



1998 MOUNTBATTEN MEDAL – Michael Wilson

At 11.15am on 31st December 1998, whilst holidaying in Mangawhai, Northland, New Zealand, Mr Michael Wilson, of Auckland, a qualified lifeguard, was invited to join Mr Tai Flavell in a 5.5 metres Searider rigid hull inflatable inshore rescue craft that was at anchor, on stand-by, near the Heads at Mangawhai. They were observing recreational raft crossing the bar at the harbour entrance. There was at the time a treacherous outgoing tide creating 3 metre swells at the harbour bar.

At this time a 6.5 metre runabout boat, containing 2 men and an 8-year-old boy, was attempting to cross the Bar and recognising the potential for a life threatening incident the rescue boat crew weighed anchor and proceeded to the area. The men were father and son and the boy was the grandson of the older man. At the same time a Surf Lifesaving Rescue Boat was launched by Wane Jones and Daniel Russek as these lifeguards had also observed the potential danger to the runabout.

The runabout was then upturned in the heavy surf and the two men were thrown clear of the boat. The young boy, Samuel Bakalich, was however, trapped inside the hull. Although Samuel was able to breathe in the trapped air pocket, he was unable to escape from under the hull because of his lifejacket.

The rescue craft arrived at the scene within about one minute of the runabout overturning and the lifeguards were told by the older man, who was clinging to the hull, that his grandson was trapped under the boat. The other man had by this time drifted some 20 metres from the upturned boat.

Despite the obvious threat of danger from the large waves and the presence of hazards such as fishing gear, boat accessories, and other debris, Mike Wilson dived under the upturned boat and located the boy in the cabin. After 3 desperate attempts the boy was finally freed by Mr Wilson who was throughout the rescue negotiating the breaking waves.

Whilst the rescue was taking place, Mr Flavell stood by in the rescue craft avoiding the big surf. On sighting Mr Wilson with the boy, he pulled alongside and picked up the pair before being pounded by the next set of large waves.

In the meantime, the other lifeguard rescue craft, manned by Messer's Jones and Russek, had picked up the boy's father and grandfather. These two casualties were transferred to the 'Searider' beyond the breakerline and all three were transferred to the shore. Volunteer lifeguards greeted all 3 for minor injuries and shock until the arrival of an ambulance. The three casualties were transferred to Whangarei Hospital, some 80 kilometres away for observation and treatment. They were discharged later that day.

For the courageous and heroic rescue, Mr Michael Wilson, a volunteer member of the Royal Life Saving Society New Zealand, through Surf Lifesaving New Zealand is awarded the 1998 Mountbatten Medal.