

LIFE-BOAT WAR BULLETIN No. 19

MARCH, 1945.

FIVE YEARS AND SIX MONTHS OF WAR

Since the war began our life-boats have rescued 6,272 lives. That is more lives rescued in five years and six months of war than in the last seventeen years of peace.

THE LIFE-BOATS IN 1944

In 1944 life-boats rescued 714 lives and helped to save 50 boats, ships and aeroplanes from destruction. There were 455 launches of life-boats to the rescue and 178, or well over a third, were to aeroplanes.

GOLD MEDAL FOR WELSH COXSWAIN

Coxswain William Gammon, of the Mumbles, Glamorganshire, who won the bronze medal in 1941 for rescuing the crew of a ship wrecked among the coast defences, has now won the gold medal for rescuing the crew of 42 of a Canadian frigate smothered in heavy seas on Port Talbot Bar. Twelve times, in the darkness and in heavy squalls of hail, the coxswain circled round through the surf and brought the life-boat alongside the frigate for her men to jump. The rescued Canadians spoke afterwards of the work of their rescuers as "magnificent" and "almost miraculous". Two of the life-boat men were over 70, two were in their sixties, and the average age of the crew was fifty-five.

SILVER MEDAL FOR PADSTOW

The Institution has awarded its silver medal to W. Orchard, its second motor mechanic at Padstow, for taking command of the life-boat when she travelled 28 miles in a rough sea and blinding squalls of rain, and rescued seven lives from a Norwegian steamer which was right inside the breakers close under the high cliffs.

MEDALS FOR DEVON COXSWAINS

Coxswain Edwin Distin, of Salcombe, who won the silver medal in the third month of the war, has now been awarded the bronze medal for rescuing the crew of an Admiralty salvage craft, in very heavy seas. His motor mechanic was ill, and his second motor mechanic had died that day, but he found a retired mechanic to run the engines, and the honorary secretary of the station, Mr. H. W. Richards, filled the remaining place in the crew.

The Institution has also awarded its bronze medal to Coxswain Sydney Cann, of Appledore, and its thanks on vellum to Coxswain George Lamey, of Clovelly, for the rescue (as described in the last bulletin) of the crews of two concrete caissons on their way to Normandy to form part of the breakwater of the invasion port.

SCOTTISH COXSWAIN MADE AN M.B.E.

Coxswain John MacLeod, of Thurso, Caithness-shire, who a year ago won the Institution's bronze medal for rescuing two exhausted Norwegians from a ship's raft, when it was within 200 yards of the rocks in a heavy sea, has now been made an M.B.E. for the same rescue.

LIFE-BOAT CAPSIZED

In November, 1944, the self-righting life-boat at Hastings was struck by a very heavy sea and capsized, throwing three of her crew overboard. She

came right way up at once, and the other six men hauled the three on board again. As she capsized her engine had automatically cut off, so that she should not travel on leaving the men in the water. The mechanic started it again at once, and the life-boat returned to Hastings. One of the three men had broken his nose. That was the only injury or damage, and the life-boat had done exactly what a self-righting life-boat is designed to do should she be capsized. The Institution gave the crew and launchers £55 in rewards.

36 YEARS A COXSWAIN

Coxswain George Parkhill, of Kirkcudbright, has retired on account of ill-health. The Institution has awarded him a certificate of service and, at his own choice, a gratuity in lieu of a pension. He is 59, and was appointed coxswain in 1908 at the early age of 23, after serving for a year and a half as bowman. He has been a coxswain for 36 years, a longer time than any other coxswain now in the Institution's fleet. He is also one of only three coxswains appointed before the last war who were still serving when this war began. The other two are Coxswain Robert Cross, of the Humber, appointed in 1912, who retired last year, and Coxswain Henry Blogg, of Cromer, appointed in 1909.

MAJOR H. E. BURTON, G.C., O.B.E.

Major H. E. Burton, of the Royal Engineers, who died in December, 1944, in his eightieth year, will always be remembered as one of the outstanding figures in the Life-boat Service in the difficult days when motor-power was replacing oars and sails. He was a skilled engineer and yachtsman and became Honorary Superintendent of the first experimental motor life-boat, placed at Tynemouth in 1905. The local fishermen would have nothing to do with this new means of propulsion, and he manned the boat with his own sappers. Their success was such that eight months later a local crew was found, provided that he remained as Honorary Superintendent. He did remain -- for over twenty years, and when he retired in 1927 he had won the Institution's gold and silver medals for gallantry, the Gold Cross of Honour of the United States, and the Medal of the Order of the British Empire for gallantry, for which the George Cross was substituted in 1941.

GIFTS FOR THE "GUIDE OF DUNKIRK"

The Durban Rangers and Guides sent to the crew of the Cadgwith life-boat "Guide of Dunkirk" a big Christmas parcel with puddings, chocolate, sweets, preserves, dried fruits, soap, shaving brushes, razor blades, tooth-brushes, tooth-paste, make-and-mend comforts, socks, handkerchiefs, writing pads, and envelopes. The Durban Guides and Brownies again sent them £5 for tobacco.

A POLISH SOLDIER'S TEETH

A Polish soldier has sent the Institution a pound to show his gratitude to a Scottish dentist who had "cured his teeth," and would accept no payment.

54 YEARS

A subscriber writes: "Herewith £5 my annual subscription which I believe I have paid punctually every 1st. September for 54 years, and believe my father paid for some years before that. I shall not last much longer."