



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS CENTER

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READY ...OR NOT?

Swept away at the beach

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Being pulled out to sea by a rip current is no one's idea of a fun day at the beach.

But it could happen, and indeed happens often.

The United States Lifesaving Association estimates the annual number of deaths due to rip currents on American beaches exceeds 100, and rip currents account for more than 80 percent of rescues performed by surf beach lifeguards.

Nobody tells a story with more impact than survivors who lived to tell of their experience with rip currents. On their website, the National Weather Service features "Survivor's Stories" from those who encountered the treacherous waters, in their own words.

Kathryn of North Carolina said: *"Then a wave broke over my head, and I felt the panic rising. I know that panic is one's worst enemy in the water, so I floated and treaded water for a few minutes to catch my breath and relax. I could see my family on the shore trying to spot me in the water, but the swells were too big for them to see me waving. Once when I looked out to sea to keep an eye on the swells so I wouldn't be caught unawares again, I realized that just a little further out, there were surfers. Suddenly the light bulb went off in my head. Instead of trying to make it back to shore on my own, I turned and swam further out to where they were. I told them what had happened and asked if one of them would allow me to accompany him into shore using his board as a boogie board for both of us. Of course, one of them agreed"*

For Ben, his encounter with a rip current occurred on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. His story began, *"It was a gorgeous day in the Outer Banks when a friend and I who were vacationing together decided to head out to the beach for some fun."*

A short time later, they were pulled out to sea in a rip current. He continued: *"That's when sheer panic set in. We were being dragged out to sea. Meanwhile, giant waves were crashing over our heads, trying to pull us under. My friend was on my body board and I was treading water. We desperately tried swimming towards the shore but it was no use ... the current was just too strong. We quickly became exhausted and my friend was having a panic attack. I still had my wits somewhat about me ... A lifeguard (who was sitting about one and a half football fields away, mind you) came swimming up to us. He had a floatation device and had both my friend and I grab opposing sides. I don't remember being pulled back to shore. My next memory is me sitting on my beach towel and my friend shaking like a leaf and coughing up water as the lifeguard and a passerby helped her calm down. I had never been more grateful to be on solid ground."*

These are the stories of survivors, but many others caught in rip currents were not so fortunate. To protect yourself and your Family, think before you enter the water.

“Great weather for the beach does not always mean it is safe to swim. Check the local beach forecast, including water conditions before you go, and once there, talk to the lifeguard about any unsafe conditions,” said Wayne Presnell, meteorologist, NWS.

The NWS also advises that bathers only swim at beaches staffed with lifeguards. The chances of drowning at a beach with lifeguards are 1 in 18 million, according to the USLA.

National Rip Current Preparedness Week is June 7-13. For more information the observance, visit <http://ripcurrents.noaa.gov/week.shtml>.