

LIFE-BOAT BULLETIN No. 21.

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A NEW LIFE-BOAT FLEET

Early in the war the building of motor life-boats almost ceased, because of the demands on the shipyards made by the fighting services. During the five years and eight months of war, 17 new life-boats were sent to the coast. In normal years it would have been between 60 and 70. At the same time the Institution lost five boats destroyed by the enemy, two captured, and three requisitioned by the government. Two of the three requisitioned boats, and one of the two captured, will return to the fleet. As soon as the yards are free to take its work again the Institution will build 29 boats as a first step towards making up for the losses and delays of war.

ALL TWIN SCREW BOATS

Important changes are to be made in the fleet. All one engine, single screw boats will be replaced by two-engine twin screw boats; and all petrol engines, with their risk of fire, will be replaced by oil engines. To do this another fifty life-boats will be built later on.

LOUD HAILERS & WIRELESS

Other plans for the immediate future are improved caterpillar tractors and carriages for launching, loud-hailers in a hundred life-boats of the larger types, and watertight wireless sets, so that all life-boats, and not only those, as at present, with cabins, will be able both to send and to receive wireless messages.

£1,000,000 TO BE SPENT

When these changes have been made the life-boat fleet will be more powerful, safer and better equipped than ever before. The cost will be about £1,000,000.

THE CAPTURED BOATS

The last that the Institution heard of its life-boats in Jersey and Guernsey before the Germans captured the Channel Islands was on June 29th. 1940. They had been ordered to sail for Cowes, but that afternoon Jersey telephoned that the governor would like to keep the life-boat. The Institution agreed. It heard nothing more for three years. Then in June 1943 a cryptic message came from Jersey, on a printed form of the German Red Cross, from which the Institution knew that the boat was at her station and seaworthy. Again nothing was heard for two years until the war in Europe was ended.

MISHANDLED BY THE GERMANS

When the chief inspector visited the two Channel Island stations in June 1945 he found that the Guernsey boat, which had been armed by the Germans with two guns and used as a fishery patrol boat, had been so mishandled that she was unfit for life-boat work. The Jersey boat was in better case. She too had been used by the Germans, but she had also gone out five times as a life-boat, with her crew under German guards, - and had rescued 35 lives. After overhaul and repair she will return to the Institution's fleet.

HER LAST SERVICE

When in June 1940 the Institution ordered the Channel Island life-boat

to go to Cowes, the Jersey boat could not get a crew and the Institution asked the Guernsey boat to fetch her, That was on the 28th. When the Guernsey boat arrived at St. Helier in the evening German aeroplanes were attacking Jersey. Three of them machine-gunned her and killed one of her crew. She then returned to her station where she was captured by the Germans. Now the Institution has given rewards of £4. 3s. to each of the six members of her crew for that last service. The States of Guernsey pensioned the widow of the dead man and the Institution has increased the pension, as from the day of his death, to the sum which would be paid to the widow of a sailor, soldier or airman killed in action.

WORK FOR MOSQUITOES

When the building of life-boats came almost to a standstill at the end of 1940, the Institution's own machine-shop began to make munitions of war. At first it made ordnance fittings. In the middle of 1941 it was put on to aeroplane work, and until the end of the war it was making light alloy parts for Mosquitoes. It machined, fitted and assembled nearly 100,000 of these parts.

GALLANT WOMEN

Three women have been thanked by the Institution for their gallantry. One was the purser of the training ship "Moyana", in Southampton Water, who was awarded a vellum. Six cadets had left the ship in a dinghy in a rough sea. They capsized. With the help of another cadet, the purser launched an open motor launch from the ship and rescued three of them. The other three were picked up by an American naval launch. Another boat which went to the rescue was swamped.

Two Scottish women, aged 60 and 58, living on the shores of Loch Linnhe, heard cries for help just after daybreak. Two American sailors, who were trying to get out to their ship on a raft, had capsized 200 yards from the shore. The women had a small open boat. They rowed out at once and at great risk of capsizing themselves hauled the two men on board.

FRENCH LIFE-BOAT RETURNS

In April, less than a month before the war ended, a French life-boat which had served on the British coast for nearly four years, was returned to the French Service. She was the "Jean Charcot" of Ile Molene, on the coast of Brittany. In June 1940 she had escaped from France, with her coxswain, motor-mechanic and refugees on board, and came to England. The Ministry of Shipping handed her over to the Institution which put her in its reserve fleet. She served at eleven different stations in Devon and Cornwall, Wales and Lancashire.

THE DUCHESS OF KENT

The Duchess of Kent, President of the Institution, visited the life-boat stations at Cromer and Sheringham on 23rd May, met Coxswain Henry Blogg and Coxswain James Dumble and their crews, and saw the Sheringham life-boat launched.

ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting will be held in the Central Hall Westminster, on Thursday, October 25th, and the Duchess of Kent will present the eight gold medals which the Institution awarded during the war to life-boat coxswains for conspicuous gallantry.