

GARDAÍ LAUDED BY LIFESAVING FOUNDATION FOR DROWNING RESCUES

With the Gardaí saving up to 20 people from drowning every year, many of them from suicide attempts, the Lifesaving Foundation is now looking to work with the Garda College to study Garda rescues in detail in establishing training modules for students and transferring this knowledge to general rescuers worldwide.

The bravery and drowning rescue skills regularly displayed by Garda officers was acknowledged by the Lifesaving Foundation and the Royal Life Saving Society, at a special ceremony in the Garda College.

At the awards presentation on 17 June, a framed commemorative parchment, commissioned by the Lifesaving Foundation, was presented to Assistant Garda Commissioner Jack Nolan, who accepted the accolade on behalf of the Garda Commissioner Noírin O'Sullivan.

In a linked ceremony the contribution of deceased Garda Commissioner Eamonn Doherty to both Garda swimming rescue and Irish Coast Guard Air/Sea Rescue was recognised with the presentation of a commemorative parchment to his family by Coast Guard Director Chris Reynolds and Edward Duffy, President of the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) Ireland Branch.

During the ceremony Assistant Garda Commissioner Jack Nolan presented a special Honorary 2015 Ireland Medal to retired RLSS Commonwealth Secretary General John Long for his outstanding contribution to saving lives from drowning worldwide.

Long has been a member of the UK Branch of the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) since 1957, and has lifesaving experience from local club level to international level through his work with the Commonwealth RLSS and also the International Lifesaving Federation.



GSRMA's Tim Bowe and Paschal Feeney (General Secretary), pictured with Chief Supt Anne Marie McMahon, Director of Training, Garda College; John Long, who received the Ireland Medal for 2015; A/Commissioner Jack Nolan, and Matt Givens, GSRMA.



Pictured at parchment presentation were (l-r): John Connolly, CEO, Lifesaving Foundation; GSRMA's Tim Bowe and Paschal Feeney (General Secretary), Chief Supt Anne Marie McMahon, Director of Training, Garda College; John Long, who received the Ireland Medal & Parchment, A/Commissioner Jack Nolan; Matt Givens, GSRMA, and Brendan Donohoe, Chairman of The Lifesaving Foundation.

TRAINED RESPONDERS

In his opening remarks A/Commissioner Jack Nolan said that the Gardaí are often the first trained responders at a drowning situation. "Whilst there is no legal requirement on officers to attempt a rescue, we have a natural inclination to save a life. The fact that around 20 separate drowning rescues annually are carried out by the Gardaí is proof of this," he noted.

Swimming and lifesaving instruction has been provided to Garda recruits since the establishment of the force in 1922. In the first half of the 20th century the majority of rescue training was provided by the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) in Ireland, especially in Dublin as at that time the Garda Training Depot was in the Phoenix Park.

"In-service lifesaving training was provided on an 'ad hoc' basis throughout the country mainly based in cities with swimming pools with some officers qualifying as lifesaving teachers and examiners," A/Comm Nolan recalled.

"If one or more officers in a Garda station were active lifesavers they encouraged their colleagues to improve their swimming and rescue capabilities. There was always a willingness to learn lifesaving but not always the facilities to do so on an ongoing basis.

"It was not until the transfer of training to the college in Templemore and the building of a new swimming pool here that it was possible to provide swimming instruction and rescue training on a structured basis."

WATER SAFETY ROLES

Many Garda officers have played leading roles in both Irish Water Safety and the Royal Life Saving Society. Garda Frank Nolan served as Chairperson of Irish Water Safety for 25 years representing Ireland at the International Life Saving Federation.

During his tenure as Assistant and Deputy Commissioner, Eamonn Doherty acted as Chairperson of the RLSS Ireland Region, and showed his commitment to saving lives from drowning by continuing in this role as Garda Commissioner. After his retirement he chaired the Irish Marine Meritorious Awards Committee.

The Gardaí regularly participate in the National Police Lifesaving Championships with the UK constabularies, and has hosted the event a number of times at the Garda College and most recently in 2009 at Malahide, recording a home win in the mixed team competition.

"It is always pleasing on a personal and organisational basis to receive awards recognising the outstanding humanitarian achievements of individual officers and of the training they receive," noted A/Comm Nolan.

The receipt of the inaugural Ireland Medal in 2004 was significant because it was a public recognition by a world leading drowning prevention and rescue organisation of, in the words of the medal criteria, *'the exceptional contribution made by An Garda Síochána as a body and of individual officers to the saving of lives from drowning.'*

FACFILE – 2015 HONORARY IRELAND MEDAL RECIPIENT

In recognition of his exceptional contribution to saving lives from drowning worldwide, a special Honorary 2015 Ireland Medal was awarded to John Long, retired RLSS Commonwealth Secretary General.

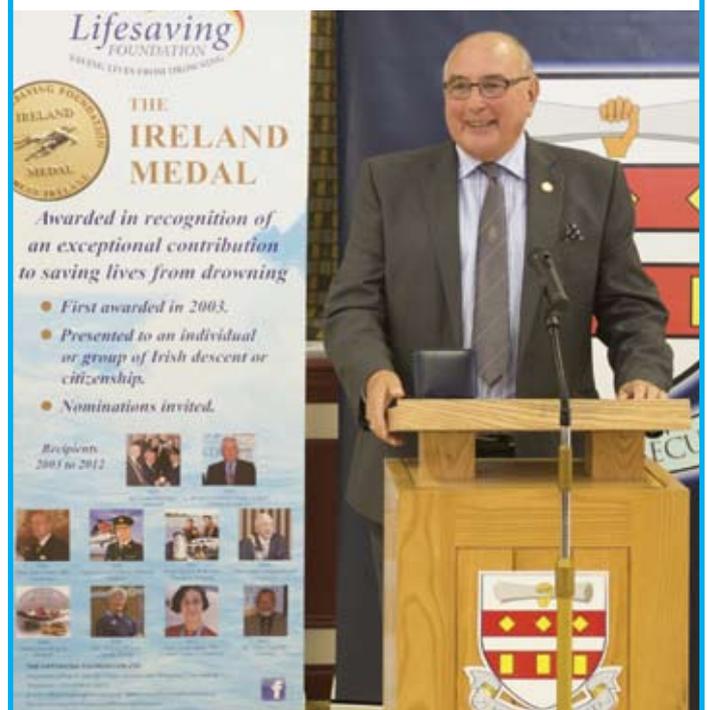
Between 1957 and 1991 John Long was a police officer initially in the Suffolk Constabulary and later in the Warwickshire Constabulary, rising to the rank of Chief Superintendent. During 34 years of police service he was responsible for the police lifesaving teams in both Suffolk and Warwickshire.

He has been a member of the RLSS UK Branch since 1957, holding various posts in two different branches. He has been President of the Warwick Life Saving Club since its formation in 1982, Chairman of the RLSS UK West Midlands Region to 2011, and is currently President of the RLSS UK Warwickshire Branch.

He was appointed Secretary General of the Royal Life Saving Commonwealth Society in 1992, tasked with promoting the saving of lives from drowning throughout the British Commonwealth. He served in this role with distinction until his retirement in 2010.

Following in the steps of RLSS founder William Henry, John Long travelled the world founding new national lifesaving organisations in many countries including Uganda, Lesotho and India. He is Patron of India's national lifesaving organisation the Rashtriya Lifesaving Society India.

In 1999 he was instrumental in the founding of the RLSS Republic of Ireland Branch's Overseas Aid Project, which is now The Lifesaving Foundation.





The Ireland Medal Parchment was presented to the family members of the deceased Garda Commissioner Eamonn Doherty, pictured here with (l-r): John Connolly, CEO, Lifesaving Foundation; A/Comm Jack Nolan; Chris Reynolds, Director of Irish Coast Guard; and (far right) Brendan Donohoe, Chairman, Lifesaving Foundation.

DROWNING RESCUE STATS

Research has established that in all swimming or in-water rescues, a percentage of rescuers die during the rescue attempt. Ireland has a small population and one or two events can skew statistics but every year between one and six rescuers die during a drowning event.

Connolly studied the Garda Roll of Honour containing details of serving Gardaí who have died since the force was established in 1922. "I identified five drowning deaths out of the 97 named in the roll; two were swimming rescuer deaths – one in 1933 and one in 1940. I estimated there's been 2,000 Garda swimming rescues since 1922 with only two deaths."

In a recent radio interview a representative of the Garda College said their programme aimed to help students develop a strong ethos and a sense of service to the community.

"So, therefore, the history of Garda drowning rescues and the rescue of individuals trapped in fires clearly proves that the training provided in this college is doing a lot right."

The latest Garda rescue research undertaken by the CEO of Lifesaving Foundation, reveals a long and proud history of drowning rescues by members of the force:

- The earliest Scott Medal awarded for a swimming rescue was the 11th medal awarded in 1927 to Garda John O'Brien for two drowning rescues at Courtown Harbour Beach.
- A total of 32 Scott Medals have been awarded to serving Gardaí from 1922 to 2014 for acts of bravery involving swimming rescues.
- The majority of rescues take place in rivers.
- The majority of casualties rescued by Gardaí deliberately enter the water.
- The majority of those rescued by Gardaí are young males.
- Many casualties were drinking alcohol before they entered the water.
- The majority of rescues take place at night.
- Rescues take place all year round.
- In the majority of situations the casualty is removed from

the water alive.

- Most casualties do not resist being rescued.
- Two or more Gardaí working together were involved in most rescues.
- No serving Garda has died in a drowning rescue since 1940.

In his concluding remarks, John Connolly also requested that the Lifesaving Foundation be allowed work with college staff to study Garda rescues in detail and to establish what can be used in training students and what can be transferred to general rescuers worldwide.

"Previous research facilitated by Garda Commissioners Eamonn Doherty and Noel Conroy helped to open new windows on how and why people drown.

"I am sure that there is much more that can be learned and shared with lifesavers worldwide."



John Connolly presented a copy of 'DROWNING' to the Garda College Director Chief Supt Anne Marie McMahon, during the proceedings.



Dr Patrick Buck, pictured here with Chief Supt Anne Marie McMahon, Director of Training, Garda College, presented a number of copies of his book to the Garda College Library.

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION: The Lifesaving Foundation is an international charity devoted to saving lives from drowning. Founded and based in Ireland since 2004 it supports a number of drowning prevention projects in Lesotho, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Liberia and organises conferences regularly devoted to promoting research into drowning prevention and rescue. For further information visit www.lifesavingfoundation.ie or email: info@lifesavingfoundation.ie