

Eight Limerick men lost on the last voyage of the Irish Pine

by Michael Kirwan

A total of sixteen Irish merchant ships were lost during World War 2. One of the ships, the *S.S. Irish Pine* had eight Limerick men on board when it sank. The vessel was originally known as *West Hematite* and was built by J. F. Duthrie of Seattle in 1919. It was 5,621 G.R.T. (gross register tonnage) and had an overall length of 409 feet 7 inches.

In September 1942 the *Irish Pine* was chartered to Irish Shipping Limited at a cost of £3,251 per month and allotted to the Limerick Steamship Company for management. She carried bulk cargo such as wheat and grain between North America and Ireland.

On 29, October 1942 she sailed from Dublin under the command of Captain Matthew O'Neill of Wexford with a crew of 33 for Tampa Florida to load a cargo of phosphate for Dublin. As Ireland was a neutral country she had the Irish tricolour painted on the side of the ship and Eire in large letters on it. On the way, she was instructed to call at Boston to have her tanks attended to. The ship was due at Tampa about 23 November.

When she did not arrive the agents became anxious. Telegrams were sent between the agents in Tampa, Boston and Limerick seeking information on the ship and no news was available as to her whereabouts. The agents, Limerick Steamship Company, decided to advise the next of kin of the crew and on 3 December 1942 they sent telegrams advising them: -

REGRET [TO] INFORM YOU
THAT THE STEAMER IRISH PINE
IS CONSIDERABLY OVERDUE
AT A TRANSATLANTIC PORT
AND FEAR MUST BE PRESUMED
LOST STOP THERE IS SO FAR,
NO NEWS OF CREW, STOP,
WE SHALL NOTIFY YOU
IMMEDIATELY WE RECEIVE ANY
NEWS IN CONNECTION WITH
CREW - STEAMSHIP

Nothing was heard of the ship or crew until 35 years later when Captain Frank Forde was writing a book *The Long Watch* about the Irish mercantile marine during World War 2. During his research at the Naval Historical Branch, Ministry of Defence, London he came across the U-boat War diaries which had been confiscated after the war and brought back to London. In the diaries, he came across a report on the U-608 that had sunk a ship in the North Atlantic in position 42° 45'N, 58° 00'W. This was the *Irish Pine*.

In his book, he states:

The War diaries of U-608 on 16 November 1942 recorded the last eight hours of the *Irish Pine*, from Stuckmeier's first sighting of her at 3.10 p.m. Central European Time when she appeared out of a snow squall, making zigzags at a very slow speed and steering south-west..... From a distance of 800 metres he fired one torpedo: it missed, passing under *Irish Pine* as she pitched and rolled in the heavy sea. At 0.14 a.m. he attacked again, this time with complete success. The log book read: Range 800 metres, torpedo depth 2 metres, running time 80 seconds. Target stopped. The torpedo hit the after part of the ship and she began to settle immediately by the stern. A lifeboat with a heavy bright light is lowered. Ship becomes

perpendicular and sinks stern first at 0017. Wind north-west force six, very rough sea.

The *Irish Pine* sunk within three minutes and the two Radio Officers on board did not have time to send out an SOS message. The crew attempted to abandon ship into a lifeboat but the sea conditions were too rough. U-608 steamed away and did not look for any survivors. No wreckage or lifeboat was ever found.

The crew were from counties Dublin (10), Limerick (8), Cork (8), Wexford (4), Galway (1), Louth (1) and one from Scotland.

The Limerick members of the crew were:

Frank Tracy (24) Fireman, 2 Mount
Kenneth Cottages, Windmill Street,
Limerick.
Maurice Dooley (33) Greaser, 1
Windmill Street, Limerick.
Michael (O) Flynn (30) Able Seaman,
1 Mount Kenneth Cottages,
Windmill Street, Limerick.
Sean Ryan (22) Fireman,
28 Charlotte Quay, Limerick.
Michael Cusack (28) Able Seaman,
St Anne's, Glenview Avenue,
Farranshone, Limerick.
Alphonsus Tobin (30) Able Seaman,
2 Broad Lane, Limerick.
(near King John's Castle)



IRISH PINE

R. J. Scott

Hector Young (20) 2nd Cook,
Rosbrien Road, Limerick.
Frank Murphy (38), Fireman,
7 Carroll's Row, Barrington Street,
Limerick.

Frank Tracy, the 24-year-old fireman, was unmarried. He was however, the sole support of his family, including an invalid father. He had been a member of the crew since the vessel was acquired. Maurice Dooley (33), Windmill Street had only been married for three months. Michael Flynn, resided near Frank Treacy, and was also unmarried. He lived with his parents and was their sole support. All three came from a city district associated with shipping for generations. Their loss came as a great shock to the people there following on bereavements suffered by several neighbouring families when the S.S. *Kerry Head* was sunk with all hands two years previously.

Sean Ryan, who resided with his father Sean, a painter, at Charlotte's Quay was aged 22 and unmarried. He was a brother of Fergus a well-known Irish artist, better known as Fergus O'Ryan, who studied under Richard Butcher at the Limerick School of Art and also attended the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art.

Michael Cusack, of Glenview Avenue, Farranshone was a young married man with one child. Before joining the *Irish Pine*, he worked in the engineering section of Messrs, Rank (Ireland) Limited. Michael was a native of Athlone and had been living in Limerick for some years and was married to a Limerick girl.

Alphonsus Tobin, a 30-year-old able seaman, belonged to a family associated with the fishing industry in Limerick for generations. The assistant cook, Hector Young, who resided at Rosbrien, was the youngest of a family of six. He was only

twenty years of age, and first went to sea on the *Irish Pine*. Fireman Frank Murphy, the eighth Limerick man in the crew, resided at Carroll's Row with his wife and family. He was a seaman of long experience and served on many vessels owned by the Limerick Steamship Company.

In March 1943 arrangements were made for the payment of interim allowances for the wives and children of the married members of the crew, and to the dependents of the unmarried members, who were receiving allotments from the seaman's wages and were found to be in pecuniary needs.

The Captain of the U-boat, Rolf Struckmeier, sunk five ships during his time in U-boats. U-608 was sunk on 10 August 1944 in the Bay of Biscay, North West of La Rochelle, by depth charges from the British sloop *HMS Wren* and a British Liberator aircraft. Unlike the *Irish Pine* there were 52 survivors from the U-boat.

Sources:

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Men on board Irish Pine when hit on 16 November 1942

Name	Age	Rank
Patrick Bent	56	Carpenter
Kevin Cashin	21	Ordinary Seaman
Patrick Cleary	31	Fourth Engineer Officer
William Connolly	31	Third Officer
Joseph Conway	25	Able Seaman
Fred Crowzer	20	Able Seaman
Robert Crichton	20	Second Radio Officer
Michael Cusack	28	Third Engineer Officer
Thomas Cusack	50	Steward
Thomas Daly	32	First Radio Officer
Wamon Donagh	18	Ordinary Seaman
Maurice Dooly	33	Greaser
Joseph Duffy	36	Cook
Peter Fanning	56	Able Seaman
Alfred Hartnett	50	Second Officer
John McCarthy	48	Greaser
Frank Murphy	38	Fireman
John Nolan	60	Donkeyman
George O'Brien	39	Chief Engineer Officer
Michael O'Callaghan	26	Assistant Steward
Joseph O'Connell	46	Second Engineer Officer
Joseph O'Connor	31	Chief Officer
Thomas O'Donoghue	20	Cabin Boy
Michael O'Flynn	30	Able Seaman
Matthew O'Neill	41	Master
Sean Ryan	22	Fireman
Patrick Sheehan	38	Able Seaman
Stephen Smith	42	Boatswain (Bosun)
Richard Talbot	57	Able Seaman
Alphonsus Tobin	30	Able Seaman
Frank Tracy	24	Fireman
Harry Ward	49	Greaser
Hector Young	20	Assistant Cook

Commemorative Brochure

Recording the Service of Irish Seafarers during the 1939 to 1945 World War.



S.S. *Irish Pine*, torpedoed and sunk with all hands, October 1940

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