

TOBOGGANED DOWN BLAZING STAIRS

Trapped in a bombed and blazing house while attempting to rescue a man and woman, a naval officer tore a door off its hinges and tobogganed with them down the stairs to safety.

His heroism is recorded in today's LONDON GAZETTE, which announces the award of the George Medal to Lieut. James Francis Reginald Crews, R.N.

During a raid on Plymouth, the man and woman were cut off from escape on the first floor of a burning house to which they had run for shelter.

Lieut. Crews, who had already made one rescue earlier that evening, was passing the blazing house and he heard the woman scream. He attempted to enter, but he was forced back by flames and smoke.

With a wet muffler he improvised a mask while onlookers urged him not to attempt to re-enter the building. He ignored both their warnings and the bombs which were again falling close-by and rushed into the house.

He fought his way to the first floor to find that both the man and the woman were trapped by a fallen joist in a corner of a room. The floor was alight and Lieut. Crews had to use a fire-guard as a means of crossing to them.

The woman had fainted and Lieut. Crews found that alone he was unable to release her. He managed to free the man and, together as burning wood and pieces of ceiling were falling on them, they succeeded in releasing the unconscious woman.

The two men carried her to the landing only to find that the stairs below were ablaze. Every way of escape seemed cut off. But, using a fire-iron as a lever, Lieut. Crews wrenched a door off its hinges. He told the other man to sit on it and hold the unconscious woman in his arms. Lieut. Crews then launched the door down the blazing stairway and leaped on it himself. In this way all three slid to the bottom.

The two men then lowered the woman out of a back window and no sooner were all three clear of the house, than the roof fell in, burying everything beneath it.

Lieut. Crews assured himself that the woman was not seriously injured and, in the words of an eye-witness, "grinning as though he had scored a goal in a football match", he made off to see if he could be of further help in the bombed area.

An onlooker asked Lieut. Crews for his name but he shouted "Nothing doing!" and vanished in the darkness. As a result, it was sometime before his identity could be established.

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