

NAVY NETS FREEDOM OF ENTRY TO DUN LAOGHAIRE

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council has awarded the Irish Naval Service Honorary Freedom of Entry to the county in recognition of the navy's ongoing humanitarian rescue missions in the Mediterranean. Report by Grace Heneghan.

LE Eithne – was the first naval ship from Ireland to be deployed to the Mediterranean in 2015, rescuing 3,300 refugees in the process from drowning and recovering 76 bodies.

Since 2015, in six separate deployments, Irish Naval personnel have rescued over 15,600 refugees from drowning, and continue to work closely with the Italian Coastguard as part of 'Operation Pontus' rescue missions.

LE Eithne recently embarked on a further six-month humanitarian aid mission to the Mediterranean in a bid to continue saving countless number of helpless migrants who are forced to flee their war-torn homelands.

Prior to this latest departure, it was only fitting then that the largest ship in the Irish naval fleet, which continues the Defence Forces' record of international humanitarian service on behalf of the EU and the UN, was honoured by Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council with the Honorary Freedom of Entry to the county.

The civic honour of Freedom of Entry is the highest honour a municipality can pay a naval group, so it's very fitting that Dun

Laoghaire-Rathdown recognised and publicly acknowledged the heroic duties undertaken by officers and crew of the Irish Naval Service.

DEFENCE OF SEA PORT

This is the first time that a local authority in Ireland has awarded the Defence Forces and, in particular, the Naval Service, the Honorary Freedom of Entry.

Speaking to 'Emergency Services Ireland' shortly after LE Eithne set sail in May, Cllr Cormac Devlin, who was then Chairman of Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, said it was a very unique award to be presented in Ireland.

The custom of granting armed forces 'Freedom of Entry' dates from Medieval Europe where walled cities could make the movement of armed forces difficult. If the passing troops were deemed untrustworthy, then the city may refuse to provide them with food and shelter.

Gaining a city's trust and gaining freedom of entry was, therefore, extremely important in times past. In the case of the navy, Freedom of Entry was usually given in recognition of the



Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council's Cathaoirleach Cllr Cormac Devlin pictured on board the LE Eithne with Commander Brian Fitzgerald and crew members in Dun Laoghaire on 31 March.

defence of the sea port, cities and towns. "In maritime circles, it's an award that is commonly recognised, and it's a civic honour for armed forces."

So, what inspired Cllr Devlin to engineer this prestigious ceremony in the first place? "We've all been moved by what we regularly see and read about; vessels in the Mediterranean with hundreds of migrants fleeing their countries.

"To know our Defence Forces are working closely with the Italian Coastguard in these rescue missions, I am immensely proud of the work carried out by the Defence Forces, and in particular the Irish Navy."

He said that since Dun Laoghaire Harbour is twinned with the LÉ Eithne, it was very fitting that LÉ Eithne received the award on behalf of the entire Irish Naval Service. "I met the crew and talked to them at the award ceremony on what they have encountered at sea. A lot of them were very young and some of them were new to the navy.

"What they encountered was very harrowing. When rescuing migrants, sadly they have also seen bodies pulled from the water. For any person regardless of age, this has to have a detrimental effect on them. So, I thought it was fitting as a port county having a strong connection with the maritime services that we would bestow this honour on the navy."

BICENTARY CELEBRATIONS

On 31 May the 200th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone of Dun Laoghaire Harbour in 1817 by Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Earl Whitworth, was marked with celebrations, attended by the President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins who laid a time capsule to mark the occasion.

"So, culminating in the bicentenary celebrations of the harbour, the Freedom of Entry award took place in the backdrop of this. We knew that the LÉ Eithne would be deployed in May, so we brought the event forward to the end of March to ensure the crew would be there to accept it," he noted.

The ship was docked at St Michael's Pier in Dún Laoghaire Harbour to mark the occasion. Bringing a touch of military pageantry to the proceeding the Army No. 1 Band led the colour party and the crew of the LÉ Eithne into the harbour. The public were out in force to witness the event, with local schoolchildren waving Irish and EU flags in celebration.

DUN LAOGHAIRE CELEBRATES BICENTENARY

Two hundred years after the first stone was laid to build Dun Laoghaire Harbour, the President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins, officially launched the Dun Laoghaire Bicentenary Celebrations on 31 May.

In the opening ceremony, 200 years later to mark this special occasion, President Higgins buried a time capsule with letters and drawings from local school children, recent photographs of the harbour, and letters from the RNLi, Coast Guard, Coal Harbour Users Group and from Cllr Cormac Devlin, Cathaoirleach of Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council.

According to President Higgins, "Dún Laoghaire Harbour is a place deeply embedded into Irish history, and has played a profound role in the lives of generations of our people. Two hundred years ago, when the foundation stone was laid, it was envisaged that the harbour would principally be a refuge for ships from bad weather.

A 21 Gun Salute was accorded by the Irish Defence Forces to mark the occasion while RNLi and Coast Guard volunteers created a guard of honour to welcome the President.



DLR Cllr Cormac Devlin, President Michael D. Higgins and Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company CEO Gerry Dunne placed a time capsule in the ground to mark the day.



Since 2015, in six separate deployments, Irish Naval personnel have rescued over 15,600 refugees from drowning.

"For example, if you look at the tragedy of Rescue 116, it's at the back of everybody's minds that it can happen at any time to any member of the emergency services.

"And taking into consideration the size of our country and the size of the population, I think everyone knows somebody who works in the emergency services or who is a first responder of some sort. So they understand the risks undertaken."

IRELAND MEDAL FOR SEARCH & RESCUE MISSIONS

The Naval Base at Haulbowline, Co. Cork was the backdrop for the 2016 Ireland Medal presentation to the Naval Service, in recognition for its ongoing humanitarian mission in the Mediterranean, and as lead co-ordinator during search and rescue operations in Irish coastal waters.

The Ireland Medal is awarded annually by the Lifesaving Foundation to an Irish person or organisation or to a person of Irish descent in recognition of an exceptional contribution to saving lives from drowning.

This year the award was presented to the Irish Naval Service in recognition of its permanent role as an on-scene co-ordinator in deep sea search and rescue lifesaving operations, in addition to its humanitarian rescue role in the Mediterranean Sea.

Flag Officer Commanding (FOC) Commodore Hugh Tully accepted the Ireland Medal on behalf of the men and women of the Irish Naval Service. He welcomed all present to the Naval Base, especially Lucan Gospel Choir, as he had grown up in Lucan, County Dublin.

"There are many thousand volunteer members of various rescue services around Ireland ready to save lives from drowning. The national and local rescue services were shocked and saddened by the Rescue 116 tragedy," he noted.

"The search and rescue effort following this tragedy was one of the most intense ever carried out in Ireland, and involved all national and some local rescue and recovery services.

"Helicopter pilot Capt Dara Fitzpatrick was removed from the water alive but she died shortly afterwards from her injuries, while the body of co-pilot Captain Mark Duffy was recovered in the sunken cabin. However, the bodies of winch team members Paul Ormsby and Ciarán Smith are still unrecovered."

NAVAL SERVICE ETHOS

According to Commodore Tully, "Organisations such as the Lifesaving Foundation have an important role to play in educating the public on how to avoid getting into trouble and also in responding to others in distress. While we in the Naval Service are very experienced in search and rescue, we would never have encountered anything on the scale found in the Mediterranean."

The work carried out by our personnel in the Mediterranean is both a source of pride and humility. It is very much in the naval tradition of coming to the aid of those in peril on the sea. The actions of our personnel are very much in line with the ethos and values that we hold in the Naval Service – courage, respect,



Pictured at the 2016 Ireland Medal presentation to the Naval Service (l-r): Brendan Donohoe, Lifesaving Foundation chairman; Michael Lewis, Cork City Branch Chair of Garda Síochána Retired Members' Association (GSRMA); Garda Supt Charlie Barry, Togher, Cork; FOC Commodore Hugh Tully, Tim Bowe, GSRMA Cork City Branch Secretary; and John Connolly, Lifesaving Foundation secretary. (Pic: Irish Naval Service)

integrity, loyalty and above all selflessness.

They display and possess the innate decency of Irish people in general and the fundamental respect we have for others no matter who they are. This is in complete contrast to the

Recipients of the Ireland Medal:

- 2003: An Garda Síochána
- 2004: Surgeon Admiral Frank Golden OBE
- 2005: Prof John Pearn (Australia)
- 2006: Garda Commissioner Eamon Doherty
- 2007: Foyle Search & Rescue
- 2008: Chief Justice Terence Higgins
- 2009: Dublin Fire Brigade
- 2010: Patricia Wilcox (South Africa);
- 2011: Prof Linda Quan MD;
- 2012: John Connolly, Lifesaving Foundation;
- 2013: Prof Stephen Langendorfer (USA);
- 2014: Dr Kevin Moran, PhD
- 2015: John Long (UK)
- 2016: Irish Naval Service

smugglers and traffickers who feed off the desperation of people who are fleeing oppressive regimes.

Our effort in the Mediterranean is best summed up by one of our ship's captains as follows: 'As members of the Naval Service we simply see a hand reaching up to us out of the sea; we grab that hand and we hold on to it with all our might and drag someone to safety.'

In acknowledging the outstanding humanitarian achievement of the Irish Naval Service, Garda Supt Charlie Barry from Toghher, Cork, said: "They have been responsible for saving over 10,000 lives to date from drowning. We're all aware of the feeling of great joy when lives are saved but there is great sadness when a rescue operation becomes a recovery mission," he noted.

SEVEN DEPLOYMENTS

The LÉ Eithne departed the Naval Base in Haulbowline for its latest six-month mission to the Mediterranean on the third week in May.

LÉ Eithne – the largest ship in the Irish naval fleet – was the first one to be deployed to the Mediterranean in 2015, and since then, in six separate deployments, Irish naval personnel have rescued over 15,600 refugees from drowning.

In May 2015 LÉ Eithne and her 69 crew first entered the Mediterranean and took up station off the coast of North Africa, and over eight 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 1 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.

UNLOCK THE WORLD

A lot has changed since Warren Avis began his journey back in 1946 but what hasn't is the way we do things. For over 50 years our mantra has been 'We Try Harder'. For example, with Avis Preferred you get faster pick ups and priority service. And with 'Select Series' we guarantee your make and model. So, however the world chooses to travel in the future, we'll be there. Still trying harder to unlock unforgettable experiences for our customers at 5,450 rental stations around the world

avis.ie