

GARDA DROWNING RESCUES LAUDED BY LIFESAVING FOUNDATION

The bravery and drowning rescue skills regularly displayed by Garda officers have been acknowledged by the Lifesaving Foundation and the Royal Life Saving Society at a special awards ceremony in the Garda College. The Foundation now wants to collaborate with the college to study these rescues in greater detail for its future training programmes.

With Gardaí saving up to 20 people from drowning every year, many from suicide attempts, the CEO of the Lifesaving Foundation wants to work with the Garda College to establish training modules for students, and to transfer this knowledge to general rescuers worldwide.

John Connolly made his remarks at the awards presentation in the college on 17 June, wherein a framed commemorative parchment, commissioned by the Lifesaving Foundation, was presented to Assistant Garda Commissioner Jack Nolan, who accepted the accolade on behalf of the Garda Commissioner Noirín O'Sullivan.

During the ceremony the Assistant Commissioner also presented a special Honorary 2015 Ireland Medal to John Long, retired Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) Commonwealth Secretary General, for his outstanding contribution to saving lives from drowning worldwide.

Long has been a member of the UK Branch of the RLSS since 1957, and has extensive lifesaving experience from local to international level through his work with the Commonwealth RLSS and also the International Lifesaving Federation.

TRAINED RESPONDERS

In his opening remarks A/Commissioner Nolan said that the Gardaí are often the first trained responders at a drowning situation.

"Whilst there is no legal requirement on officers to attempt a rescue, we have a natural inclination to save a life. The fact that around 20 separate drowning rescues annually are carried out by the Gardaí is proof of this," he noted.



John Connolly, CEO, Lifesaving Foundation; John Long, who received the Ireland Medal for 2015; Assistant Commissioner Jack Nolan, and Brendan Donohoe, Chairman of The Lifesaving Foundation.



Pictured at the presentation of the parchment to John Long were (l-r): John Connolly, CEO, Lifesaving Foundation; Tim Bowe and Paschal Feeney, Garda Síochána Retired Members' Association (GSRMA); Chief Supt Anne Marie McMahon, Director of Training at Garda College; John Long; Assistant Commissioner Jack Nolan; Matt Givens, GSRMA, and Brendan Donohoe, Chairman, Lifesaving Foundation.

Swimming and lifesaving instruction has been provided to Garda recruits since the establishment of the force in 1922. In the first half of the 20th century the majority of rescue training was provided by the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) in Ireland, especially in Dublin as at that time the Garda Training Depot was in the Phoenix Park.

"In-service lifesaving training was provided on an 'ad hoc' basis throughout the country mainly based in cities with swimming pools with some officers qualifying as lifesaving teachers and examiners," A/Commissioner Nolan recalled.

"If one or more officers in a Garda station were active lifesavers they encouraged their colleagues to improve their swimming and rescue capabilities. There was always a willingness to learn lifesaving but not always the facilities to do so on an ongoing basis.

"It was not until the transfer of training to the college in Templemore and the building of a new swimming pool here that it was possible to provide swimming instruction and rescue training on a structured basis."

WATER SAFETY ROLES

Many Garda officers have played leading roles in both Irish Water Safety and the Royal Life Saving Society.

Garda Frank Nolan served as Chairperson of Irish Water Safety for 25 years representing Ireland at the International Life Saving Federation.

During his tenure as Assistant and Deputy Commissioner, Eamonn Doherty acted as Chairperson of the RLSS Ireland Region, and showed his commitment to saving lives from drowning by continuing in this role as Garda Commissioner. After his retirement he chaired the Irish Marine Meritorious Awards Committee.

The Gardaí regularly participate in the National Police Lifesaving Championships with the UK constabularies, and have hosted the event on a number of occasions at the Garda College; most recently in 2009 at Malahide, recording a home win in the mixed team competition.

"It is pleasing on a personal and organisational basis to receive awards recognising the outstanding humanitarian achievements of individual officers and of the training they receive," noted A/Comm Nolan.

The receipt of the inaugural Ireland

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION: The Lifesaving Foundation is an international charity devoted to saving lives from drowning. Founded and based in Ireland since 2004 it supports a number of overseas drowning prevention projects in Lesotho, Sri Lanka, South Africa and Liberia. It organises conferences to promote research into drowning prevention and rescue. *For further information visit www.lifesavingfoundation.ie or email: info@lifesavingfoundation.ie



The Ireland Medal Parchment was presented to the family of the late Commissioner Eamonn Doherty – the 'Doherty Report' led to the setting up of the Irish Marine Emergency Service (IMES) in 1991, which became the Irish Coast Guard in 2000.

Pictured (l-r): John Connolly, CEO, Lifesaving Foundation; Assistant Commissioner Jack Nolan; Chris Reynolds, Director of Irish Coast Guard; Eamonn Doherty Jnr, daughters Deidre and Fionnuala Doherty, grand-daughter Ellen Doherty, Michael Cleary, son-in-law, and Brendan Donohoe, Chairman, Lifesaving Foundation.



John Connolly presented a copy of 'DROWNING' to Garda College Director Chief Supt Anne Marie McMahon, during the proceedings.

Medal in 2004, awarded by the Royal Life Saving Society in Ireland, was significant, he said.

"It was a public recognition by a world leading drowning prevention and rescue organisation of, in the words of the medal criteria, 'the exceptional contribution made by An Garda Síochána as a body and of individual officers to the saving of lives from drowning'."

DEFINING 'DOHERTY REPORT'

In a linked ceremony the contribution of the late Garda Commissioner Eamonn Doherty to both Garda swimming rescues and the Irish Coast Guard's air/sea rescues was recognised with the presentation of a commemorative parchment to his family by Chris Reynolds, director of the Irish Coast Guard, and Edward Duffy, President of

the RLSS Ireland Branch.

Reynolds first met Commissioner Eamonn Doherty in 1990, who was leading the review group at that time on air and sea rescue in Ireland, which had been set up by the late John P. Wilson, Minister for the Marine.

“Eamonn didn’t underestimate the resistance to change that he faced, in effectively demilitarising SAR, decades ahead of other European countries and in creating a new single entity to deliver on a national maritime emergency service.”

Reynolds recalled that the ‘Doherty Report’ in 1990 on air and sea rescue fundamentally changed search and rescue forever in Ireland.

“The report led to the creation of the modern Coast Guard and to the acquisition of modern large helicopters that can reach out into the dark Atlantic on the stormiest of nights.

“The report, which contained in fact 54 recommendations, led to many more lifeboat stations on our west coast,” he noted, pointing out that later reviews didn’t have the same impact as the ‘Doherty Report’.

“Ireland now has a Coast Guard service that is a mix of full-time professional mariners, contracted helicopters and crew and thousands of volunteers; not just Coast Guard but the RNLi and CRBI.

“I believe Ireland now has a coastal and maritime emergency response system that is the envy of our European partners. And there are many men and women walking around Ireland that owe their lives to Eamonn’s insight and perseverance.”

DROWNING RESCUE STATS

The CEO of the Lifesaving Foundation said that from his studies of the Garda Roll of Honour, he estimated there has been 2,000 Garda swimming rescues since the force was established in 1922.

In fact, the latest Garda rescue research undertaken by John Connolly reveals a long and proud history of drowning rescues by members of the force:

- The earliest Scott Medal awarded for a swimming rescue was the 11th medal awarded in 1927 to Garda John O’Brien for two drowning rescues at Courtown Harbour Beach.
- A total of 32 Scott Medals have been awarded to serving Gardaí from 1922 to 2014 for acts of bravery involving swimming rescues.

FACFFILE – 2015 HONORARY IRELAND MEDAL RECIPIENT

In recognition of his exceptional contribution to saving lives from drowning worldwide, a special Honorary 2015 Ireland Medal was awarded to John Long, retired RLSS Commonwealth Secretary General.

Between 1957 and 1991 John Long was a police officer initially in the Suffolk Constabulary and later in the Warwickshire Constabulary, rising

to the rank of Chief Superintendent. During 34 years of police service he was responsible for the police lifesaving teams in both Suffolk and Warwickshire.

He has been a member of the RLSS UK Branch since 1957, holding various posts in two different branches. He has been President of the Warwick Life Saving Club since its formation in 1982, Chairman of the RLSS UK West Midlands Region to 2011, and is currently President of the RLSS UK Warwickshire Branch.

He was appointed Secretary General of the Royal Life Saving Commonwealth Society in 1992, tasked with promoting the saving of lives from drowning throughout the British Commonwealth. He served in this role with distinction until his retirement in 2010.

Following in the steps of RLSS founder William Henry, John Long travelled the world founding new national lifesaving organisations in many countries including Uganda, Lesotho and India. He is Patron of India’s national lifesaving organisation the Rashtriya Lifesaving Society India.

In 1999 he was instrumental in the founding of the RLSS Republic of Ireland Branch’s Overseas Aid Project, which is now The Lifesaving Foundation.



- The majority of rescues take place in rivers.
- The majority of casualties rescued by Gardaí deliberately enter the water.
- The majority of those rescued by Gardaí are young males.
- Many casualties were drinking alcohol before they entered the water.
- The majority of rescues take place at night.
- Rescues take place all year round.
- In the majority of situations the casualty is removed from the water alive.
- Most casualties do not resist being rescued.
- Two or more Gardaí working together were involved in most rescues.
- No serving Garda has died in a drowning rescue since 1940.

In a recent radio interview a representative of the Garda College said their

programme aimed to help students develop a strong ethos and a sense of service to the community.

“So, the history of Garda drowning rescues and the rescue of individuals trapped in fires clearly proves that the training provided in this college is doing a lot right,” said John Connolly.

In his closing remarks, he also requested that the Lifesaving Foundation be allowed work with college staff to establish what can be used in future training programmes for students, and what can be transferred to general rescuers worldwide.

“Previous research facilitated by Garda Commissioners Eamonn Doherty and Noel Conroy helped to open new windows on how and why people drown. I am sure that there is much more that can be learned and shared with lifesavers worldwide,” he concluded.