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FRIDAY, JUNE 12, 1942
THIS EMBARGO SHOULD BE RESPECTED OVERSEAS BY
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AIR-SEA RESCUE

Thrills in Life-Saving Our Airmen

A thrilling thirty four page booklet, profusely illustrated, about the work of the organisation which rescues our airmen who are forced down into the sea is issued today (June 12) for the Air Ministry by the Ministry of Information and published by H.M. Stationery Office at sixpence net or twenty shillings for fifty copies.

It contains many personal narratives of the exciting experiences of air crews who have been picked up sometimes in incredibly short periods of times and other times have spent as many as nine days before rescue after trials of endurance which could only end in death but for the elaborate organisation which exists for their safety.

All the complicated apparatus necessary for the fulfilment of their valuable tasks is vividly described, through the various stages of their work in saving the lives of our gallant airmen, who, because of the geographical position of our land, have always to cross water on the last lap of their journey homewards.

The work is four fold in character - to provide the crews with the means of keeping afloat, to see that they can live for such time as they are left to the mercy of the sea, to find them and finally, to rescue them.

A full description is given of the expert drill to which the airmen are subjected in readiness for the event of their being forced down, of the various safety devices provided for them, of the types of rescue craft at the disposal of the Air-Sea Rescue Service and of what happens from the time of receipt of the S O S to the moment when the men are brought to safety.

There is an important message to every member of the public, be they coastguards, sentries, children at play on the sands and beaches, shepherds watching their flocks on the Downs or anyone who may look out to sea. If they see a parachute, a flare or a dinghy, they should note their position, the time and the direction of the object and the distance away and phone their information to the nearest police station. They should then return and keep watch if still possible. Time, of course, is the great factor in the saving of life.

It was this factor which was in mind when it was decided that those controlling the Air-Sea Rescue Service should do so in conditions which would make it possible for the Royal Navy and the R.A.F. to work in the closest cooperation. Area Combined Headquarters of the groups of Coastal Command have, from the beginning of the war, been manned jointly by the two services.

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There is in the booklet a picture panorama of the baling out, the orderly manning of the dinghy, the life jackets, smoke signals and other safety equipment, including fluorescine used to colour the sea, the gay looking rescue floats which are really like little yachts moored about the coasts, with the comforts almost of a home within, the slick launches which dash out to the rescue, the scenes of the rescue itself and a diagram illustrating the methods of reporting a distress signal and the subsequent action taken.

The Air-Sea Rescue Service is controlled by the Directorate-General of Aircraft Safety in the Air Ministry, which was established in 1940. The Directorate itself is concerned with co-ordination. It is in the closest touch with Area Combined Headquarters by day and night and with other ministries which have to provide the dinghies, equipment, food and craft which all play their part in the work of rescue. Figures of the number of rescues cannot be given but it can be said that they are increasingly successful. The Directorate has a wider responsibility than Air-Sea Rescue alone, for it is concerned with the safety of all aircrews whether they are in the air or have to come down in the sea.

Its primary object is to help aircraft in distress to reach home, be they bombers or fighters returning from a raid on the enemy, or a general reconnaissance of Coastal Command on the way back from an anti-submarine patrol over the Atlantic or a strike against an enemy ship. How the system works must remain a secret for the moment. If it is unable to bring back the aircraft by any of the secret means at its disposal, then the rescue procedure described in this account is put into immediate operation.

Here then is the story of Air-Sea Rescue. It is not complete because it is not ended. It will not end till victory is won. Many an airman has been rescued. Many more will be rescued. Some have not been. How many, the Air-Sea Rescue organisation knows. It is this knowledge which spurs them on, from the Directorate in London to the men in the launches. They are not contented men, and they will not be contented until they have devised a system so perfect that the crew of every aircraft falling into the sea will be brought back in safety to this country.

That is their sole aim and object. It has not been achieved. Perhaps it never will be; but, as the curve of rescues on the graph hanging upon the wall in the central office of the organisation rises slowly upward, the hearts of all concerned in this great and not unworthy task rise with it. Air-Sea Rescue is still young, but it has a great tradition behind it - a tradition that has grown up from the day on which men first began to sail the seas - the tradition that no one shall be left to drown if any human means can be found to save him.

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