

Patricia Dickson, a fourteen-year-old Aboriginal from Cootamundra Girls Training Home, has received the Royal Humane Society's highest awards for her daring rescue of a drowning woman.

At a Sydney ceremony late last September the State Governor, Sir Roden Cutler, presented Pat with a Bronze Medal and Certificate of Merit. Watching proudly from the crowd were Pat's friend from Cootamundra Home, Loretta Ebsworth, 15, and her sister Evelyn Dickson, 18, who works in Wagga, and the woman whose life Pat saved, Miss Morag Owens, deputy-matron at Cootamundra Home.

The Royal Humane Society, now in its 90th year, presents its awards to people who show bravery and courage in the saving of human life. Police and other people tell the Society when they hear about exceptional deeds of courage. This year there were fewer reports and the standard was much higher than in previous years.

Before Sir Roden presented awards to the thirty-two people, whose ages ranged from 14 to 72, N.S.W. Premier Askin congratulated them and said that their deeds of bravery stirred him. Mr R. J. Heffron, former premier of N.S.W., referred to Sir Roden's gallantry and valour in war (Sir Roden won the Victoria Cross) and said that he must feel at home at such a presentation.

Sir Roden, a patron of the Society, said that he did not feel at home at such presentations. He said: "I've never seen anyone who received an award who didn't deserve it—but I've seen many who deserved an award but who were never recognized".

Sir Roden said that he and Patricia were practically old friends; a few weeks before they had been introduced at the Cootamundra Wattle Festival by Mayor Conky. Sir Roden told the Sydney gathering that Patricia must be an excellent swimmer to have rescued Matron Owens from the swiftly-flowing Murrumbidgee River.

### **Taught herself**

Pat was a little modest when she said that she could swim quite well. She taught herself, and the circumstances of the rescue proved that she is a strong swimmer, and a good teacher.

Last April, Pat and other girls from Cootamundra Home, with Deputy-Matron Owens, were picnicking at Jugiong, on the Murrumbidgee River. Pat and two of her friends went for a swim but the swiftly-flowing river caught them. Pat helped her friends swim downstream to a fallen tree on the opposite bank, where they called for help.

# **Girl gets Highest Award for Bravery**

Other girls who heard them thought they were joking, but Miss Owens dived in to save them and was herself dragged past by the strong current.

Pat swam from the safety of the fallen tree, grabbed Miss Owens, and pulled her on to the far bank. Miss Owens, who had been in considerable difficulty, fainted, and fell back into the river. Pat dived back into the current, caught hold of Miss Owen's hair, and again pulled her back to shore.

Pat then helped Miss Owens walk farther downstream till they reached shallower water and could walk across to the other bank.

Mr Gardiner, handyman at the Home, ran half a mile to a petrol station, got a rope and returned with it so that Pat could rescue the other two girls still struggling to hold on to the tree on the opposite bank.

She tied the rope around her waist, swam to the girls, and helped them back across the river.

### **Owes her life**

Miss Owens said that Pat was a very brave girl, and that she definitely owed her life to Pat's quick thinking in grabbing her hair when she fainted. She was very pleased that Pat's bravery had been recognized.

The swimming spot at Jugiong was normally safe, but a sudden surge of very cold water released from Burrinjuck Dam caused the trouble, Miss Owens said.

Miss Owens came to Australia about 18 months ago from Glasgow, Scotland; she has been deputy-matron at Cootamundra Home for the past nine months.

Patricia Dickson has been at Cootamundra Home for seven years, and last year was in Second Form at Cootamundra High School.

And what does she want to do when she leaves school? You guessed it: she wants to stay in the life-saving business, by becoming a nurse.