



2019 Mountbatten Medal – Clifford Coombe

At around 2.45pm on Sunday 01st September 2019, RLSS Award holder Clifford Coombe was walking along the beach at Herold's Bay, Southern Cape in South Africa. Cliff and his wife were taking in some gentle exercise while he was recovering from a hernia operation 10 days before.

When Cliff arrived at the beach, he noted a group of children, some of whom were swimming in the shallow water. He noticed there were three teenage boys who were slightly separated from the group and further out in the sea, and commented to his wife that it would only take a couple of big waves to make them lose their footing and push them into a nearby rip tide. Exactly this happened a few moments later, and Cliff could tell they were in trouble. He ran to collect one of the new pink NSRI Torpedo buoys that had been placed along the shore, and after removing his shoes and handing his phone to his wife and asking her to call for help, he entered the water and began to swim out to the boys. After a few moments, the rip took over and carried him to the first two boys (by this time the group had separated, and the third boy was on his own further out). The first two boys were gripping on to the torpedo buoy and the third boy was now screaming for help. At this point, another man (Sydney Erasmus) approached Cliff and the first two boys and offered to get them back to shore (Sydney had on a wetsuit and fins and was using a bodyboard) but Cliff said he would stay with the boys and shouted to Sydney to go and save the third boy. Sydney did just that, having to pull him up from under the water, and then made his way back to Cliff and the other boys. By this point Cliff was feeling the effects of his previous surgery. Cliff and Sydney made the decision together to go with the rip towards the nearby rocks and try to get out of the water at the edge of the rocks. One of the boys was very panicky and Cliff needed to and reassure him constantly, as the rip tide pulled the group under the water several more times. At this point, the group had been joined by a surfer and another torpedo buoy swimmer, so Sydney was able to take the stronger of the boys to the beach, while Cliff stayed with the smaller two and the bodyboard. Soon after, Cliff could touch the seabed and was able to walk the remaining two boys out of the water, to be met by the NSRI rescuers who had arrived after been called by Cliffs wife. All the boys were safe and well, if not a little shaken after the experience.

If it wasn't for Cliffs quick actions, and the teamwork of Cliff and Sydney, the incident that day may have had a very different outcome.