

# Ship in a gale

# Keeping watch on a Spanish armada



The L.E. Emer . . . one of five Irish Naval warships.

THE Navy has detained 517 vessels since 1976. The figures show an increase, with most of the ships coming from Spain.

In 1976, two Spanish vessels were arrested; two French, two British, one Belgian, one Soviet, one Rumanian. Last year 27 Spanish-registered vessels were arrested, 22 "Brit-Spanish" (Spanish trawlers registered in Britain); nine Irish-Spanish, two French, one Belgian, one British and eight Irish.

The sea is divided into zones which are patrolled by the Navy. But five ships are not adequate to cover the area inside the 200-mile

limit. There is a specific "box" off the North, West and South coasts, called the "Spanish Box", where the Spanish cannot fish. Its limits off the coast vary from about 60 to 150 miles.

The Spanish Box does not include the Porcupine Bank, off the West coast where Spaniards have been fishing for centuries. Spain's insatiable appetite for fish makes poaching worth the risk.

Many trawlers belong to wealthy fleets and the fin are only an overhead. The Emer spotted two other trawlers while arresting the Gonzalez Parada but bad weather prevented safe boarding.

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Officer and LS climbed up side it with

were house in seawater fish was

overpowering.

Midge and Matthew stayed on the trawler. Getting me back on to the dingy with Kevin and Austin was difficult as the gale was increasing and it was hard to judge when to jump.

Midge and Matthew had had enough of living on the trawler by Wednesday morning when they handed her over to the Gardai and an interpreter.

They had taken turns to sleep and declined an offer of strong Spanish wine. Dinner on the trawler was Irish; ribs, spuds and cabbage. Fish was for tea.

After a sleepless and unsettling night, I nibbled bread, but it came up again. It wasn't consoling to hear that even seasoned sailors get sick, and some of the men were feeling queasy.

LATER I was on my bunk, wishing we weren't 150 miles out. When I heard the noise of falling cutlery and chairs in the wardroom, I got up. The chairs were tied to the table and we had dinner in armchairs. I only ate the starter (melon) and dessert (rice).

In the galley, Able Cook Mick Alcock and Ordinary Cook John Mullins fitted railings to the vast cooker and tied down the pots.

Able just means longer experienced. There was nothing ordinary about John's cooking.

In the Ratings' Mess, I sat down just as the ship rolled, and was rammed into the

edge of a table. Each mess has a bar and video. The men were so busy, however, that there was little time for anything but work, meals and sleep.

Sometimes the ship is out weeks and the lads are eager to visit towns. Galway is the favourite because the night-life is lively, with Dun Laoghaire and Dublin in second place.

But the ship normally has to anchor in Galway Bay these days instead of tying-up at the docks, because she must be

prepared to rush off in an emergency.

On Thursday morning Emer flexed her guns on a calm sea. Before the firing exercise began I warned all ships on the radio.

The guns spat fire and a sulphuric smell lingered. The gunners were strapped on, peering into the sights.

As I cringed at the piercing rattle, I remembered that Emer had fired on the Marita Anne. Not long after that, people somehow forgot we had an Irish Navy. It didn't seem fair.



Geraldine in the engine room watching Able Mechanician Martin Murphy at work on the two engines.

## What attracts men to a sea career

MANY of the sailors I met come from maritime backgrounds, but the sea in itself is often regarded as incidental to the job.

Engineering Officer Terry McGibney, from Dublin, was "drawn by the engineering side" and now has between 13 and 16 men working under him at any one time.

Leading Seaman Sean Daly, however, has the proverbial seafaring blood. "When the other fellows were out playing, I was out with my uncle in the boat," he says. He comes from Kenmare and has sailors on both sides of his family.

Able Seaman Michael Brick, from Tralee, has been in the Navy for seven years. His father was a fisherman and Michael was attracted to the Navy "because I can see different countries". He lives in married quarters at the Naval base.

One of the things you have to get used to in the Navy is the hard work. When the ship is at sea, the crew can't escape the atmosphere of work. It's a badly-paid and dangerous job but there is a chummy

atmosphere which is hard to find in other workplaces.

The Captain, Lt. Cmdr. Brendan Stockdale, has been at sea for 25 years. His father was with Irish Shipping during the Emergency, his grandfather was in the Royal Navy and he has two brothers at sea also. CPO Martin Carroll, the Coxswain, first went out in a currach at the age of two-and-a-half. "The local fishermen would take me out".

Martin joined the Navy at 17 and is now the highest-ranking Non-Commissioned Officer. His work ranges from helmsmanship and administration to training divers — he specialises in diving and tasks range from finding wrecks and human bodies to disentangling nets from the ship's propellers.

The strength of the Navy decreased from 934 in June, 1986, to 841 in February this year. Pay ranges from £8,070.92 for an Ordinary Seaman (with £5.76 extra for each day on patrol duty) to between £13,800 and £15,200 for a Lieutenant (with a patrol duty allowance of £8.64).



A/Tel Tomas Moor in the radio cabin.

Photos John Sheehan