COXSWAIN HENRY GEORGE BLOGG, G.C., B.E.M., OF CROMER
From the painting by T. C. Dugdale, R.A.

STORM ON

THE STORY OF THE LIFE-BOAT SERVICE IN THE WAR OF 1939-1945

BY

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In memory of many happy days
and nights spent in your company.

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from capture. She was the *Greater London*, of Southend-on-Sea.*

Other life-boatmen besides those who took their life-boats to Dover answered the summons in their own boats. On the evening of Thursday, the 30th of May, a message came to Wells, in Norfolk, asking that all the fishing boats should go to Lowestoft; and all went. Seventeen men were aboard them and all but one were life-boatmen.† They went to Lowestoft, then to Harwich and then to Ramsgate. At Ramsgate there was a call for volunteers to sail on a secret mission across the Channel. Among those who volunteered was the coxswain of the Wells life-boat. He was a Dane by birth, and his birthplace had become a base for German seaplanes. He was ready for any adventure. Four of the boats were chosen for the mission, but they were small to go overseas, open boats not more than 25 feet long. Each had a small motor and a dipping lugsail. They were sent first to Dover, and the coxswain, who had set out from Wells a simple fisherman, arrived there still wearing his life-boat coxswain's cap, but now armed with rifle and revolver and declaring that he was going to fight those Germans. The boat was in charge of an ex-captain of the Indian Army. Two naval gunners had been added to her crew. She carried a twin Lewis gun, a bucket of hand grenades and a gallon of rum.

A naval ship towed her and the three other fishing boats from Dover along the coast to Dungeness, and from there, by night, across the Channel. Near the French coast she gave them their orders. They were to wait off shore for a signal. They were to wait for one hour. If the signal were made they must sail in and pick up whoever was there. Should they run aground when close to the shore and not be able to get off, they were to land, taking their guns with them, and hide in the sand-dunes. Then the destroyer left them and they waited in great expectation, but the hour passed with no signal made, and they returned across the Channel (one of the boats capsizing on the way) their

* She was another of the Civil Service life-boats.
† The life-boat herself was away at a shipyard being overhauled.

mission, through no fa[illegible] wondering who the mysterious stranger could have been.*

While these things were happening across the sea Commander Upton at Dover had summoned to him others of the Institution's mechanics until he had seven. He could call also on shipwrights and divers from the naval dockyard as he needed them. Yet more helpers came unexpectedly, for on the Saturday morning the Brixham fishing fleet arrived after a journey of 230 miles up channel. It arrived only to find that its boats drew too much water and would be useless on the beaches; but among the crews were several men of the Torbay life-boat and they were added to the repairing party.

As the shelling and bombing at Dunkirk increased the beaches had become more and more hazardous by day, and about seven in the morning the small boats that had been working on them all night began to arrive at Dover for food, fuel, repair and rest. They were towed by the trawlers and drifters bringing their loads of troops. At once they were taken over by the repairing party, and their crews went to sleep. They slept in the sheds. They slept on the open quays. They even dropped asleep in the boats, and there they continued to sleep, undisturbed by the work which went on round and over them. It took on an average one hour to test and repair the engines of each boat. The most frequent cause of their failure was ropes and the clothing and web equipment of soldiers wrapped round their propellers. Until it could be arranged for divers to go down, or for the boats to be lifted out of the water, the repairing party cut the ropes and clothing away with a sheath-knife fastened to a broom-handle.

So the work went on from the first arrivals at seven in the morning until ten at night. The repairing party did not leave the dock, and the Navy brought them bread and butter and tinned beef, which they ate in relays at the dock-side, so that all day the work never stopped. By dusk all

* It was rumoured that he was Sir Lancelot Oliphant, British Ambassador to Belgium, who was made prisoner by the Germans when trying to get from Bruges to Le Havre.

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