many more people from peril. He developed good working relationships across the Wellington SAR community, helping to increase the region's SAR capability and capacity.

Gerry was promoted through the New Zealand Police ranks to the position of Manager Emergency Management. During his time at Police National Headquarters Gerry has played a pivotal role in SAR until his retirement earlier this year. He saw training as key to an effective SAR sector, and to this end helped establish a number of national courses for SAR personnel. These courses include: National SAR; Managing Land Search Operations; and Marine Search Controllers. Each one provides training for members of the Police, Department of Conservation, Defence Force, LandSAR, Coastguard, and Surf Life Saving.

In 2001 Gerry completed a Winston Churchill Fellowship, analysing the SAR systems in Australia, USA, UK, and Canada. The recommendations from this study resulted in the formation of the NZSAR Council, Secretariat and Consultative Committee – the SAR governance arrangements that we have in place today. He has provided SAR advice to the Police Executive, represented Police on the NZSAR Council, and contributed to strategic decisions such as the review of the SAR classification system and the policy on Mass Rescue Operations. Gerry's vision for SAR in New Zealand is to ensure the pursuit of best practice. His contributions have enabled a stronger, more effective New Zealand SAR sector.