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Seven Escape As Crabber Sinks After A Collision

SEVEN Breton fishermen in the crabber George Le-Bail, of Audierne, narrowly escaped being drowned in their bunks early on Wednesday morning when their vessel was run into and sunk by the St Ives inshore trawler "Francis Stevens" while riding at anchor, apparently without lights. The Frenchmen scrambled aboard the Francis Stevens as their boat, badly holed amidships, sank within seconds.

Mr Edwin B. Stevens, of 31, Virgin Street, skipper of the Francis Stevens, told The "Times and Echo" that they had been fishing off Porthtowan and headed for St Ives Bay at 12.45 a.m. on Wednesday when the weather got bad. They arrived off Carbis Bay at 3.30 a.m. to wait for enough water to get into the harbour and were heading across the roads when suddenly the crabber loomed up out of the darkness and they could not avoid her.

PROMPT ACTION

The Francis Stevens came round at once, said her skipper. "We were only just in time. Mr. Ernest Bassett, one of my hands, picked up a rope that was handy and threw it to the crabber. That helped to bring us up to her quick. The tide was going out very strongly at this point and the crabber was sinking fast. If that rope hadn't been thrown quickly some of the crabber's crew might not have escaped."

Mr. Stevens said the crew of the Georges Le-Bail were all below asleep when the collision occurred. They were fully dressed. The last of the seven was hauled aboard the Francis Stevens as the crabber was disappearing. "If we had hit her aft a bit all the crew might have been trapped below and drowned," said Mr. Stevens. The St. Ives boat was slightly damaged about the bows.

The Francis Stevens landed the crabber's crew at Smeaton's Pier and they were taken to the Seamen's Institute where hot drinks and food were quickly arranged for them by the port missionary, Mr. M. L. Hawken. The Rev. Father A. W. Delaney, who speaks French, was soon on the scene to help them.

At low tide on Wednesday the masts of the sunken vessel were visible about 600 yards from Porthminster Beach.

NOT INSURED

The Georges Le-Bain, which was painted green, was one of the traditional type of Breton crabbers and a regular visitor to St. Ives for a number of years. Her skipper was Louis Trepou, of Audierne, joint owner of the boat with his sister, Mme. C. Perennou. The vessel was not insured. The youngest member of the crew was the cabin boy, 15 years old Jacques Nebra.

The first of the Breton crab fleet to arrive in St. Ives Bay this season, the Georges Le-Bain had been anchored with another crabber, Nicole. Neither ship appeared to be carrying lights on Wednesday night. Near them a brightly lit coaster was at anchor.

The seven stranded fishermen were seen by the French consul, Mr. George Peak, who arranged their return to Audierne.