

# LIFE-BOAT WAR BULLETIN No. 20.

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## THE RECORD OF THE WAR

In the five years, eight months and six days of war, from September 3rd., 1939, to May 8th., 1945, the life-boats of the Institution were launched to the help of ships and aeroplanes in distress 3760 times and rescued from them 6376 lives. That is 21 lives each week. In less than six years of war life-boats rescued more lives than in the last eighteen years of peace. Never before in the same time have they rescued so many. They also saved or helped to save 374 boats and vessels.

## 211 MEDALS

The Institution awarded 204 gold, silver and bronze medals for gallantry, and in rewards and other payments to its crews and launchers it spent £400,000. Life-boatmen also won four British Empire Medals, two Distinguished Service Medals and one George Medal.

## THE COST

Twelve life-boatmen lost their lives at sea, or died on their return, and seven life-boats were lost in various ways. One was left on the beaches of Dunkirk. One was destroyed at its station by an air-raid. Three were destroyed by an air-raid on a building yard. Two were captured in the Channel Islands. They are still there.

## THE LAST WAR SERVICE

The war in Europe ended at one minute after midnight of May 8th., and the last launch of a life-boat was one minute before the end. An under-water explosion, either torpedo or mine, had blown up a Norwegian minesweeper, one of four, fifteen miles east by south of Berry Head on the coast of Devon, and the Salcombe life-boat was launched to her help at midnight. The Torbay life-boat had already put out three-quarters of an hour earlier. Both life-boats searched for the remains of the minesweeper and her crew for several hours, but all that they found was two cushions.

## A TORBAY SILVER MEDAL

In December, 1944, the life-boat at Torbay put out one night in torrential rain with a gale blowing to the help of a tug and a small vessel which she had in tow. The life-boat crew was two men short. So dark was the night that they could see nothing, and the water was so shallow that the life-boat was continually bumping on the bottom. Yet she rescued all nineteen men from the two vessels. Coxswain F. C. Sanders was awarded the silver medal for gallantry.

## ALONE IN A LIFE-BOAT

The Walmer life-boat was being launched down her skids in December, 1944, when a hook slipped and she ran suddenly into a rough sea with only the motor mechanic, C. P. Cavell, on board. When he felt her afloat he came on deck to find himself alone. He started an engine at once, and taking the wheel brought the life-boat into deep water. There he started the second engine and cruised about until the men on shore signalled that they were ready for him to beach the boat. Then he ran her ashore in a gap of fifty yards, the only place where she could be safely beached among the coast defences. He has been awarded the thanks on vellum.

### **A NAVAL TRAWLER SAVED**

A vellum has also been awarded to Second-coxswain F. Upton, of Walmer, who, at great risk, went on board a naval trawler from the life-boat when the trawler was labouring in heavy seas close to the Goodwins. She fell over so far that the life-boat coxswain thought all her crew would be washed out of her, and at the same time, Second-coxswain Upton, on her bridge, saw a huge sea about to strike her. He gave "full speed ahead" just in time. His promptitude had saved her, and he piloted her into the Downs.

### **AMERICAN SHIP TORPEDOED**

Early in 1945 the German U-boats renewed their attacks on shipping close to the British coasts and one of the first ships to suffer was an American steamer which was torpedoed off South Wales. She was taken in tow, but broke away in a gale and was drifting helplessly off the Scillies with fifteen men on board. They were rescued by the St. Mary's life-boat which had to make a hazardous journey of nine miles among the islands in that gale on a very dark night with no lights or marks to guide her. Coxswain Matthew Lethbridge and his brother Second-coxswain James Lethbridge were awarded vellums.

### **TO ANOTHER NAVAL TRAWLER**

Coxswain Duncan Newlands, of Campbeltown, Argyllshire, has also won the vellum for rescuing the crew of a naval trawler which had gone on the rocks on the Isle of Arran. He rescued them in a gale on a very cold night, with snow falling and a very heavy sea.

### **A WIRELESS APPEAL**

On March 4th., the 121st. birthday of the Life-boat Service, Lord Winster, a member of the Committee of Management, made an appeal for it on the air. This appeal was "The Week's Good Cause" in the home service of the B.B.C. The response was £2,878. This was the fourth appeal which the B.B.C. had given the Institution since the beginning of the war and the total response to the four appeals is £17,052.

### **LIFE-BOAT DAYS IN 1944**

In the fifth year of the war life-boat flag days raised £131,829. That is £657 more than in 1943 and nearly three times as much as in 1939, the last year of peace. In each of the five years of war the figure has been a record. The number of branches which held days was 845, twelve less than in 1943, but more people gave than ever before, 10,911,000.

### **FROM GOLF CLUBS**

In 1944 forty golf clubs held competitions to help the Life-boat Service and they contributed £223.

### **VE DAY GIFTS**

A number of gifts have been sent in gratitude for victory in Europe. One was for £100 and another for £200.