

MERITORIOUS SERVICE AWARD

Presented to

Station 36 – Oyster Bay

It gives me great pleasure to present to NSRI Station 36 Oyster Bay, this **MERITORIOUS SERVICE AWARD**, in recognition of their exceptional rescue operation at Grootkrans on Thursday, 3 April 2025.

When reports came in of a 74-year-old woman who had suffered a serious fall while hiking in a remote gorge near the Elands River Mouth, it became clear this was no ordinary call-out. As a team, you were faced with a rescue that combined extreme terrain, fading light, minimal cell phone signal and a treacherous river mouth.

The team responded with immediate coordination across multiple NSRI stations, Relay Ambulance Services, EC Government Health EMS and SANParks rangers. The initial team hiked into the gorge to stabilise the injured hiker, who was later confirmed to have suffered a fractured vertebra. It was soon evident that waiting until morning to evacuate the casualty from the gorge was not an option.

With helicopter rescue unavailable, and despite 4-metre breaking swells, light fog, and a hazardous river mouth, the team united to gather vital real-time information before attempting a marine rescue. Sea conditions were evaluated from the cliff edge. Video footage of the area was reviewed and maps checked before the final decision to proceed with the rescue was made.

NSRI Oyster Bay's 5.5m RIB, Caltex Challenger II was launched from Skuitbaai, Eersterivier, with Lodewyk van Rensburg, Johan Strydom and Caro Oosthuizen on board. The vessel was navigated through a narrow 10–15-metre rock channel, over sandbanks and submerged rocks, utilising the incoming tide and breaking waves to its full advantage. The patient

was safely loaded into the boat, attended by an EMS paramedic, and began the exit attempt.

On the first attempt, the motors cut out on a sandbank, and the vessel nearly capsized. After managing to re-enter the river mouth, the crew waited for another opportunity. This time, in pitch darkness and fog, relying only on handheld spotlights to read the swell, the exit was successful. The vessel powered out through the river mouth, barely clearing the sandbank and breaking surf, taking on a 4-metre wave that swamped the boat.

With no time to spare, the crew, with the patient onboard, had a 12-nautical-mile return journey in 30-knot headwinds and 4 to 6-metre seas. Thanks to the crew on shore, additional lighting was set up at Skuitbaai, ensuring the vessel was safely brought in through the tricky L-shaped channel.

Through commitment, skill, teamwork, and courage, you all played a vital role in saving a woman's life.

We salute you.

R36 Crew: Lodewyk van Rensburg (Cox'n)
Caro Oosthuizen (Trainee Class 3 Cox'n)
Johan Strydom Jnr (Crew)

Shore Crew: Alton Crouse (Crew)
Charles Hutchins (Crew)
Chevandre Prince (Crew)
Christopher Hutchins (Crew)
Cobus van Aswegan (Crew)
Jaen Smit (Crew)
Zibonele Mdlestshe (Crew)
Annie Fourie (Crew-Trainee)



Jonathan Velloza
Chairman: Board of Directors



15 August 2025

Date