

Flags of National Life-Boat Societies

Günter Mattern

The idea of the creation of life-boat societies was born in the early 19th century, in order to help seamen and people whose ships were in danger or destroyed by heavy seas.

The Royal National Life-Boat Institute of Great Britain was the first to be established. Colonel Sir William Hillary was the originator of the idea of making the rescue of life from shipwreck a national duty and founded the institution, on a voluntary basis, on 4 March 1824.

Many countries now have National Life-Boat Services most of them on a voluntary basis. It is an old maritime tradition to use distinct flags for these societies and their boats; some incorporate a red cross and/or an anchor, some others a life-buoy. Most of them show the national colours.

BELGIUM

The Belgian Life-Boat Society is a state service and was established in 1832. The Administration de la Marine is responsible for it. This is the reason why this society uses the naval tricolour of black, yellow and red, in the yellow stripe the black lion with a crown.

DENMARK

The Danish Life-Boat Service is also a state service and uses the national naval ensign, i.e. the swallow-tailed national ensign. This service was established in 1852 and used the national flag until 1882. On 13 May 1882, the society was granted a royal warrant to hoist the naval ensign.

FINLAND

The Finnish Sea Saving Society is a voluntary society and was established in 1897. The first flag was white with a free-standing red cross in the centre and centered upon two blue old-fashioned anchors flukes downwards, stocks in the same place as the flukes, the anchors, being crossed so that the shanks are at an angle of 90° with each other, the tips of the flukes and stocks just impinging on the red cross. This flag was in use until Finland became independent in 1917.

In 1930 Commander E. Huttunen designed the new flag of the society: on the national flag centered on the cross, a device consisting of a white circle, with a blue rim, having a red cross enhanced, with the stock, ring and shank of an upright blue conventional anchor, with white fibration, superimposed, the flukes of which impinge on the white circle.

On 1 January 1981 the flag must be modified due to meet the requirements stipulated in the new act on national flag, which shall not have any particular figures with the exception of that of the President's coat of arms. The flag of the Finnish Life-Boat Society was therefore slightly altered: In white the blue cross, the centre of which is nearer to the hoist than to the fly, superimposed by a small white cross, centered on the cross the old device.

FRANCE

In 1824 the Société Humaine et des Naufragés de Boulogne was founded. The first flag was white, with a blue five-pointed star in the centre, having above, in the form of an arc, the inscription VIRTUS ET SPES. - In 1920 another flag was adopted after fusion with another society.

The Central Salvage Society for Shipwrecked (Société Centrale de Sauvetage des Naufragés) was established on 17 November 1865 on a voluntary basis. Its flag consists of the tricolour of blue, white and red of equal width. The letters "SCS" are superimposed centrally as follows, - a white "S" in the blue stripe, a red "C" in the white, and a white "S" in the red stripe.

The national Salvage Society of the Sea (Société Nationale de Sauvetage en Mer) is a voluntary society and was established on 1 June 1967. It integrated in the second semester of the same year the Société Centrale de Sauvetage des Naufragés and the Société des Hospitaliers Sauveteurs Bretons. This new society used various flags.

The flag is white, in its canton the French tricolour: blue, white and red, superimposed by the letters "SNS"; "S", in white, on the blue stripe, "N", in red, on the white, and "S", in white, on the red stripe. - The lower part, divided from the upper by a small white stripe, is blue superimposed by crossed yellow fouled anchors.

The separation line between blue and white goes from the centre of the flag to the lower point of the fly.

In 1969, the anchor was changed, instead of the fouled anchors, conventional anchors were superimposed.

The guidon is a swallow-tailed, the pennant is horizontally divided from white and blue, in the canton the emblem as mentioned above, underneath in the blue field a single conventional anchor.

The Société des Hospitaliers Sauveteurs Bretons was established in 1873 on the initiative of the later president, attorney-general of the court of Rennes, Nadault de Buffon. The flag is diagonally divided, white and blue, and the canton shows the French tricolour, in the blue part aside the hoist the white letters "HSB", in the flying part a black ermine.

GERMANY

The German Company for Saving Shipwrecked Persons (Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Rettung Schiffbrüchiger) is also a voluntary society and was established in 1865. Some twenty years later it took over a State Service - on the Baltic which has been established by the Prussian Government in 1852.

On 24 May 1868, the Society received permission from the King of Prussia to adopt a flag; it is white, with a black border and has a red Hanseatic Cross in the centre.

Great Britain and Ireland

The Royal National Life-Boat Institution, established in 1824, has a flag consisting of the red cross of St George, with a narrow blue border, on a white ground. The letters "RNLI", in red, are placed, one in the centre of each canton of the flag. In the centre of the cross, a yellow crow above a yellow fouled anchor.

On life-boats it is painted on the bows, and these vessels use no other flags. Other vessels fly the Red Ensign with the RNLi flag as a rectangular badge in the fly.

ITALY

The Italian Life-Boat Society is incorporated in the navy. Therefore the boats use the naval ensign, i.e. the national flag, in the white stripe the shield: Quarterly, the arms of the former maritime republics: Venice, Genoa, Amalfi and Pisa. The shield has a gold corded border and, above of the shield, a golden mural crown.

JAPAN

The Imperial Japanese Life-Saving Institution was a voluntary society - and was established on 3 November 1889. At the time of foundation, the flag adopted was white, with a red 32-rayed sun in the centre, the rays stopping short of the edges of the flag. Upon the sun, a Japanese character in white. The characters were the initial-- character of the name of a shrine which was deeply believed in as a life-saving God from sea disasters among Japanese - seamien. The flag was replaced in 1901 by another.



The flag, adopted on 6 November 1901, was designed by Count Kozo Yoshil and is white, superimposed by a life-buoy, in red. After World War II - the Occupation Force forbade the use of the sun, similar to the Imperial Japanese Navy flag.

The Japanese Life-Saving Institution (Nippon Suinan Knysai Kai) refounded in 1945, reintroduced its old flag: in white a life-buoy. The boat flag shows in the fly black characters. The institution and ceremonial flag is white with a red life-buoy and a yellow border on all four sides.

The Maritime Safety Agency was established on 1 May 1948 as a government agency attached to the Ministry of Transport. The flag was hoisted on 12 May 1948: on a dark blue ground a white compass mark. All MSA's patrol - vessels and aircrafts use this emblem.

CANADA

The Canadian Marine Transportation Administration, responsible for the - rescue of shipwrecked persons, is administered by the Federal Department of Transport. In turn, the administration oversees the activities of a number of components: the National Harbours Board, which has jurisdiction over the major public commercial ports; the St Lawrence Seaway Authority, which oversees most of the inland waterway system; a number of Pilotage Authorities, which have the responsibility for providing pilotage services in Canadian waters to those ships which require them; and the Canadian Coast Guard.

The Canadian Coast Guard has inter alia the task of rescuing people from the water and the sea.

The Canadian Coast Guard has a real flag system. The colours are a product of the fact that when the Coast Guard came into being Canada did - not have its present national flag, but rather flew the Union Jack and Red Ensign, which incorporated red, white and blue colours.

Affiliated with the Coast Guard are five regional Canadian Marine Rescue Auxiliary Organisations across the country. When engaged on duty, they are entitled to fly a pennant showing their membership in this co-operative arrangement. The flag is vertically divided, white and blue (2:1), in the white stripe the red maple leaf, in the blue a golden delphin.

NETHERLANDS

There are two life-boat societies in the Netherlands, both of which were established, on a voluntary basis, within a few days of one another in November 1824.

The Northern and Southern Holland Life-Saving Society (Noord- en Zuid-Hollandsche Redding-Maatschappij): The flag was designed in 1924, the centenary of the society, by E.M. Eden, a well-know Dutch marine painter. The colours are orange, white and blue, the old Dutch colours. The golden crown above the life-buoy was added in 1949.

The Southern Holland Society for Life-Saving Shipwrecked Persons (Zuid-Hollandsche Maatschappij tot Redding van Schipbreukelingen) has a flag of white, with a light blue cross having a narrow orange border. The letters "ZHRM", in black, are placed, one in the centre of each white canton. It was designed in 1924, the centenary of the society, by A.J.M. Goudriaan.

The first flag was green with the letters "N.Z. & H.R.M." on a white background. A photo of 1914 shows this flag.

NEW ZEALAND

Service

The Wellington Sea-Rescue uses an emblem, in orange a black wave with an emergency rocket emerging. Probably the emblem is shown in the orange flag of the society.

NORWAY

The Norwegian Society for the Rescue of the Shipwrecked is a voluntary society and was established on 9 July 1891. A state service, established in 1854, was in the fifties of this century handed over to this society.

The flag is white, having in the centre a red Hanseatic cross within a white circle superimposed on a blue circle. The letters "NSSR", in blue, are placed one in each corner of the flag. It was designed by the committee in 1893 for use in their first life-saving ketch "Colin Archer", - built during that year.

PORTUGAL

The Institute for Assistance to Shipwrecks is a voluntary service and was established on 21 April 1892. The flag is red and has a white diagonal band with the letters "ISN", in red, superimposed, extending -- from the top of the hoist to the bottom of the fly.

Probably the colours are derived from those of the shield and the border of the old royal arms. In 1957 the Institute became an organ of the Ministry of the Navy and all local commissions were dissolved.

SOVIET UNION

The Life-Boat Service of the USSR uses the ensign for Fleet Auxiliaries and Harbour Vessels. It was established in 1872 as a voluntary service. The ensign is dark blue, with a white canton containing, side by side, a red five-pointed star and hammer and sickle in red. A horizontal -- narrow light blue band forms the base of the white canton. Very probably, it was adopted in 1935.

SOUTH AFRICA

The flag of the National Sea Rescue Institute of South Africa, a society on a voluntary basis, was adopted on 16 June 1972 and shows on a white ground an orange cross; in each canton of the flag the letters "NSRI" in blue.

SPAIN

The Spanish Society for Life-Saving Shipwrecked Persons (Sociedad Española de Salvamento de Naufragos) is also a voluntary society and was established in 1880. It took over a service previously established by the State.

The flag is white and in the centre a vertical red fouled anchor with a red shining five-pointed star above it. It was adopted on 29 June - 1884. To quote from the original documents, the "shining star is a representation of the Polar or Navigator Star, the coveted guide on tenebrous maritime routes, and the anchor, which harmonises with all that refers to seafaring, symbolises in addition the anchor of hope - salvation of the shipwrecked."

SWEDEN

The Swedish Society for the Rescue of Shipwrecked is a voluntary society established in 1904, 49 years after the state service was established.

The flag, designed in 1910, is white, with a red Hanseatic cross in the hoist. The letters "SSRS", in black, are placed one in each corner of an imaginary square enclosing the cross. The flag has a narrow double border, the outer royal blue and the inner yellow.

The pennant is dark blue with a white life-buoy superimposed on a yellow anchor and charged with the letters "SSRS" in yellow. On the blue disc the yellow front of a boat is to be seen. This flag is flown at the tops of the members' sailing and motor boats.

The former State Life-Boat Service was established in 1855; the royal - pilotage board was the founder. The service used the national flag.

TURKEY

The Life Saving Service of Turkey is state-controlled and a part of the group of Life Saving and Lighthouses Department.

It was established in 1923 and succeeded similar organisations, the first of which dates back to 1869. The flag used is the national flag.

USA

The United States Life-Boat Service was established in 1848, and is administered and maintained by the state. It is - as in Canada - part of the Coast Guard Service and uses the coast guard flag system. The flag used consists of 16 equal vertical stripes, alternating red and white, beginning with red at the hoist; with a white canton containing a curve of 13 dark blue stars over a dark blue eagle, upon which a shield with 13 red and white stripes is superimposed. The eagle has an olive branch, with 13 leaves in one claw and 13 arrows in the other. The distinctive blue badge of the US Coast Guard in the fly is positioned over the centre of the 7th vertical red stripe from the hoist.

In conclusion, I wish to express my thanks to the officers of various life-boat services and to Lucien Philippe for their courteous assistance.

Finter Adams

Canadian Coast Guard
Flags and Crest

Garde côtière Canadienne
Pavillons et écusson



CREST

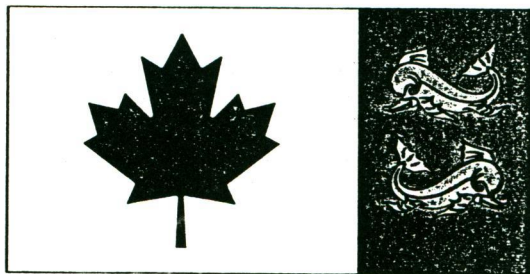
ÉCUSSON

THE MINISTER
OF TRANSPORT



LE MINISTRE
DES TRANSPORTS

R/W



Y/3

JACK

PAVILLON DE BEAUPRÉ

R/W



3

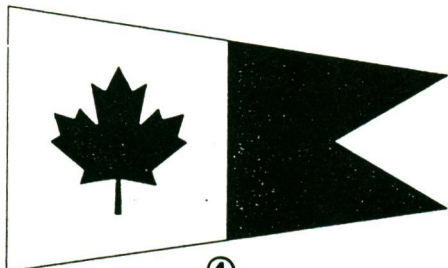
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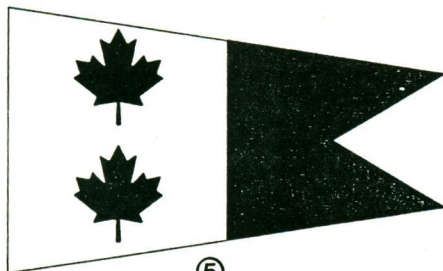
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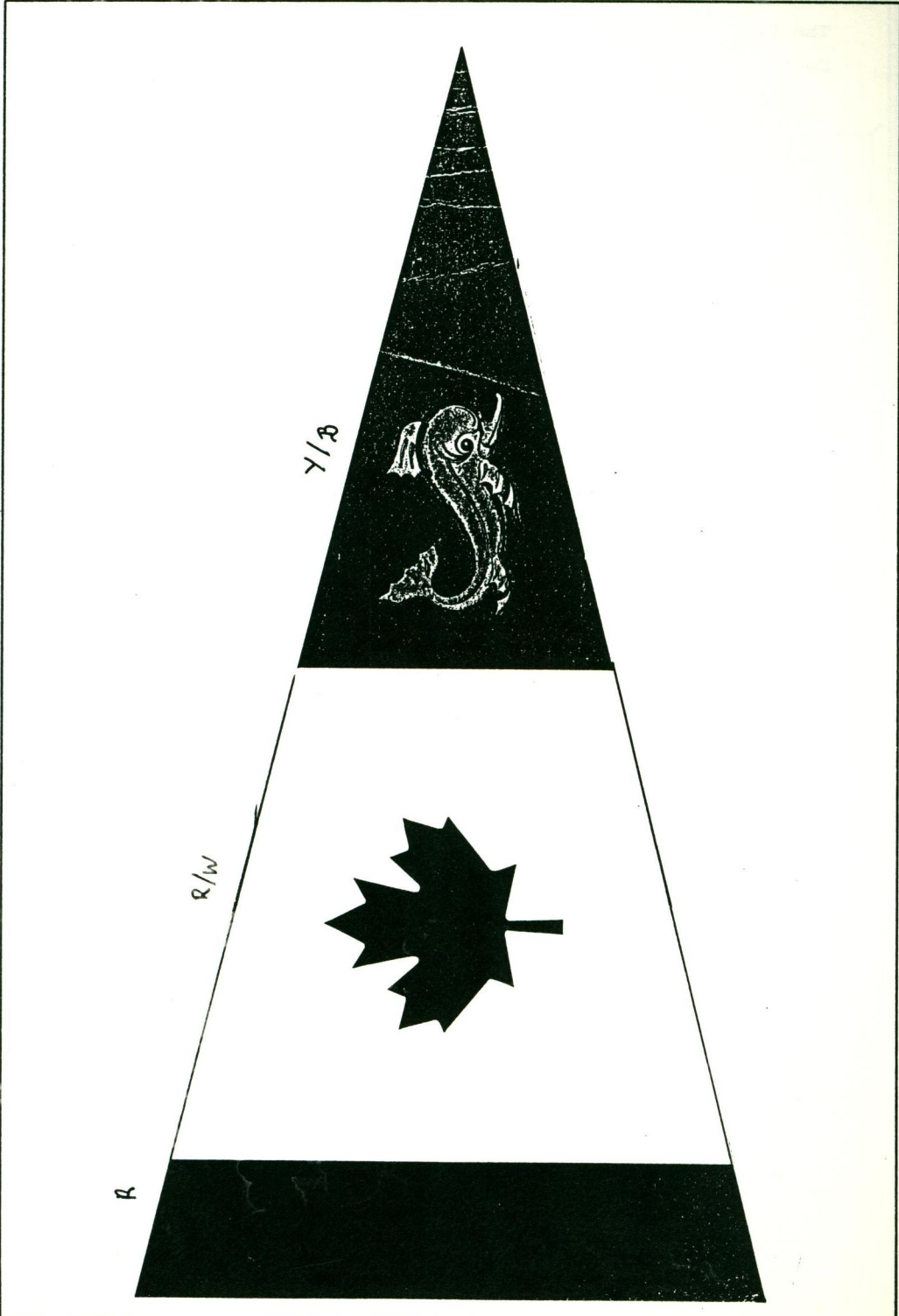


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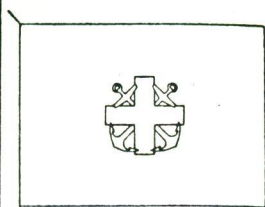


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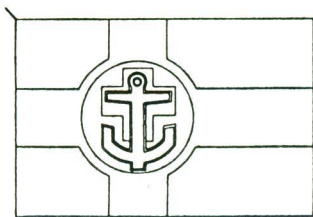
①	THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF TRANSPORT	◆	LE SOUS-MINISTRE DES TRANSPORTS
②	THE COMMISSIONER	◆	LE COMMISSAIRE
③	THE ADMINISTRATOR	◆	L'ADMINISTRATEUR
④	THE DIRECTOR, FLEET SYSTEMS	◆	LE DIRECTEUR DES SYSTÈMES DE LA FLOTTE
⑤	THE SENIOR OFFICER AFLOAT or HONORARY COMMODORE	◆	L'OFFICIER NAVIGANT PRINCIPAL ou LE COMMODORE HONORAIRE



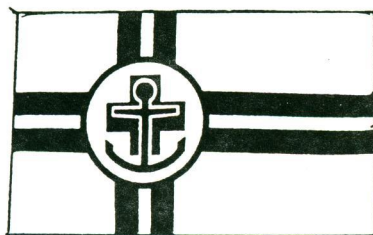
The figures were issued in H.G. Carr's article on Life-Boat Societies, edited in "The Mariner's Mirror", Vol. 25, 133-150:



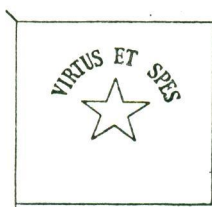
Finland (1st v.)



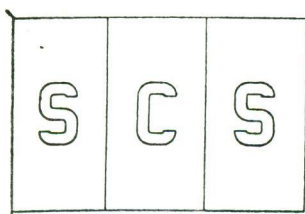
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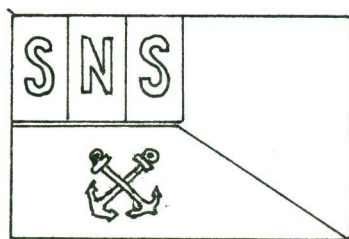
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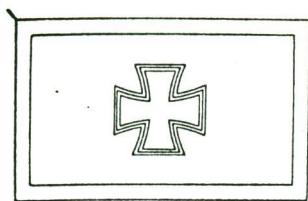
France (old)



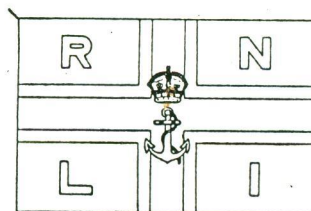
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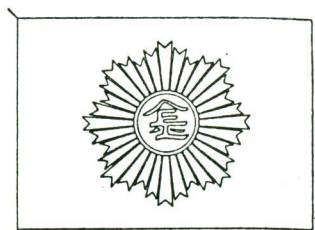
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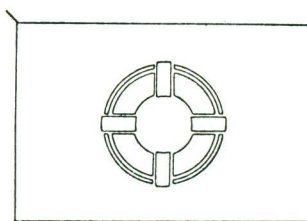
Germany



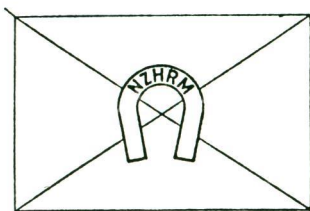
Great Britain and Ireland



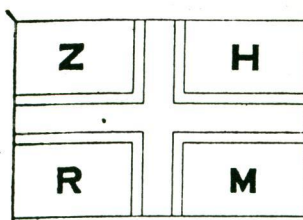
Japan (old v.)



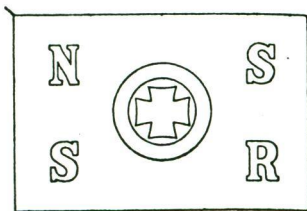
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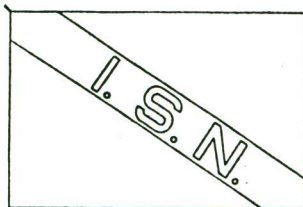
(NZHRM)



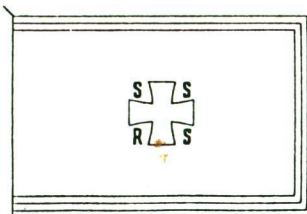
Netherlands (ZHMR)



Norway



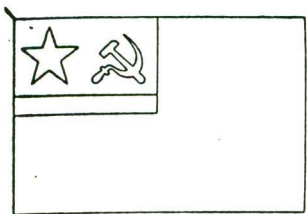
Portugal



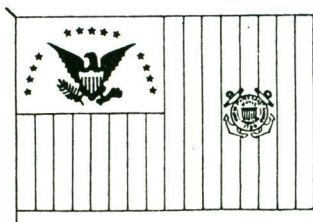
Sweden



Spain



Soviet Union



USA