



1955 Mountbatten Medal – Neville Maier and Frederick Potgieter

On Sunday, 16th January, 1955, Mr N. G. Maier and Mr F. Potgieter were on patrol as Life Guards at the Eastern Beach, East London, South Africa. This beach, which is approximately half a mile long, is one of the most dangerous in the Cape Province. Submerged rocks on either side have caused gullies to be formed which in certain weather conditions give rise to dangerous cross currents. In the centre of the bathing area there is a large sandbank some 30 yards from the water's edge and on both sides there is deep water

On the day in question there were approximately 400 people bathing in the sea on the sandbank and suddenly a batch of these were washed off the bank into a gully on the eastern side and were being pulled out to sea by a strong current. Mr Maire and Mr Potgieter immediately went to the aid of these bathers and together rescued twelve of them who would otherwise undoubtedly have been drowned. They first of all rescued one bather and having landed her on the beach Mr Potgieter went back into the sea with a surf-ski and with great difficulty, due to the heavy surf, collected a further eight bathers who by holding on to the handles provided were brought safely ashore. At the same time Mr Maier swam out to a twelve-year-old girl and her mother who were in great difficulty and by allowing the girl to hold him round the neck and using the safely to the beach. Mr Maier then swam out some 50 yards to a man who was in difficulty. He was able to hold him up, but was unable to make any headway towards the shore against the strong current until Mr Potgieter, who by then had landed his party, came to his assistance and together they were able to bring the man ashore. After a further short interval another bather was swept off the sandbank and was rescued by Mr Maier using a surf-ski and Mr Potgieter swimming freely.

All the bathers who were rescued were unable to swim and the beach was subsequently closed for bathing for two hours owing to the dangerous conditions.

As these gallant rescues were made by Mr Potgieter and Mr Maier together, the President has awarded a medal to each.