

NAVAL SERVICE NETS FREEDOM OF ENTRY TO DUN LAOGHAIRE

Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council recently awarded the Irish Naval Service the Honorary Freedom of Entry to the county, which coincides with the bicentenary year of Dún Laoghaire Harbour. DLR Cathaoirleach Cllr Cormac Devlin, who engineered the award ceremony, tells Grace Heneghan it is due recognition for the Irish navy's ongoing humanitarian rescue missions in the Mediterranean.

The LE Eithne recently embarked on a further six-month humanitarian aid mission to the Mediterranean in a bid to continue saving countless number of helpless migrants who are forced to flee their war-torn homelands.

For over the past two years the Irish Naval Service has closely worked with the Italian Coastguard as part of 'Operation Pontus' in the rescue, to date, of over 15,000 migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean.

Prior to this latest departure, it was only fitting then that the largest ship in the Irish naval fleet, which continues the Defence Forces' record of international humanitarian service on behalf of the EU and the UN, was honoured by Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council with the Honorary Freedom of Entry to the county.

The civic honour of Freedom of Entry is the highest compliment a municipality can pay a naval group, so it's very fitting that Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown would recognise and publicly acknowledge the heroic duties undertaken by officers and crew of the Irish Naval Service.

UNIQUE AWARD

According to Cllr Cormac Devlin, Cathaoirleach of Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, this is the first time that a local authority in Ireland has awarded the Defence Forces and, in particular, the Naval Service, the Honorary Freedom of Entry. "So, it's very



On behalf of the Irish Naval Service, Commander Brian Fitzgerald, LE Eithne captain, accepted the 'Honorary Freedom of Entry' award from DLR Cathaoirleach Cllr Cormac Devlin.

unique and certainly in Ireland it's a very uncommon award to be presented," he added.

The custom of granting armed forces 'Freedom of Entry' dates from Medieval Europe where walled cities could make the movement of armed forces difficult. If the passing troops were deemed untrustworthy, then the city may refuse to provide them with food and shelter.

Gaining a city's trust and gaining freedom of entry was, therefore, extremely important in times past. In the case of the navy, Freedom of Entry was usually given in recognition of the defence of sea port cities and towns. "However, it's more common in Australia. In maritime circles, it's an award that would be commonly recognised, and it's a civic honour for armed forces."

NAVAL SERVICE AWARD



Dun Laoghaire - Rathdown's Cathaoirleach Cllr Cormac Devlin pictured with the crew of the LE Eithne.

So, what inspired the Cathaoirleach of Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council to engineer this prestigious ceremony? "All of us have been moved by what we've seen on practically a daily basis in the Mediterranean; vessels with hundreds of migrants fleeing their countries who have been rescued. And to know that our Defence Forces are working closely with the Italian Coastguard in these rescue missions in the Mediterranean to save lives at sea.

"I am immensely proud of the work carried out by the Defence Forces, and in particular the Irish Navy. Dun Laoghaire Harbour, as a port, is twinned with the LE Eithne, so it was very fitting that it was the LE Eithne that received the award on behalf of the entire Irish Naval Service.

"I met the crew and talked to them on the day of the award on what they have encountered, and it has to be said that a lot of them are very young and some of them are new to the navy. So, what they have encountered is very harrowing. When rescuing migrants, sadly they have also seen bodies pulled from the water. For any



The deployment of LE Eithne shows the real difference that Ireland, as a comparatively small member state, can make.

person regardless of age, this has to have a detrimental effect on them. So, I thought it was fitting as a port county having a strong connection with the maritime services that we would bestow this honour."

BICENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

On 31 May the 200th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone of Dun Laoghaire Harbour in 1817 by Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Earl Whitworth, was marked with celebrations, attended by the President of Ireland Michael D. Higgins who laid a time capsule to mark the occasion.

"So, culminating in the bicentenary celebrations of the harbour, the Freedom of Entry award took place in the backdrop of this. We knew that the LE Eithne would be deployed in early May, so we brought the event forward to the end of March to ensure the crew would be there to accept it. The public really rallied around on the day for the conferral of the award in the harbour area," noted the Cathaoirleach.

The ship, which received plenty of attention from onlookers, was docked at St Michaels Pier in Dún Laoghaire Harbour to mark the occasion. Bringing a touch of military pageantry to the proceeding was the Army No. 1 Band, which led the colour party and the crew of the LÉ Eithne into the harbour. The public were out in force to witness this very special event, with local schoolchildren waving Irish and EU flags in celebration.

"It was great to see the Army Band leading the naval crew from the LE Eithne into the harbour plaza area. It was great for the crew to witness the support and gratitude from the public on the day for the work that they undertake overseas. And this is only right, because these people – like all emergency services personnel – put their lives on the line, and the public really recognise such sacrifices.

"For example, if you look at the tragedy of Rescue 116, it's at the back of everybody's minds that it can happen at any time to any member of the emergency services.

"And taking into consideration the size of our country and the size of the population, I think everyone knows somebody who works in the emergency services or who is a first responder of some sort, so they understand the risks undertaken."

DUN LAOGHAIRE BICENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

Two hundred years after the first stone was laid to build Dun Laoghaire Harbour, the President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins, officially launched the Dun Laoghaire Bicentenary Celebrations on 31 May.

In May 1817, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Earl Whitworth, laid the foundation stone, the first stone from the quarry at Dalkey, on the site where the King George IV monument on Queens Road was subsequently erected.

In the Bicentenary Opening Ceremony, 200 years later to mark this special occasion, President Higgins buried a time capsule with letters and drawings from local school children, recent photographs of the harbour, and letters from the RNLI, Coast Guard, Coal Harbour Users Group and from Cllr Cormac Devlin, Cathaoirleach of Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council.

According to President Higgins, "Dún Laoghaire Harbour is a place deeply embedded into Irish history, and has played a profound role in the lives of generations of our people. Two hundred years ago, when the foundation stone was laid, it was envisaged that the harbour would principally be a refuge for ships from bad weather.

"Across those two centuries, the harbour has evolved, adapted and adjusted and is today very much a place of community, leisure and enjoyment, contributing greatly to the vibrancy and popularity of Dún Laoghaire."

Cathaoirleach Cllr Devlin said: "One central thread to life in Dún Laoghaire is our wonderful harbour. For 200 years it has offered refuge to sailors during inclement weather, a critical port between Ireland and the UK and a great amenity for the residents of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and beyond."

In celebrating 200 years of Dun Laoghaire Harbour history, Gerry Dunne, CEO of Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company, said the immense contribution of those who built the harbour between 1817 and 1842 must also be remembered. "The ceremony also announces the packed summer schedule of events marking the bicentenary of Dun Laoghaire Harbour taking place around Dun Laoghaire over the rest of the year."



An Cathaoirleach Cllr Cormac Devlin, President Michael D. Higgins and Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company CEO Gerry Dunne place a time capsule in the ground to mark the day.