

# Service Ideas - Inspiration

## **Have you heard of the 'Guide of Dunkirk'?**

From Guiding In Australia, October 1990 (Submitted by Mary Ranson, Tasmania)

Probably many of you read in the newspapers recently about dozens of small boats which crossed the English Channel (and a very rough crossing it was!), and sailed into the French port of Dunkirk on 25 May: marking the 50th anniversary of the historic evacuation of allied troops from Dunkirk in 1940.

Three hundred and eighty thousand troops were rescued on the beaches from the pursuing German army, but literally hundreds of little boats of all kinds ~ fishing boats, ferries, private yachts, launches and motor boats; even rowing boats helped by ferrying the weary soldiers between the shore and larger ships standing off in deeper water. And, of course, all under fire and air attack from the enemy. These little boats made journey after journey back and forth across the Channel.



Image © Royal National Lifeboat Institution

What a wonderful and heart-stirring mission. But I wonder how many of you know that among this fleet of small boats was a lifeboat provided by the girl guides of the Commonwealth? It is an exciting story - an achievement of which all members of the Movement can be proud.

It had started earlier in 1940, when guides (and this includes brownies, rangers, and their leaders, of course), were wondering what they could do to help with the war effort. Someone had a brainwave and suggested that members of the Movement all over the Empire (as it was then called) should give a day's pay, if they were working, or part of their pocket money in the case of the younger ones. This money was to be used to buy road and air ambulances for the forces, and a motor lifeboat for the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. The scheme took off like wildfire, and instead of the target of £20,000 (about \$40,000), over £50,000 was raised!

The lifeboat had only just been built and still hadn't got a name when the Dunkirk emergency arose: but off she went, a gallant little ship among all the other gallant little ships. Over the next few days she did her share of rescue journeys to and fro across that strip of water which has always been England's strong defensive moat; dodging the enemy aircraft with their rain of bombs and bullets from above. By the last trip, her engines were so badly damaged that she had to limp home to England under sail - or what was left of it! What an achievement!

When it was all over the guides' lifeboat came to be christened at last, such an appropriate name chosen - the Guide of Dunkirk! By this time she had been handed over to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, who sent her to the pretty little fishing village of Cadgwith, Cornwall, to replace an older boat. There was a grand christening ceremony with flags, and a band playing. Cornwall rangers, guides and brownies were given places of honour as passengers.

The Guide of Dunkirk served at Cadgwith taking part in many rescues from ships wrecked on the bleak, rocky Cornish coast, from 1945 to 1963. By that time there had been improvements to the design and equipment of lifeboats generally, and she had become out-of-date. However, she was not scrapped, but sold to a private owner as a pleasure boat.

In case you are wondering what else, besides the Guide of Dunkirk, was purchased with the \$100,000 raised: among other things there were two air ambulances for the RAF; 20 ambulances for the Royal Navy; four mobile canteens and three recreation huts; and equipment for a hostel for merchant seamen in Iceland, and 100 rest huts for the army! It just shows what can be done if we all put our backs into it and do our share.

*This, and other stories of wartime efforts by the girl guides may be found in From a Flicker to a Flame, the story of the Girl Guides in Australia, available from your guide shop.*

## **An update on the 'Guide of Dunkirk'**

*from The Association of Dunkirk Little Ships ([www.adls.org.uk](http://www.adls.org.uk))*

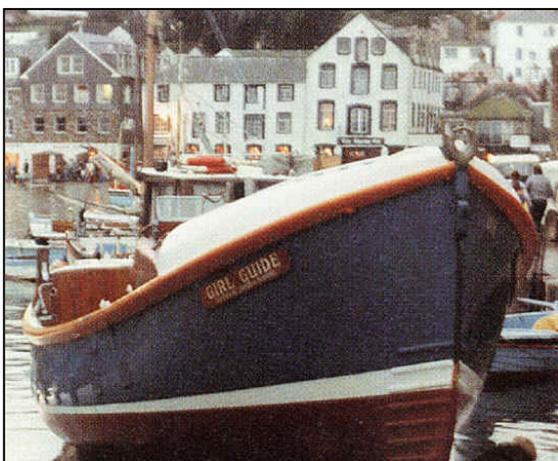


Image © Royal National Lifeboat Institution

After Dunkirk, she served at Cadgwith Cove, Cornwall until John Moor bought her when she came out of service in 1963. Being a local man himself, he remembers the day she arrived and he had relatives who were among her crew. He changed her name to Girl Guide, but did not make any structural alterations. He now uses her at Mevagissey where she is a workboat and, with her handsome red and blue livery and her proud nameplate, a tourist attraction during the summer season.

## **WHY NOT...**

- Go on the web and find out more about the evacuation of troops at Dunkirk.
- Check out the [adls.org.uk](http://adls.org.uk) and see the other boats that were involved in the evacuation.
- Brainstorm how you could give service to your local Lifesavers and put the plans into action.
- Have a camp based around the story of the Guide of Dunkirk. What service project could you incorporate in the program?
- Have a go at building a replica of the Guide of Dunkirk (big or small). Can you get it to sail?