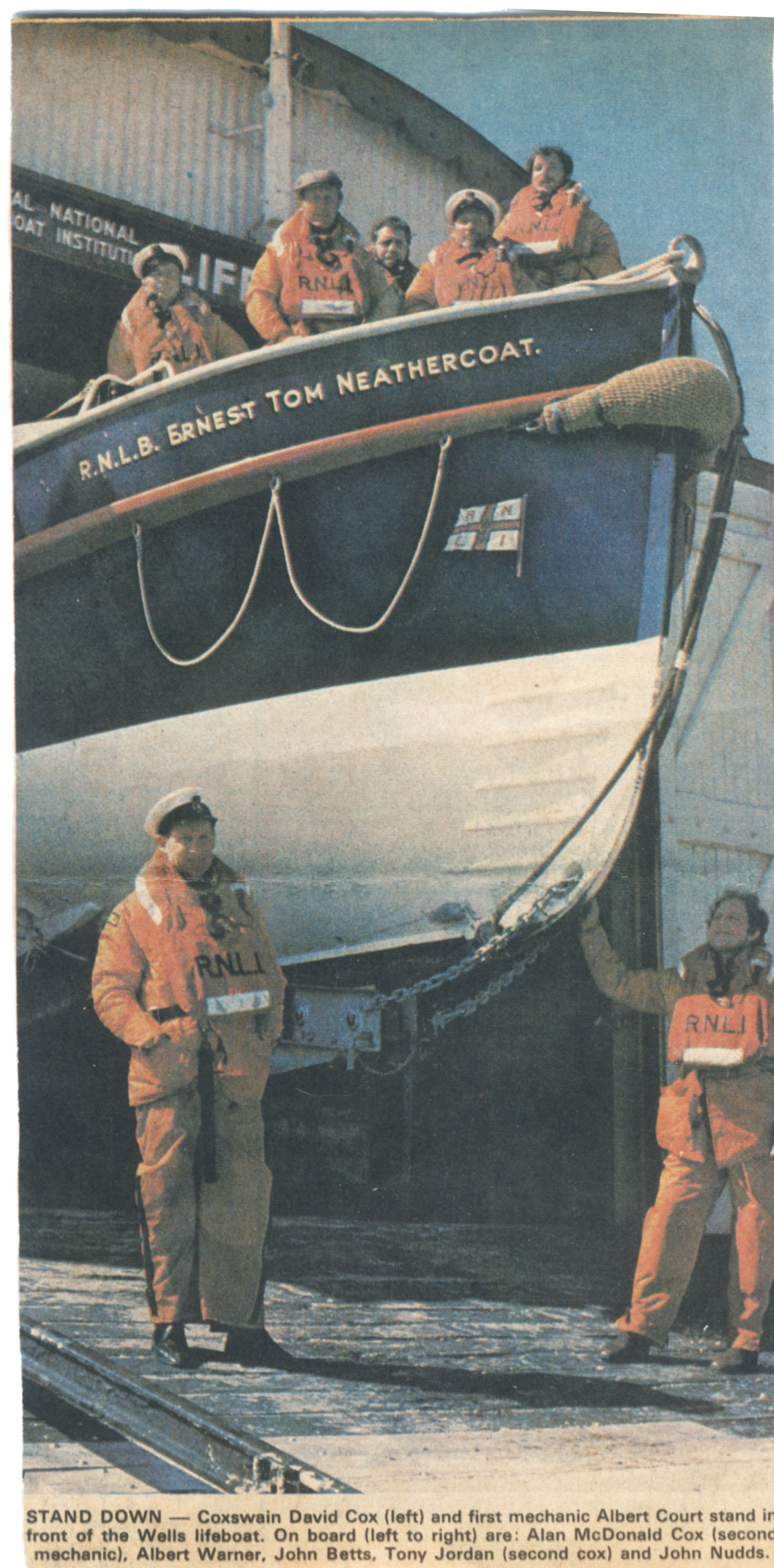


# Silver medal service to the *Savinesti*

## 15 February 1979



STAND DOWN — Coxswain David Cox (left) and first mechanic Albert Court stand in front of the Wells lifeboat. On board (left to right) are: Alan McDonald Cox (second mechanic), Albert Warner, John Betts, Tony Jordan (second cox) and John Nudds.



Ernest Tom Neathercoat



Savinesti

### Sea heroes who beat an Arctic hell

It was Thursday, February 15th. Britain was numbed in the grip of an Arctic winter.

And for Wells lifeboatmen, it was a day they'll never forget. It started with the maroons sounding at 10 a.m. . . and turned into the most frightening ordeal most of the crew have known. The men rallied to the call on that freezing morning three months ago.

But the weather looked too foul for Wells' 37 ft open lifeboat to try to reach a ship in trouble 17 miles off the North Norfolk coast.

And Croner lifeboat couldn't launch, either, because waves were breaking up the slipway.

#### THE GALE

Wells Coxswain David Cox had little choice. He gave the order to set to sea in the worst conditions he had ever seen.

His brave decision was the right one. And it earned him and his crew medals for gallantry which are being presented today by the Duke of Kent.

The lifeboat was launched at 10.30 and it was a harrowing experience.

For it was not just the biting cold of a North-easterly gale. The force 11 winds were whipping up the sea into 40 ft waves.

The men could see only a few yards in front of them because driving sleet and snow blanketed their vision.

They all knew the route like the back of their hands. But it was little consolation for the task of searching for the Rumanian ship and her crew of 28 when they reached the whelking grounds.

#### THE BUMP

Following a compass course, the coxswain knew they were just about there when he spotted the outline of a ship.

"We just bumped into them," he said, putting it down to luck. But it was more likely his own skilful navigation.

The 4000-ton Rumanian vessel had trouble with her engines and steering. Her skipper was worried about being driven on to shoals in the area.

The lifeboatmen stood by for two hours — and the coxswain's big fear was confirmed.

The Humber lifeboat was delayed by the weather and arrived later than expected with a tug to

tow the crippled vessel back to the Humber.

David Cox was worried that it would be dark by the time they were relieved and he would have to navigate his way blindfold in treacherous seas.

"I wanted to be relieved by 2 o'clock so we could get back before dark and see the coastline. But they held us out until gone three."

The crew were on their last legs. The coxswain knew that if any of them was lost overboard they may



Graham Walker, Wells lifeboat crewman, who took part in the operation, but is not in the picture as he was on holiday when it was taken.

never have survived the shock and intense cold.

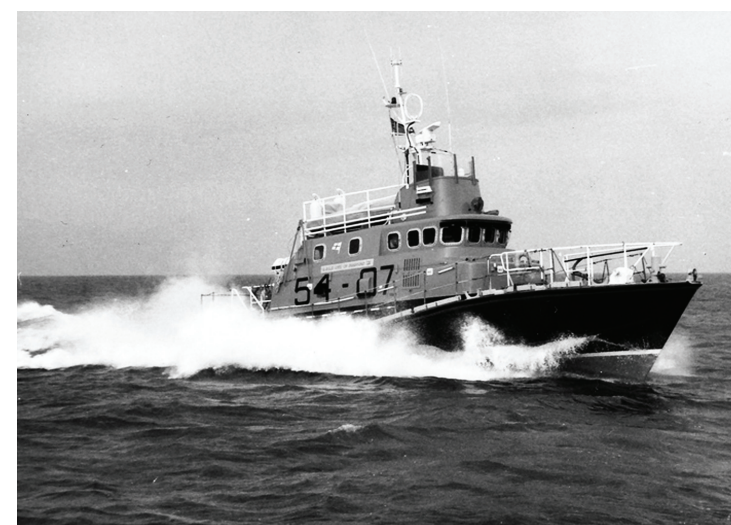
But they chose not to strap themselves into the open boat and clung for life to the safety rail.

Their first glimpse of land was a light on Brancaster Golf Club but it took them another three hours to

edge their way along the coast using a dredge all the way.

A fishing boat was waiting for them at the entrance to the

harbour.



City of Bradford IV



MFV Strandline



Painting of Savinesti rescue by Mick Bensley

### Lifeboat heroes at Wells win awards

Wells lifeboat service to a disabled Rumanian ship in a blizzard and storm force winds has resulted in its coxswain, David Cox, being awarded the RNLI silver medal for gallantry and each member of the crew being awarded medal service certificates.

In an RNLI summary of the awards, it is stated that Mr. Cox has been awarded the silver medal for the skill, courage and expert seamanship he displayed on a service to the disabled freighter Savinesti on February 15th.

#### NAMES

The freighter was in danger of running aground, and the open lifeboat spent over 11 hours at sea in violent storms, a continuous blizzard, and with huge seas washing

right over her. The crew were so cold when they returned that most were unable to walk, and two of the men did not recover complete feeling in their fingers for two weeks.

The crew who have been awarded medal service certificates are: A. Jordan, A. Court, A. Cox, A. Warner, J. Nudds, G. Walker and J. Betts.

Coxswain of Humber lifeboat Brian Bevan has been awarded the RNLI bronze medal for his part in the service. The Humber boat relieved the Wells boat at the scene of the casualty and escorted the Rumanian vessel to the safety of the River Humber.

Skipper of the Wells fishing vessel Strandline Mr. John Ward, is to receive a signed letter of thanks from the chairman of the RNLI, Major-General Ralph Farrant, for his help in guiding the lifeboat into Wells.

#### BROKEN DOWN

An account of the incident says at 10 a.m. on February 15th — the first day of the deep snows which paralysed Norfolk — the Savinesti was reported broken down and dragging her anchor about 16 miles off Wells. There were 28 people on board and the ship was in danger of running aground.

Wells lifeboat, the Ernest Tom Neathercoat, was launched into a force ten north-east gale with a continuous snow blizzard giving poor visibility.

As the lifeboat left harbour she met the full force of the wind and the heavy rolling seas washed right over her. She was standing by the casualty soon after 1 p.m., by which time the wind had increased to north-east force 10-11 and there was a heavy swell with breaking seas of 40 ft. Visibility was nil at times, and the air temperature was below zero.

#### SEASWEPT

On the return journey snow was blown directly into the cockpit and one crew member had to keep clearing the screen and compass glass. By 6.15 p.m. shore lights were remaining seven miles, took two hours. By 8.26 p.m. the lifeboat was just off Wells. And the local fishing vessel Strandline came down the channel to provide light to guide the lifeboat in. The lifeboat left the harbour bar at 9.10 p.m., being completely swept by three seas as she did so.

The lifeboat had been at sea for 11 hours 24 minutes. The coxswain had been at the helm for all but half an hour of this time, realising that the second coxswain was required to tend the dredge on which their safety depended.



The Wells lifeboat crew, front, from left to right, Mr. David Cox (coxswain), Mr. Tony Jordan (second cox), Mr. John Betts, Mr. Albert Court (first mechanic), Mr. Alan McDonald Cox (second mechanic), back, Mr. John Nudds, Mr. Albert Warner and Mr. Graham Walker.

### Lifeboat heroism honoured

WELLS lifeboat coxswain David Cox travelled to London on Tuesday to receive a silver medal from the Duke of Kent for his brave part in a sea drama at the height of the winter.

Mr. Cox was at the helm of the

37 ft. open lifeboat for ten hours, struggling to bring the boat and crew safely back from a trip to stand by a disabled freighter until the Humber lifeboat could reach it.

After receiving the medal, he admitted that at one time on the night of February 15th he thought

that he and his crew would never set foot on dry land. Fortunately, they reached Wells safely but exhausted from a 12-hour trip in Force 10 gales and blizzard conditions. It was a day none of the crew or their families would ever forget.



The Medallists (from front, l. to r.): Superintendent Coxswain Brian Bevan. (First row) Motor Mechanic Bill Sayers, Assistant Mechanic Ronald Sayers, Crew Member Michael Storey and Crew Member Peter Jordan, Humber. (Second row) Second Coxswain Dennis Bailey, Snr, Humber, Coxswain David Cox, Wells, Crew Member Sydney Rollison, Humber, Motor Mechanic Cyril Alcock, Plymouth and Crew Member Dennis Bailey, Jr., Humber. (Third row) Coxswain William Morris, St David's, Coxswain Evan Jones, Burnmouth, Coxswain/Mechanic William Rees Holmes, Angle and Second Coxswain Patrick Marshall, Plymouth. (Back row) Coxswain Arthur Curnow, Torbay, Acting Second Coxswain Seamus McCormack, Rosslare Harbour, Coxswain/Mechanic Charles Bowry, Sheerness, Coxswain John Petit, St Peter Port, and Coxswain Fred Walkington, Bridlington.

photograph by courtesy of Peter Hadfield

