

Silver Cross – Example Citation

The following account took place on Saturday 16 October in Cumbria. It is written by the man whose life was undoubtedly saved by the quick thinking and rapid response of the nominee, Steve Jones, a Scout Network member and Cub Scout Leader.

On the day of the incident we were part-way through a white water kayaking trip and had headed to a dam release river. The river was releasing on three pipes, providing sufficient white water for a continuous trip down to the bridge above the falls. We paddled down the river to an eddy above the final gorge and stopped to inspect it. Steve ran the first section of the gorge while John and I kept an eye on him from the bank. He then pulled in to an eddy to protect it for us to run it. I set off first and Steve was close behind. As I left the eddy my attention was focused on the gorge; the lead up to it was fairly easy water, or so I thought! As soon as I left the eddy, the current started pushing me off course and up against the trees, which were partially underwater. I did not react quickly enough and became pinned against a tree. The pressure of the water was so great that I was trapped, unable to move at all. Steve spotted what had happened and waded out through the current in chest-high water to try and help. Although I tried to offer what little assistance I could, he was unable to move my kayak. The water was surging and my head was either completely underwater or just far enough above the surface to allow me to breathe a mixture of water and air. Steve tried so hard to move the kayak and even managed to attach a line, but before he could pull on it, the water started surging even more and he had to come back to help me keep my head above water. He shouted to John for help and somehow his voice was heard above the deafening noise of the water.

Throughout the whole ordeal, Steve was shouting reassurance, telling me that I mustn't give up and that they would get me out. John ran up the bank and saw what was happening, returning quickly to his kayak and paddling it through the current to help us. I was now feeling quite weak from oxygen deprivation and the crushing pressure of the kayak on my body. Whilst I didn't ever totally give up, I was becoming convinced that the pressure was just too great to overcome and that I wasn't going to get out. When John reached us, he took over the task of keeping my head above water. The two of them tried to shift the kayak, but to no avail. Steve then set up a pulley system from a nearby tree and was able to move the kayak very slightly. I didn't think it was going to be enough, but to my amazement I was pulled from my buoyancy jacket and through the gap they had created between the kayak and the tree. Steve had to maintain the pull on the line throughout, which was no mean feat considering it took three of us to shift the kayak afterwards. They then managed to get me across the current to the safety of the bank. After an emotional period of recovery, we set up a line with a 3:1 mechanical advantage. Despite this, it still took all three of us to pull the kayak out.

I am extremely grateful that John and Steve were well equipped with slings, ropes, karabiners and so on, but also that they were calm enough to deal with the emergency whilst putting their own lives at considerable risk.