

CORK'S MISSING PERSONS SEARCH AND RECOVERY UNIT

Cork City's Missing Persons Search and Recovery Unit continues to provide an invaluable service of immeasurable value to bereft families since it was founded in 2001. And similar to other charitable organisations the unit always welcomes donations, and it also recently rolled out a recruitment campaign to attract new volunteers on board.
Report by Ruairí de Barra.

The loss of a loved one is one of the most tragic experiences that can befall a family. However, if that loved one is never recovered, then the grieving process can be made all the more difficult on those who are left behind.

Founded in 2001 by David Linehan, following the loss of his own father, Cork City's Missing Persons Search and Recovery Unit (CCMPSAR) has grown over the years. This all-volunteer charitable group has successfully rescued persons in distress. However, its primary focus has been the search and recovery of hundreds of others.

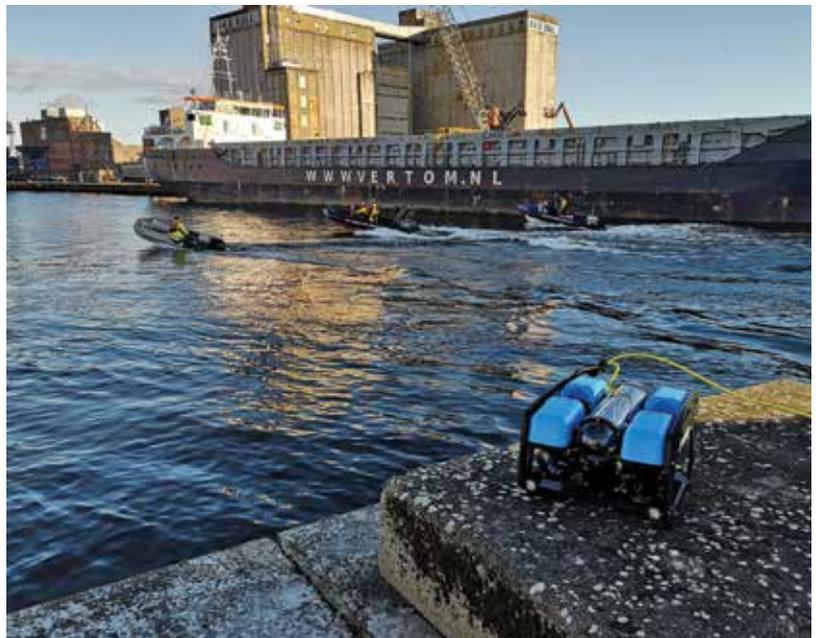
For the past 18 years the unit's dedicated team of 13 volunteers with diverse range of professional skillsets has provided hundreds of families with the solace of returning their loved ones to them.

Current chairperson Edwin O'Sullivan, a soldier with the Defence Forces, has volunteered with the unit for many years in an effort, he said, "to give back to the community, through using my skills as a diver in the Army Dive Group and my RHIB operations experience".

Primarily based on the River Lee, the unit also been involved in land and river searches in other parts of the country. For example, they sent a coxswain team and a RHIB (Rigid Hulled Inflatable Boat) to Blacksod Bay in Mayo to assist in the search for the wreckage of Rescue 116, following the tragic incident off the North Mayo coast in March 2017, which claimed the lives of four Coastguard crew members.

An Garda Síochána receives thousands of reports of suspected missing people during the course of any given year. Each case is treated with the same degree of importance, and the Gardaí follow strict guidelines and procedures that help to ensure the searches are conducted efficiently and effectively.

"CCMPSAR co-operates and liaises with the Gardaí, Coastguard and Civil Defence, and other emergency services. And often a family member will contact our unit directly. We are here to help and we will try our very best. It is never easy and searches can take days out on the river and walking the banks," according to O'Sullivan.



CCMPSAR rhibs on patrol with the ROV ready to deploy from the shore.

TECHNOLOGY AND TRAINING

Another Defence Forces member involved in the unit is Petty Officer David O'Leary. The Radio & Radar Technician is also a member of the elite Naval Service Diving Section. Involved with the Remotely Operated Underwater Vehicle (ROV) section of the Navy, he brings a highly specialised skillset to the CCMPSAR Unit.

Recently the unit has purchased a BlueROV II, a sophisticated piece of equipment, which he has assembled in his workshop. It has given excellent ROV capabilities to the affordability range of this group that relies on donations to keep providing the searches which can go long after statutory bodies may have to scale down or redeploy resources elsewhere.

"I felt that I could bring my diving and ROV experience to the unit. It's an opportunity for me to give back to my community," said David O'Leary, who joined CCMPSAR after he returned from a deployment on 'Operation Pontus' off the coast of Libya in 2016.

He experienced high tempo rescue operations in Libya, and has also been involved with many search and recovery



Divers from CCMP SAR undergo full face mask training.

operations all over Ireland with the Naval Service. 'I am now Training and Development Officer, and with the introduction of new items of equipment such as the ROV, I will create and run training courses, so that the capabilities of the vehicle can be maximised and share the knowledge with all volunteers.'

DIVER SAFETY IS PARAMOUNT

"Given the often-dangerous sub-surface conditions and the physical and psychological challenges involved in diving in the fast moving and extreme low visibility river, the unit needs to ensure that the safety of the divers is paramount at all times. Therefore, training is big part of the unit," O'Leary pointed out.

Joining the unit was also seen as a way for Karl O'Mahoney to help out after he saw the work of the unit on social media. He spoke with David Linehan and David Varian and offered whatever skills and experience he could provide them.

"They invited me to come on board and I'm now a part of the unit now for nearly four years," noted Karl, who is also a Petty Officer with the Naval Service. He has extensive experience overseas in the co-ordination of complex multi-vessel rescues of

migrant craft in distress.

"I am a communications specialist and GMDSS instructor. At the moment the unit is using just basic VHF radios, so I'm currently designing a course to qualify the unit with a GMDSS Short Range Certificate," he said.

GENEROSITY AND COMMEMORATION

CCMP SAR's water craft 'The Daniel Mulcahy' and 'The Aidan Brereton' have been named in commemoration of some of those who have been lost and whose families made generous donations to assist in funding the boats.

CCMP SAR recently held an official launch and blessing for their new RHIB 'The Nora Flynn'. "It was a privilege and an honour to have the late Nora Flynn's family and sponsors join us for the launch. We could not have done this without the continued support of a number of Cork companies such as Port of Cork, Irish Mainport Holdings, Lehan Environmental & Industrial Services Ltd, CH Marine, Whelan Stores and Inver and Jotun (Ireland) Ltd," Edwin O'Sullivan noted.

He added that many others have been supportive and exceptional in giving to the group. "Fergus Thompson in Blackpool Auto Centre donated a jeep, while an anonymous donor recently gave another utility jeep to the group."

Now a registered charity, the unit strives to make each cent count. "RHIBs are thirsty beasts for fuel, and searches involve huge man hours on often-freezing conditions of the water.

"Boston Scientific has adopted the unit as its preferred charity this year. It's a fantastic partnership. We gave them a presentation on what we do and we were blown away by their support. We can't thank them and people in general enough," he added.

A STOLEN RINGBUOY IS A STOLEN LIFE

Christy O'Donovan, search co-ordinator for the unit, recently highlighted the incredible number of ring-buoys which are being recovered by the CCMP SAR. During one week in February this year 15 ring-buoys were removed from along the south bank of the River Lee.

The unit recovered 11 of these potential lifesaving devices, which have no other purpose than to save lives. "This is now getting beyond the realm of ridiculous. A life ring is a life. If you



CCMP SAR recently held an official launch and blessing for their new RHIB 'The Nora Flynn' by Naval Chaplain Fr Des Campion, which was attended by the late Nora Flynn's family.

were caught doing the same thing with a defibrillator, you'd be dragged through the courts for it," Christy noted, in a recent interview with the 'Cork Independent'.

O'Donovan recently posted images of yet more recovered ring-buoys and stated on social media: "Four more life rings recovered from the river while we were on a routine search today. It's like an epidemic, idiots throwing them into the water; every time we go out we seem to find three or four each time."

The River Lee is not an exception with people continuing to interfere with ring-buoys throughout the country; 150 were removed from the Claddagh River in Galway City last year. Irish Water Safety's long-running campaign warns that lives will be lost to drowning unless irresponsible members of the public stop damaging ring-buoys. The IWS continues to appeal to the public to assist in maintaining these vitally important lifesaving devices by reporting missing ring-buoys on its website www.ringbuoys.ie.

And while the CCMP SAR's committed volunteers are disappointed at acts like this, they remain undeterred in their mission to provide compassionate and responsive services to anyone in need.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Phone: CCMP SAR @ 087-9609885
 Email: ccmpsar@gmail.com
 Websites: www.missingpersons.ie/
 Facebook: www.facebook.com/missing.persons.search.and.recovery
 National Missing Persons Helpline: 1890-442-552

Donations can be made via The Lough Credit Union a/c no. 80073951 (Sort Code: 991061) or by electronic transfer: IBAN: IE88LOC199106180073951, BIC: 'LOCIIIE21XXX' swift code BNPAIE21.

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