

15 MARCH 2000

Fleetwood Medals Presented

On Wednesday 15th March in the Conservative Club in Fleetwood, England, Mr. Tom MacLoughlin, Superintendent of the Mercantile Marine Office Dublin presented Irish Merchant Marine service medals and certificates to the relatives of two Fleetwood men lost on the Dublin Trawler *Leukos* in March 1940. These were the Skipper James Potter Thomason and Deckhand, Tom Mulligan. They were located through an appeal in the *Fleetwood Gazette* made by Peter Mulvany who has done sterling work in this regard. The event also reunited two cousins who had not seen each other for sixty years.

In his speech Mr. McLoughlin said it was a great honour on behalf of the Irish Government to make these presentations to the relatives of the two seamen from the community who had so tragically lost their lives in the line of duty. That traditional links between Ireland and the North West of England were nowhere stronger than between the fishing communities.



L. to R. Tom Mulligan Vice. Chair. RNPS Fleetwood, a nephew of Tom Mulligan; Ms Iris Butler, grand-daughter of Tom Mulligan; Mrs Mary Butler, daughter of Tom Mulligan; Tom McLoughlin, who made the presentations; George Wohlers RNPS, who received the medal on behalf of his wife Joyce, a niece of Skipper P. Thomason; Lt. Cmdr. W.J. Williams RN (Rtd) Chair. RNPS Fleetwood and Peter Mulvany.

Photo courtesy Fleetwood Gazette.

**Address by Mr. Tom Mc Loughlin, Superintendent
of the Mercantile Marine Office, Dublin.**

**On the occasion of the presentation of Valour Awards to the Relatives of
James Potter Thomason and Thomas Mulligan in Fleetwood, Lancashire.**

15 March 2000

It is my great honour to be here this evening with you, on behalf of the Irish Government, to present medals and certificates to the relatives of two seamen from this Community who tragically lost their lives in the line of duty. The traditional links between Ireland and the North West region of England, both social and commercial, are well founded - nowhere more so than between the fishing communities.

As you will be aware James Potter Thomason and Thomas Mulligan were on board the Irish Registered Steam Trawler Leukos when she was attacked and sunk off the Donegal Coast by the German submarine U-38. She was the first Irish vessel to suffer fatalities as a result of belligerent action. In all 11 brave crew members, 7 of whom were British Nationals, were lost in the attack which occurred on 9 March 1940 - 60 years ago last week. It pleases me that these men's deeds have not been forgotten despite the passage of time and that we are gathered here today to honour and celebrate their memory. Indeed the debt of gratitude we owe these brave men, both of whom made the ultimate sacrifice in carrying out their duties, should **never** be forgotten.

The seafaring history of both Britain and Ireland is long and proud. As island nations our reliance on the sea as a means of trade is enormous. Our dependence therefore on those who work at sea cannot be overstated. At the best of times a seafarer's occupation is a hazardous one - open to the vagaries of the elements and at the mercy of nature's whims. The sea can be a beautiful friend but a deadly enemy. When the seafarer's task is further complicated by the real dangers of war we can begin to realise the extent of the bravery of the men who served on board vessels at that time. While knowing the personal risks involved in their work they also recognised the importance of keeping the vital supply lines open, and they did so with admirable courage.

Of those men serving on Irish registered vessels during World War II, 156 were lost at sea. 18 of these men were British Nationals, 4 of whom were from the Fylde area of Fleetwood. In addition to James Potter Thomason and Thomas Mulligan, Tony Pill and Robert Sumler also died as a result of the attack on the Leukos. Tony Pill's relatives will travel to Dublin in the near future to receive his award. However, despite many avenues of inquiry no

relatives of Robert Sumler who, at 16 years of age was the youngest seafarer to lose his life on an Irish vessel, have been traced. If anyone in attendance here this evening knows the whereabouts of Robert Sumler's relatives I would be delighted to hear from them.

I would like to introduce a man who travelled with myself from Dublin to be here this evening - Mr. Peter Mulvany. Peter's grand uncle Patrick Mc Carthy was also lost on board the Leukos. It is thanks to Peter's tireless research, and many hours of chasing up on every lead, that relatives of many of the men were traced. Indeed it is thanks to Peter's research that we are here this evening to honour James Potter Thomason and Thomas Mulligan.

Finally before I proceed with the presentation of awards I will close with the following thought. There is a concept which has stood the test of time and which I think appropriate to mention this evening. That concept is "duty and service". The seafarers who we honour today were no strangers to that concept. They did their duty, took risks and made sacrifices. Let us keep that to the forefront of our thoughts this evening.

And so I would now like to call upon the relatives to come forward and receive awards in honour of James Potter Thomason and Thomas Mulligan.