

RESCUE OF AIR-SEA RESCUE CREW

He learned the hard way, but 'Sweeney' Ellstock, Royal Canadian Air Force pilot, finally found out how important the work of air-sea-rescue really is. For Sweeney, an Air-Sea Rescue pilot, spent 30 hours floating in a dinghy on the North Sea before he was rescued.

'Sweeney', officially known as P.O. Al Ellstock, 25 of 1044-120th Street, Edmonton, took off recently, accompanied by three other Ansons from his squadron, to search for the crew of a Boston bomber which had come down in the North Sea. As it later proved, the Boston crew didn't need any help for their dinghy washed up on the English coast with all aboard - but it led to an exciting time for 'Sweeney' and his crew.

As the four Ansons reached a spot about 30 miles off the English coast, about 300 feet above the water, one engine of Ellstock's Anson 'packed up'. The aircraft immediately lost height and the young Canadian was obliged to make a crash landing on the 'deck' of the sea.

"Unfortunately the dinghy landed upside - down", related Ellstock, "so I dived in to reverse it. Then the other lads, all English chaps in the R.A.F., followed and let me tell you, it was wonderful the way they filed out of that door, just as though leaving the cinema. There was absolutely no panic. They are a grand crew."

The other Ansons circled around the scene of the crash and when two had to return to base because of lack of fuel, the other "stoozed" around with the idea of leading Air-Sea Rescue launches to the spot.

As the day wore on, and the last of their companions was obliged to leave the scene, the sea grew rougher and the waves towered above the tiny dinghy.

"We took it all in our stride, though," says Ellstock. "Our food and water was intact and we never had a worry, except as to whether our dinghy would survive the constant pounding. We felt sure we would be found."

"We got great relief from the chemical hot water bags, which, with the addition of water, provide heat. The only damage we suffered was a black eye to my wireless operator when he banged his head on his instruments on landing."

About 10 o'clock the following morning a Beaufighter of Coastal Command arrived on the scene and sent back a position to base, and within a few minutes another 'kite' arrived, a Hudson from a Netherlands Naval Air Service Squadron. By this time the dinghy had drifted to within 40 miles of the Dutch coast and there was constant danger from German planes.

The navigator of the Beaufighter was P.O. George Fern, D.F.M., who accompanied F/Lt. Gatwood, D.F.C., on the historic bastille day flight to Paris, when a tricolour was dropped on the Arc de Triomphe.

Four hours later, when the Air-Sea Rescue launch arrived, there was a sky umbrella of Beaufighters, Hudsons, Spitfires and Ansons watching over the dinghy, which had drifted 22 miles in 24 hours.

Picked up, the lads were sent to hospital for observation, but the next day they were back with the squadron, all hale and hearty.

Aircrews of Air-Sea Rescue squadrons are sometimes inclined to belittle their work. Not exciting enough, they claim. It may not be as exciting as some jobs. But it is important, and no one realizes that more now than 'Sweeney' Ellstock and his crew. The young pilot has made more than 30 'searches' with about 110 total 'ops' hours, and he knows now that not one of those hours was wasted.

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