

DUNKIRKA LITTLE SHIP GOES BACK

Charlie Parker heads his deep-sea tug "CHALLENGE" across the sea towards Dunkirk, just as he did ten years ago, on just such a day as this, with the same sailing orders: "Proceed Independently to Dunkirk." But there was a blacker pall obscuring the sun, then, and they didn't use the harbour. They worked off the beaches. A little unarmed ship couldn't do much good by the mole. But today the bridge swings open to welcome the little ships. Today is their day.

Most of the others arrived ahead of "CHALLENGE." There's not much call for speed in her line. And there are the really little ships, pleasure-craft and breadwinners, side by side as they went in to the beaches. What a sight it was in those days. You never saw such a Fred Karne collection. There's a naval cadet band to lead them to the simple little service. A good muster of seaworthy little ships and the seasoned men, Winnie asked for ... men of the white ensign, men of the red duster. Didn't have time to think you were brave in those days. You were too busy, even to be scared.

If you're not much of a churchman you think (during the service) of the men who sweated it out on the beaches. Wonderful weather we had. Funny, that's what we prayed for, fine weather. Somehow the banners don't seem quite right till you remember they're from a lot of others who couldn't get over today. There's a bit of a wrecked lorry there and a little ship - soldier and seafarer, side by side.

And there, where sea and sand meet, we remember them ... the men who gave all till there was no more to give ... but life itself.