



Sunderland AGM – May 2008

At our Annual General Meeting in Sunderland this year (May 2008), we stayed at the Roker Hotel.

Imagine our surprise when one of the waitresses asked about our group. As you know we are not shy about saying who we are and who we represent and the National Committee members told Janet the waitress that there would be approximately 65 other ladies joining the group the next day, from all over Britain and that we were all members of The Watch Ashore a national association supporting the Merchant Navy.

Janet was delighted and said that her grandfather had been in the Merchant Navy and she would bring in some information about him.

The following is a précis of what she brought in, and there are attachments that you can download to read more. Her father had contacted the newspapers to tell them of his father's days in a freezing hell.

Sinking of the Empire Wave – The cabin boy's untold story as reported in Sunderland Echo November 9th 2000 (www.sunderlandecho.com) and also The Sunday Post October 30th 1960.

...In 1941 my father James (Jim) Adie was 16 years old, living in Southwick and was given the job of cabin boy on a small merchant ship (about 10,000tons) the Empire Wave. The ship was to make its maiden voyage in a convoy protected by frigates to Halifax Nova Scotia. However, the ship developed engine problems and was left by the convoy, a lone and unprotected target which was

The Watch Ashore



soon spotted and tracked by a German U boat. On October 2nd 1941 at 2am under the cover of darkness the U boat fired torpedoes and the order was given to abandon ship. My father was lucky in that they managed to free their lifeboat and 29 men rowed the lifeboat away from the ship to prevent it going down. Their position was 500 miles from Iceland.

Petty Officer Cameron, took command of the lifeboat and decided the best chance they had was to row towards Iceland doing navigation by the sun and stars. The men were only dressed in basic clothing and during the first days they rowed pretty well and also erected a sail which was used to catch rain water. As the days progressed hypothermia developed and also many started suffering frostbite. They were becoming exhausted , 2 died. Those who could use the oars had to concentrate on rowing and after about 14 days the men were all close to death but they launched their last flare which was seen and an Icelandic fishing trawler found them and winched them on board. They were winched on board and taken to Reykjavik and given medical aid. Two more men died in Iceland and everyone lost some part of their body due to frostbite, my father was lucky and only lost some toes! ...

Janet has kindly given copies of this account and also a cartoon depicting the event for us to put on our website, our thanks to her and her family.