



Citation for Mountbatten Medal for Kathaluwa Wellalage Yasarathna of Sri Lanka

At 9 a.m. on 26 December 2004, Mr Kathaluwa Wellalage Yasarathna, aged 44, who is the Chief Examiner of the Life Saving Association of Sri Lanka, reported for duty as a lifeguard at Polhena Beach and then commenced a swimming training class. He noticed that the sea was unusually rough and the seawater discoloured as it mixed with the in flowing river water.

At about 9.15 a.m. the water became extremely rough and he noticed that the water was beginning to recede rapidly to a point some 200 metres from the shoreline. At this time there were about 100 adults and children in the water. As the water receded some young children were being swept away from the shore and their parents began calling for help. Mr Yasarathna then noticed a very large volume of water surging up on the dried sea bed. He stated that " In a spur of the moment a very big volume of water rose up from the sea bed, just like spilling milk rushing from a boiling milk pot." As the large volume of water surged towards the shore he describes it as " making a thunderous sound".

He was then caught up in the surging water and carried into a pile of wooden logs. As he struggled to surface from this floodwater, he was caught again by a second tidal wave of some 30 feet in height and was carried for about half a mile along the beach. During this time he heard many people crying out for help but he was unable to help them. As the power of the floodwaters decreased he was able to catch hold of the trunk of a coconut tree. He had received a number of painful injuries as a result of being swept into trees by the two tidal surges. Despite these injuries, as the waters began to recede, he began rescuing people from the floodwater. He brought a total of 15 people to safety by taking them onto the top floor of a nearby flat-roofed building. The power of the floodwater was such that it had torn the clothes from Mr Yasarathna and many of the people he had rescued. After the floodwater subsided and his own wounds attended to, he joined the local Police in searching for more victims of the disaster.

Mr Yasarathna is credited with training more than 8000 persons in the past few years to swim and learn lifesaving techniques. It is estimated that over 500 lives were saved by trained lifesavers on that fateful day in Sri Lanka. It is also worth noting that during horrendous flooding in the Matara District of Sri Lanka, Mr Yasarathna personally rescued 28 persons caught up in the floods.

For his outstanding courage and perseverance on the day of the tsunami Mr K.W. Yasarathna is awarded the Mountbatten Medal.