

## **Portland Harbour Sunday, 17 October 1948**

At 2220 hours, a 36ft open motor launch left Weymouth Pier to return to HMS ILLUSTRIOUS moored in Portland Harbour. The boat was carrying 50 men, 5 crew and the rest, liberty men returning to the Ship after an evening ashore in Weymouth. The initial part of the journey across Weymouth Bay was a little turbulent, but as the liberty boat passed through the northern entrance of the massive breakwater of Portland Harbour, it was immediately in great trouble. A southwesterly gale with 30-knot winds and blinding rain squalls was a frightening experience for these young men and, worsening every moment, the boat began to ship water.

Men began bailing out water with their caps, buckets and anything which came to hand. Others attempted to form a breakwater with their bodies. The young Midshipman in charge of the boat did all he could to keep the boat trimmed and the bows out of the water but the liberty boat was foundering, and sank some 60 yards astern of ILLUSTRIOUS. Spotlights were trained on the sea, rescue boats were launched from ILLUSTRIOUS and neighbouring ships. Ropes and buoys were thrown from the carrier. There was incredible bravery, strength, resolve, courage and character displayed that night. Men dived from the gangway to assist those struggling to stay afloat. But despite all their efforts, 29 of the 50 onboard the liberty boat were lost.

That night we lost friends, shipmates, brothers, sons, young men in the prime of their lives, National servicemen along with regulars, old hands with new, some of the best and brightest. A tragedy by any measure, and made even more distressing by the fact that some had survived the war only to succumb to the capricious sea.

### **Those who died:**

Roy Ashwin, Roy Binks, Walter Black, Robert Blakey, Kenneth Brenchley, Richard Clough, Geoffrey Collier, Richard Cope, Lewis Crowson, John Davies, Dennis Elwis, William Evers, Robert Fennell, Geoffrey Hughes, Eric Jack, Thomas Leonard, Roy Lindsay, Leonard Llewellyn, Eric Marshall, Ian Martin, James McBain, Clement Mitchell, Edward Morrison, John Neale, Edward Rye, Edmund Seaford, Ian Still, Geoffrey Williams, Alan Young.