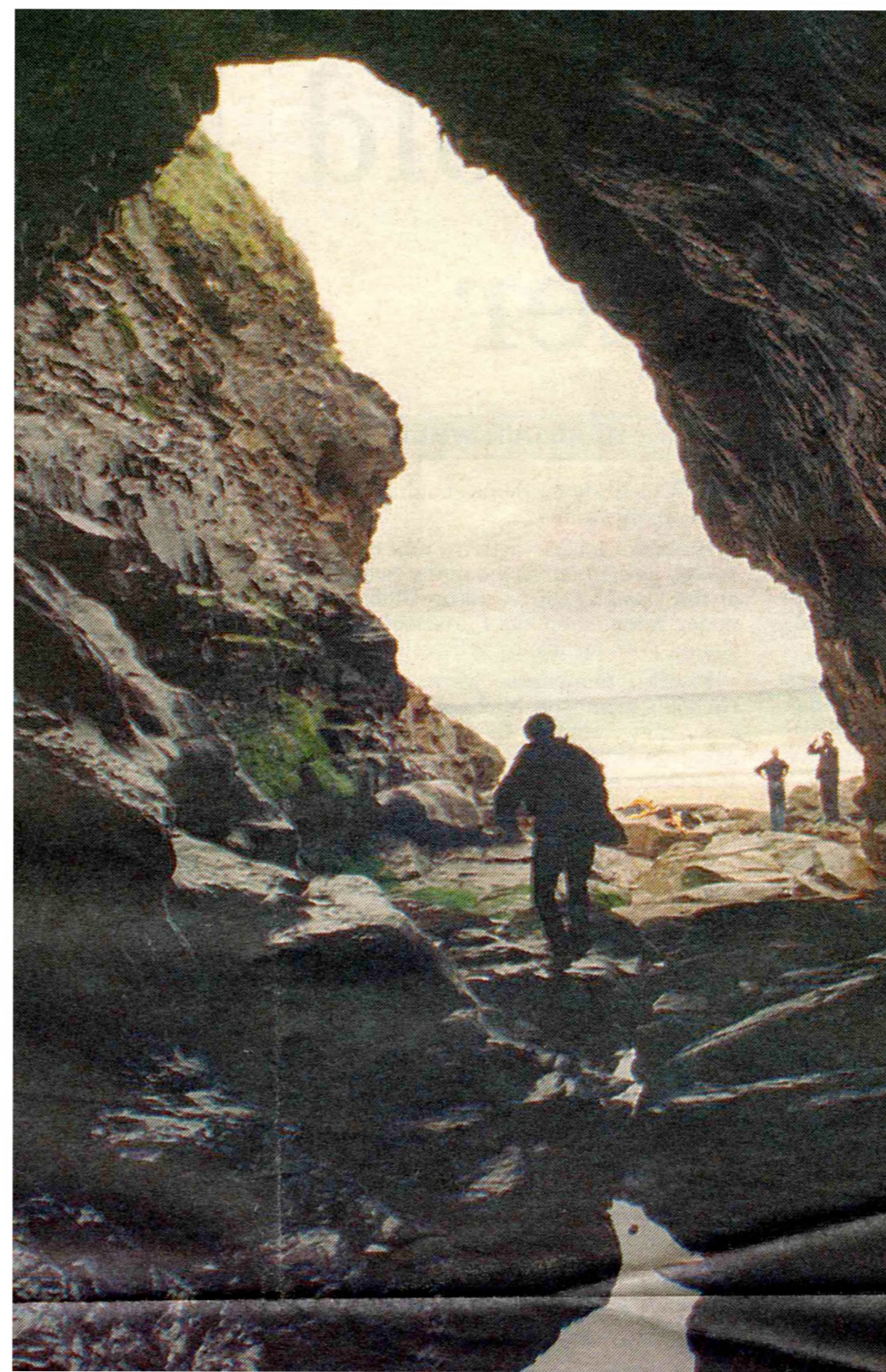


The last rescue of D517

The Last Trip of D517

Our I.L.B. (service number D517, named 'Spirit of the Postal and Courier Service, Royal Engineers') which had arrived at our station only in May 1997 and had been officially handed over to us on the 13th. September 1997 [see Trio issues 166 and 169] set out on what was to be her last journey. She was launched shortly before 5.00pm. in relatively calm conditions with a crew of three men to go to the aid of a boy who had been swept into the sea at Tintagel. During the trip to Tintagel further information was radioed to the crew that the boy was by now ashore in a cave with his father at Bossinney, a mile or so further to the north of Tintagel. Once round Tintagel Head the boat had to slow down due to worsening sea conditions and finally arrived on the scene where there was an R.A.F. helicopter already searching. The I.L.B. was directed by the helicopter crew to investigate what proved to be items of clothing floating about, then began a search of some caves. Two caves were found to be empty but the boy and his father were spotted in a third cave. After assessing the situation the crew of the I.L.B. felt there was a reasonable chance of saving the two if the I.L.B. could be steered backwards into the cave. The anchor was dropped and the boat motored astern whilst the anchor rope was paid out over the bow. The wave pattern at the time allowed this to proceed until the I.L.B. was inside the cave mouth but suddenly three huge waves hit the boat in quick succession; the first slammed the boat against the roof of the cave smashing the bow board and the radio, the next wave swamped the boat and stopped the engine, and the next washed two of the crew right out of the boat and into the cave.



Heroes of sea cave rescue

Father and son trapped in cave

A difficult and dangerous service by Port Isaac's D class inshore lifeboat has led to the award of the RNLI's Thanks on Vellum to her helmsman Kevin Dingle and to a crew member, Mike Edkins.

The service, on 6 September 1998, made headline news when the two lifeboatmen became trapped in a cave and the station's lifeboat became a total loss.

The rescue was a classic example of teamwork by the emergency services, with Padstow's all-weather lifeboat, Coastguards, Auxiliary Coastguards, an RAF and a Royal Navy helicopter all playing their part.

The events began when Port Isaac's D class was launched after the Coastguard alerted the station to a boy being swept out to sea at Bossinney, some seven miles to the northeast.

Although the wind was offshore and only around Force 3 a very big swell was running up the coast, reaching 15ft to 20ft high where it felt the effects of shallow water.

Launching at 1656 the lifeboat, *Spirit of the PCSRE* with helmsman Kevin Dingle and crew members Mike Edkins and Paul Pollington aboard, was able to maintain full speed down the swells until having to reduce speed for the broken water off Tintagel Head. Cutting inside The Sisters rocks the lifeboat reached Bossinney inside half an hour, arriving at the same time as



Helmsman Kevin Dingle



Crew Member Mike Edkins



thrown against the roof with great force - breaking the canopy and an oar. Paul feared that she would be washed inside the cave and crush his fellow crew members.

The engine had stopped and was full of water, so Paul began to haul the lifeboat back out of the cave using the anchor warp.

This took considerable effort, but he managed it and, once outside the cave, began the post-capsize drill to restart the engine.

The downdraught from the helicopter had been blowing the lifeboat clear of the shore, but it moved away before Paul managed to restart the engine and the inflatable blew round broadside to the rocks. It was obvious that she had to be abandoned and the helicopter moved in to winch Paul to safety.

The lifeboat was washed steadily into the cave, hitting Mike Edkins on the way with such force that it knocked him free from the rocks which trapped him and allowing him to climb up close to Kevin Dingle.

Recede

The D class began to break up, but the wreckage took some force out of the waves as they came into the cave. It was now about 1800.

Two caves proved to be empty, but Kenny Richards, the Port Isaac Coastguard auxiliary in charge, had identified one particular cave as a likely spot and directed the lifeboat towards it from a position on the rocks.

Glanced

All three crew thought they could anchor and veer down into the cave, despite the sea conditions, and had actually reached the mouth of the cave and glimpsed the two casualties huddled at the back when disaster struck.

A large breaker bore down on the lifeboat, but Kevin Dingle kicked the lifeboat ahead to encourage the bow to lift, and the wave broke heavily just after the lifeboat had ridden it.

The next wave was the problem. It was described as 'a wall of water' and although Kevin kicked the engine ahead again to lift the bow the prop could not find any grip in the aerated water left from the first wave.

The lifeboat simply didn't lift to the sea, and a mass of solid green water swept through her with tremendous force, sweeping Kevin Dingle and Mike Edkins out over the stern.

Both men were dashed on the shore and swept into the cave, Mike Edkins was trapped for a while, wedged by his chest and back and, as the waves broke over him, he felt that he was starting to drown.

Kevin Dingle was more fortunate in that he did not become wedged, but he had to make a supreme effort and use the surge of the seas to climb to relative safety inside the cave. From here he was able to shout encouragement to the two casualties who were about 30ft away from him.

Meanwhile outside the cave Paul Pollington was left alone in the lifeboat, which had dragged her anchor and was now inside the cave mouth being

into the entrance, or the helicopter from trying to float a lifejacket in on a line.

All efforts were unsuccessful and with high water at 1839 and darkness falling everyone settled down for a very anxious wait.

The Tyne held station off the cave, illuminating the mouth with her searchlight, while coxswain Alan Tarby fought to keep her in position as close as he dared in the heavy swells. He estimated them at about 15ft high, although those ashore thought they were nearer 20ft.

The cliff rescue team started to make their preparations and positioned themselves about 150ft above the entrance - where they were joined by other Coastguards, most of the Port Isaac crew and helpers and even the Honorary Secretary of Rock lifeboat station.

Relief

Finally, at about 2130 the tide had fallen enough for the crew members inside the cave to help the casualties towards the inside of the entrance and for the Coastguard team to reach the outside.

There was great relief when all four were brought out safely with only relatively minor injuries and airlifted to hospital. The lifeboat crew were shocked, badly bruised and suffering from inhaling petrol fumes but were discharged later that night. The casualties were also shocked and bruised, and were suffering from hypothermia. The father had a dislocated shoulder and both were detained in hospital.

A replacement lifeboat was sent from RNLI headquarters and by 0300 the next morning the station was operating normally again - even before the wreckage of the ill-fated D517 had been recovered with the aid of the cliff rescue team. She was so severely damaged and wedged in position that she had to be cut up and dismantled before the wreckage could be removed.

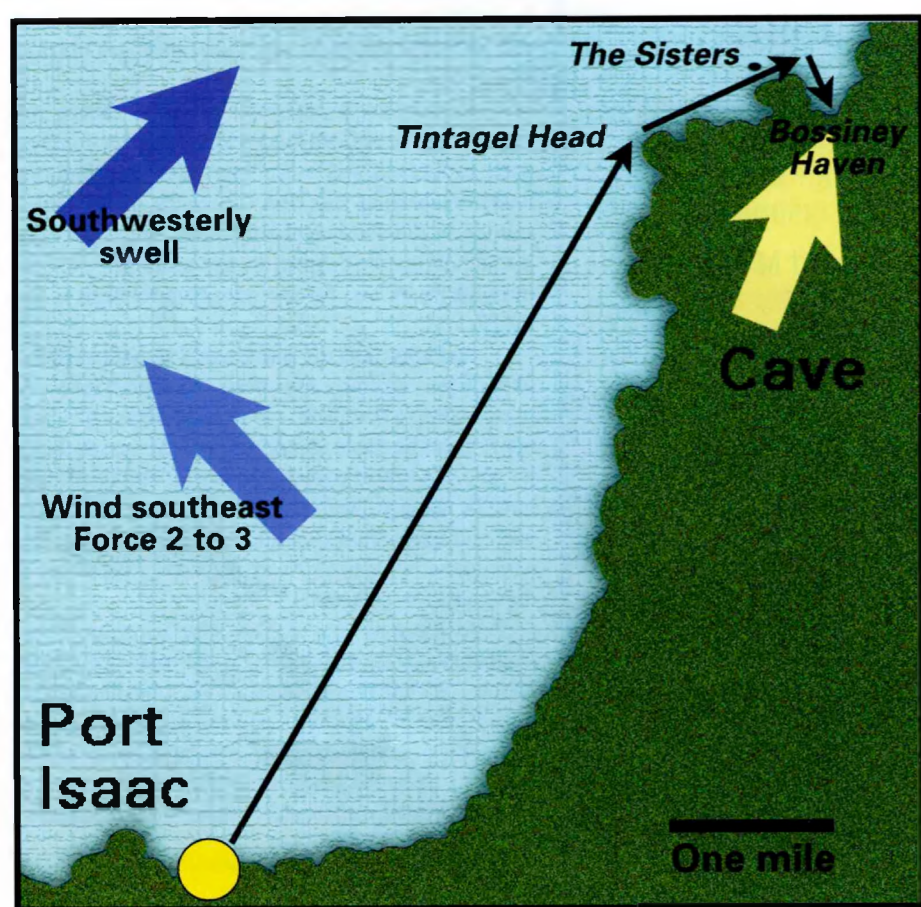
The remaining crewman pulled the I.L.B. on its anchor rope back into deeper water and he then tried to re-start the engine. In spite of his efforts he was not successful and shortly afterwards he was winched up into the helicopter still hovering overhead.

Terrifying Ordeal

Meanwhile the four people in the cave were being washed about by the increasingly rough seas and the ever-rising tide. Their ordeal was to last for several hours until the tide turned and eventually ebbed far enough

... extract from Trio article, October 1998

The lifeboat: D class D517 Spirit of the PCSRE
Thanks on Vellum Helmsman Kevin Dingle Crew member Mike Edkins Chairman's letter of thanks Crew member Paul Pollington



PRIDE OF OUR NATION



LIFESAVER of the year

PAUL POLLINGTON, KEVIN DINGLE, MIKE EDKINS



HEROES: The trio got their award from Zoe Ball

THREE lifeboatmen who had a miracle escape rescuing a boy and his dad were honoured yesterday. Kevin Dingle, 22, Mike Edkins, 37, and Paul Pollington, 42, were thrown into the sea as they saved hoteller Nick Leeds, 52, and stepson James, 11, from a cave filling with water.

Kevin said: "We don't do it for the recognition but this has been the best day of my life." Paul said: "It's nice to know people appreciate what we do. That's one of the things that makes me proud to be British." And Mike added modestly: "We're all in awe of the courageous stories we have heard today."

