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THE
Lifesaving
FOUNDATION
SAVING LIVES FROM DROWNING



THE IRELAND MEDAL

2016 Medal Presentation Ceremony

Naval Base, Haulbowline, County Cork

Saturday, 22nd April, 2017



AWARDED to an Irish person or organisation or to a person of Irish descent in recognition of an exceptional contribution to saving lives from drowning.

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THE 2016 IRELAND MEDAL is awarded to the IRISH NAVAL SERVICE



The Lifesaving Foundation is pleased to announce that the 2016 Ireland Medal has been awarded to The Irish Naval Service in recognition of its permanent role as on-scene coordinator in deep sea Search and Rescue (SAR) lifesaving operations and its recent humanitarian rescuer role in the Mediterranean Sea.



The Irish Naval Service is the principal sea going agency of the Irish State. It is charged with Maritime Defence, Fishery Protection, Contraband Interdiction Duties, Search and Rescue (SAR) and with enforcing Irish and EU legislation within the Irish Economic Zone. This zone is 132,000 square miles in size (5 times the size of Ireland) and is 16% of all European Union waters. Among these many duties is the rescue of 'those in peril on the sea'¹. Historically, the role of on-scene SAR coordinator has been held by the Navy. With the formation of the Irish Coast Guard in 2000 a service



level agreement was introduced through which the nearest Naval Service vessel usually assumes the role of on-scene coordinating vessel for deep sea search operations.



The LÉ Samuel Beckett acting as on-scene commander during a search and rescue mission with RNLI and Air SAR Helicopter.

LÉ Deirdre was on-scene during the August 1979 Fastnet Race tragedy. As yachts in the race reached and rounded the Fastnet Rock they were hit by a Force 10 gale resulting in 5 yachts sinking and 24 being abandoned. In the subsequent rescue operation 136 race crew members were rescued and 15 persons died.

In a 1985 terrorist attack Air India Jumbo Jet 182 exploded over the Atlantic Ocean in Irish air space with the loss of 329 lives. The majority of passengers were Canadian citizens or had strong connections with Canada. LÉ Aisling was the on-scene coordinator and Irish Naval Service



LÉ Aisling crew members carry the recovered body of an Air India passenger

personnel entered shark-infested waters to recover bodies. A total of 131 bodies were finally recovered from the ocean.



In the year 2012 Irish Naval service ships were involved in a number of SAR operations. In January 2012 the Naval Service deployed LÉ Niamh to help in the search for five men missing from a trawler that had run aground off the Cork coast. In March 2012 LÉ Ciara was involved in a search in the Irish Sea for a crewmember lost overboard from a cargo ship and in September 2012 she joined the search for a missing diver twelve miles south of Baltimore Harbour.

Often navy divers are involved in SAR missions. The Naval Service Diving Section was established in 1963 with search and recovery one of its primary roles. Navy divers are involved in around 15 missing person searches



Naval Service diving crew during a training exercise.

missions each year. These recovery missions can last up to two weeks at a time and they have a high success rate. The recovery of drowned bodies is of great comfort to the families of casualties.



In 2015 the Irish Government, in response to the tragic refugee situation, decided to send a naval ship to the Mediterranean as part of the European Union response. In May 2015 LÉ Eithne and her 69 crew entered the Mediterranean and took up station off the coast of North Africa where over 8 weeks they saved 3,376 migrants. The LÉ Niamh replaced LÉ Eithne in July 2015 on a three month mission rescuing more than 4,100 people. In October 2015 LÉ Samuel Beckett replaced LÉ Eithne and by the end of 2015 over 8,000 migrants had been rescued from drowning by Irish Naval Service ships.

LÉ Róisín was deployed to the Mediterranean on 01 May 2016 and rescued a total of 1,264 people. LÉ James Joyce, replaced LÉ Róisín in July with LÉ Samuel Beckett taking over at the end of September. By October 2016 over 10,000 persons had been rescued from drowning in the Mediterranean. Also the ships have provided assistance to a further 2,209 migrants, who were transferred from other vessels onto Irish Naval Service vessels and then brought to safety.

The Minister with Responsibility for Defence, Paul Kehoe, said: "I wish to congratulate the Naval Service for the

excellent role they have played in saving the lives of so many migrants since Naval Service vessels were first deployed in May 2015. The Government and I are very proud of your efforts. The deployment of Irish Naval vessels to the Mediterranean to engage in humanitarian search and rescue tasks is an important element in Ireland's response to the migration crisis in the Mediterranean. The success of these operations demonstrates clearly the value of Ireland's participation in this important work."

The Irish Naval Service reported on 21st October 2016;

"Earlier today, following a request from the Italian Maritime Rescue Co-Ordination Centre, LÉ Samuel Beckett located and rescued a total of 772 migrants from a large wooden barge during a complex search and rescue operation conducted 36 Nautical Miles North East of Tripoli. The LÉ Samuel Beckett also acted as on scene co-ordinator for four other ships that rescued migrants from approximately 20 small craft within the search area.

The rescue operation began at 6.30am and all 772 migrants were taken on board LÉ Samuel Beckett by 2.30pm. The migrants are now receiving food, water and medical treatment where required. LÉ Samuel Beckett will transfer some migrants to an Italian ship before transferring the remaining migrants to a Port of Safety.

The LÉ Samuel Beckett departed Naval Service Headquarters in Haulbowline, Cork to assist the Italian Authorities in the humanitarian search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean on the 23rd of September.

The role of the Irish Naval vessel is to provide a search and rescue capability and to undertake humanitarian rescue operations at sea in the Mediterranean. Assistance to persons in distress at sea is provided in accordance with the applicable provisions of international conventions governing search and rescue situations."²

1. Hymn 'Eternal Father, strong to save' by William Whiting
2. <http://www.military.ie/en/naval-service/news-and-events/single-view/article/le-samuel-beckett-rescues-772-migrants/?cHash=db7488b1d06df36cf9630a726e9297cb>



History of the Irish Naval Service

Adapted from the Defence Forces website

The modern Irish State came into existence in 1922. From 1922 to 1938 there was little government interest in maritime affairs. The United Kingdom had control of Irish waters under the 1922 Treaty which had established the new state. In 1938 control of Irish waters was handed back to the Irish Free State. The country did not have a navy and had no means of protecting its coasts and off shore waters. The Haulbowline Naval Base in Cork was reactivated to act as a Base for a new Marine and Coastwatching Service. By 1941 the Service consisted of 10 craft (6 motor torpedo boats plus 4 assorted vessels) and about 300 all ranks. Their tasks during the war included mine laying, regulation of Merchant Ships, upkeep of navigational aids and fishery protection. At the end of the war the Coastwatching part of the Service was disbanded and the Marine side run down with ships sold off and personnel discharged. In September 1946 the Government decided that the Marine Service should become a permanent component of the Defence Forces and the modern day Irish Naval Service was born. Three Flower class Corvettes were purchased from the United Kingdom and these became the backbone of the Naval Service in the 1950's and 60's. During these years



LÉ Niamh

numbers of personnel (about 400 ratings and 40 officers) remained constant with Fishery Protection being the main day-to-day task. A decision was taken to decommission the corvettes and to buy 3 Coastal Minesweepers (CMS) from the UK in 1970. The period from 1972 - 89 was an extremely interesting time for the Irish Naval Service. During this period the Naval Service saw the commissioning of seven new ships and took great steps towards modernising the service.



LÉ Aoife (1979-2015) moored at Haulbowline, Co. Cork having been decommissioned and gifted to Malta for use in humanitarian operations.

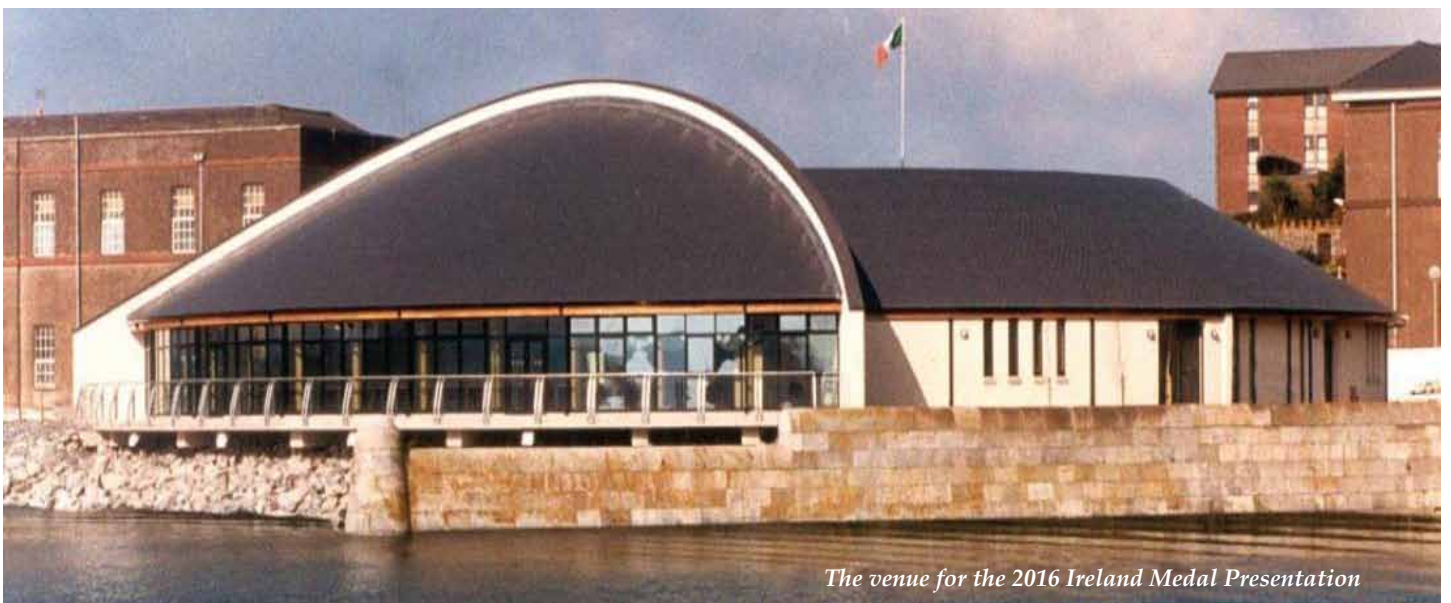
By the nineteen nineties the service had proven itself to be a confident and professional part of the Defence Forces. Fishery Protection played an important role in the Service's day-to-day operations. It was during this period that the Naval Service became involved in combating a new threat, drug smuggling. New legislation provided the Naval Service with the powers to board and detain personnel and vessels involved in the illicit trade of drug smuggling. The Naval Service was involved in numerous seizures of drugs throughout the nineties and is still involved in preventing drugs from reaching Irish shores. During the nineties the Service carried out Resupply Missions to Lebanon, Cyprus and the former Yugoslavia; ensuring that the needs of Irish Peacekeepers were always met. As the millennium approached, the Naval Service decided it was time to bring in some changes of its own which included planning for a new type of Naval Vessel to meet modern needs. In 1999 construction began on LE Róisín (P51), which would be the first vessel of this class, joined in 2001 by her sister ship LE Niamh (P52). In 2002 the LÉ Niamh conducted a four month voyage which included the first ever visit by an Irish naval ship to the Far East during which she resupplied Irish troops serving with the UN in Eritrea.

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Several high profile incidents occurred during this period ensuring that the Naval Service was never far from national and sometimes international headlines. These included LÉ Aoife's part in the rescue operation for HMCS Chicoutimi, a Canadian Navy submarine which suffered a fire off the coast of Donegal in October 2004. Numerous other Search, Rescue and Diving Operations punctuated this period, in addition to the Naval Service's increasing fishery protection output and a general increase in patrol days per ship. In October 2003 the LÉ Niamh was sent on a mission to the West Coast of Africa, in support of the Army's reconnaissance prior to the deployment of Irish troops in Liberia with the UN. LÉ Niamh's taskings included the transport and delivery of vehicles, equipment and personnel to Monrovia's war-torn port, and the logistic, medical and communications support of the reconnaissance party as they explored the coastal areas. The ship acted as a secure base and was poised to conduct an extraction of personnel should the situation deteriorate unexpectedly. LÉ Niamh conducted a charting survey of the port while there, using the navigational skills and training of her personnel to note the position of wrecks, damage to piers and other navigational hazards.

One major development ashore was the construction of the National Maritime College of Ireland, a partnership between the Department of Defence, the Naval Service, the Department of Education and the Cork Institute of Technology. This state of the art facility opened for its first students in September 2004. It represents an enormous advance in the training environment for Naval Service personnel. Modern classrooms, equipment and training facilities mean improvements have been made in seamanship, engineering, sea-survival and fire fighting training. Navigation and engineering training in particular are making use of high tech simulator facilities. The Naval Service continues to run its military training in the Naval College installations on the Naval Base but the bulk of the maritime training is now conducted in the NMCI.

The current Irish Naval Service fleet comprises one Helicopter Patrol Vessel (HPV), five Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPV) and two Coastal Patrol Vessels (CPV). Each vessel is equipped with state of the art machinery, weapons, communications and navigation systems. The Flagship of the Irish Naval Service is the L.É. Eithne which is a HPV.



The venue for the 2016 Ireland Medal Presentation