

NOTES AND COMMENTS

by the Chief Inspector

THIS ISSUE of the "Coastguard" contains accounts of four fine rescue services. In two of them the rescues were carried out by L.S.A. Companies using the traditional rocket and breeches buoy, and in the other two the rescues were effected by R.N. and R.A.F. helicopters.

As I write news comes in of yet another fine rescue carried out off the Donegal Coast by helicopter from the R.N. Air Station at Eglinton, Northern Ireland.

That helicopters can now effect rescues in severe weather conditions has been proved beyond all doubt,

and I am sure that all members of the old established L.S.A. Companies will be the first to congratulate the crews of the helicopters both R.N. and R.A.F. who so successfully carried out the rescues referred to.

It is obvious from the reports received at Headquarters that all on the Coast are alive to this new factor in marine rescue work, a factor which will grow in importance as work is carried out on the development of helicopters.

J.H. LEWTY

WRECK OF THE BEATRIX FERNANDE

WEDNESDAY, December 14, 1955 was one of the worst possible nights imaginable - bitterly cold - no moon - a wind force 9 with rain, sleet and snow blizzards.

Somewhere between Macduff and Gardenstown on the Banffshire coast came a Mayday message from the Belgian trawler Beatrix Fernande, being swept ashore by overwhelming seas. She eventually struck the rock-bound coast near Melrose Head. Matters were considerably complicated due to her reporting her position at More Head - 1 mile east of Gardenstown.

The first information was received from a local fisherman, and later confirmed by Wick Radio. The former notified Banff C.G. at about 2100. Whitefields Lifeboat was launched - Gardenstown and Banff's L.S.A. Companies proceeded. Gardenstown's L.S.A. to More Head and finding nothing proceeded to search, eventually becoming bogged down in a field where, in spite of utilising tractors, it refused to move.

The ship was eventually located at the bottom of a 350 ft. cliff on a rocky beach and about 25 yards out from the Base. The first arrivals of the L.S.A. Company, Mr. Watt and Mr. Grant, found two of the crew being washed ashore in the boiling surf. They were dragged to safety under the cliffs, artificial restoration applied, and from them it was learned that all eight of the crew had jumped into the sea. Further search found one body.

By 2245 the remainder of both companies with the aid of jeeps had transported the gear to the top of the cliff.

Then began a $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile journey - transporting the gear by hand, in a most round about way, down the cliff face. This was a very treacherous journey under the prevailing weather conditions. Torches and portable searchlight proved invaluable. No sign of life appeared on board the trawler, and it seemed that the first information that all had jumped was correct. The gear was however prepared for firing when a heavy sea came in taking projector, line box and whip out to sea. Not only the gear but some of the company were swept out to sea as well. The rocket line and whip, as a result, were well and truly entangled. However, order was eventually restored and the first line fired fell over the ship. Immediately three of the crew appeared from the wheelhouse, and after very great difficulty owing to off-lying rocks the whip was out and secured. The tripod could not be set up as no stakes could be used. Method B was employed - both whips being manned by hand.

FIGHT AGAINST TIME

It was a fight against time - the vessel was breaking up and the beach was strewn with gear. Contact was made at 0225 and three men were brought ashore by 0357. During the operation the company were in danger of being washed out to sea. This happened to the No.1 of the Banff company, who was fortunately seen and rescued by the District Officer, Mr. Hancox, who went in after him. Of the crew of eight, one had been washed ashore dead, two dragged from the surf, three rescued by buoy and two were still missing.

Further search of the coastline by the company and the lifeboat failed to find them. The next day search was made again with no result. What was left of the gear was recovered, and the arduous job of conveying it back up the cliff was successfully accomplished.

The strain undergone by the L.S.A. Companies was very noticeable, and they deserve the highest praise for achieving their object under most arduous con-

ditions of weather, and in circumstances of utmost difficulty.

We were indeed grateful to the many helpers on this night. Among them were -

the Rev. John Phillip of Gardenstown who looked after the crew, the Police of Banff, Mr. Watson of Melrose Farm, and the people of Gardenstown who assisted with their landrovers.

M.H.R. CRICHTON
Inspector.

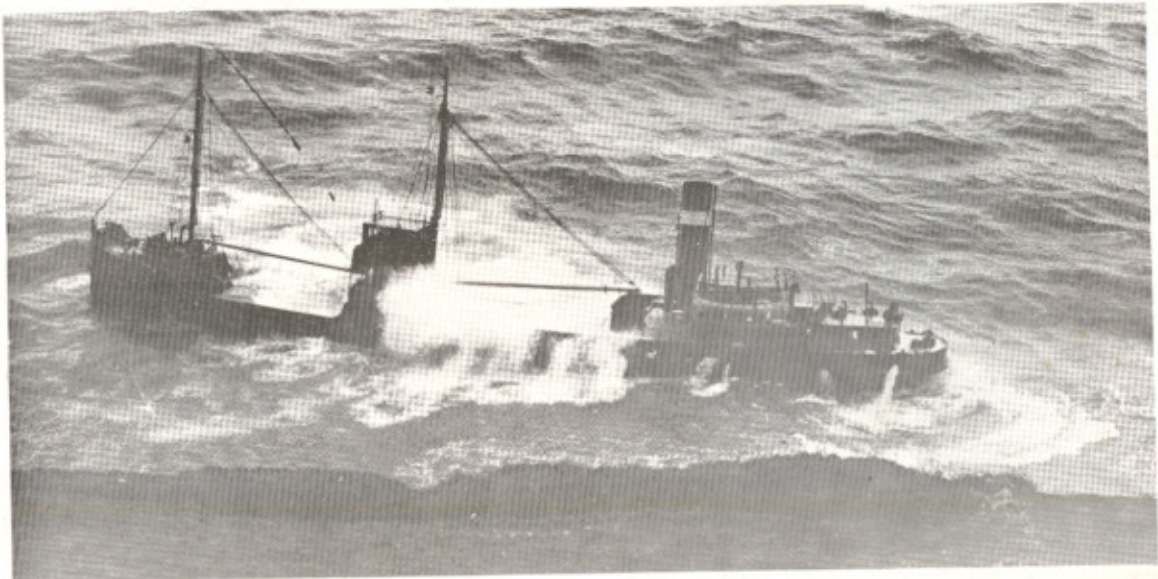
WRECK OF THE ST. RONAIG

ON DECEMBER 14, 1955, the entire crew of the s.s. St. Ronaig, wrecked three miles south of Torr Point, County Antrim, were rescued by breeches buoy without "wetting their feet." The rescue took place in a s.e. gale, with heavy driving rain and fog. Visibility at most times was nil. The distance from Ballycastle LSA house is 12 miles, over some of the wildest country and worst hills in Northern Ireland. The following account of the rescue was sent by Mr. Threlfall, D.O.,

At 0645 Watchman rang to say there was a ship ashore somewhere south of Torr Point and breaking up. Out of bed at double quick time and arrived at car to find S.O. Gallagher and C.G. Green ready with searchlight and other gear. At 0649 the maroon was fired to assemble the company. Was told the lifeboat had been informed and that the V. in V., Mr. McBride of Torr Head was searching in the immediate vicinity of Torr. Arranged to meet him there. Left Station at 0655 with C.G. Green, to be followed by Mr. Gallagher and Company.

Met Mr. McBride at Torr who reported no ship between Torr Head and Torr Cor so it was on up the "Green Hill." This is pretty bad in summer, but it was awful then. Anyhow, we made it and after stopping and listening at points we thought the ship might be we then arrived at a Chapel where the boy Murphy was able to tell us that the ship was a few miles further on over the mountain. So on we went and eventually we saw the masts of the ship at the foot of the cliffs - about 1400 yards from the road. It was a wild slippery climb down. We left the searchlight burning on the bank of the road to stop the LSA lorry, and I fired off a couple of parachute flares hoping they would see them and lit a flare for the benefit of the ship. Time about 0800.

On reaching the point nearest the ship I saw we had a job - waves breaking all over her, except the bridge where the crew were. The ship tried to drift a line ashore and Green at great risk managed to get it but it fouled the rocks and carried away. Decid-



St. Ronaig. (By courtesy of the Belfast Telegraph.)