

“You have to go, but you don’t have to come back,” is the unofficial slogan of U.S. Coast Guard Search and Rescue (SAR) teams. These SAR teams are based at Coast Guard Stations throughout the world, including “TRACEN” here at Sewell Point, here on Cape May’s Other Side.

“You have to go, but you don’t have to come back” becomes much more than a slogan when it is brought to life in vivid and poignant detail through the film, *The Finest Hours*.

*The Finest Hours* will be the second film aired Saturday evening, November 12<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 P.M. at the West Cape May Borough Hall, 732 Broadway in West Cape May.

Brought to Cape May by the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Cape May Film Festival, November 11-13, ***The Finest Hours*** brings to life the most daring rescue in the history of the U.S. Coast Guard as it depicts the harrowing saga of a four man crew based out of Small Boat Station Chatham, Massachusetts, who risked their own lives to save those of 33 men stranded at sea during a devastating nor’easter.

Their ship, the *Pendleton* was a World War II-era oil tanker that smacked into a vicious nor’easter in January, 1952. The old tanker, poorly built during the flurry of shipbuilding in days of World War II was split in half by towering 60’ high seas. While the bow section quickly sank below the waves, the stern stayed afloat and the crew huddled together on this section.

It must be remembered that this tragedy happened long before the days of EPRIBS, locator beacons, GPS or even reliable helicopters. Save for the Coast Guard, the crew of the *Pendleton* were on their own, alone in an angry and unforgiving sea.

The Coast Guard crew manning the 36-foot motor life boat coming to save them consisted of a coxswain, Petty Officer Bernie Webber and three hastily recruited volunteers, Andrew Fitzgerald, Richard Livesey and Irving Maske.

Aside from monstrous waves exceeding 60-feet, hurricane force winds, and freezing temperatures Webber had to guide his small craft through the huge breaking waves at the Chatham bar, which is a shallow area where waves break exceptionally hard.

Losing his windshield and compass on the first attempt Webber tired again and again and finally cleared the bar. Only then could he begin his search, but without as much as a compass to guide him.

In later years Bernie Webber would say that Divine Providence guided him but the fact remains that somehow he found the *Pendleton* only then to be faced with the daunting prospect of rescuing far more men than his little craft could possibly

hold and from a drifting hulk that towered far above them, and in a raging storm.

Michael Tougias is a masterful story teller whose genre generally seems to be true stories of storms at sea, tragedy, rescue and courage in the face of impossible odds. For many of us here in South Jersey, our first exposure to Tougias was the book he co-wrote with Douglas Campbell, *Rescue of the Bounty*. Those of us who live in the Cape May area have a special connection with the tragedy of the *Bounty* because she sank just south of here off the North Carolina coast during Hurricane Sandy which so devastated the Jersey shore.

Interestingly, the legacy of *The Finest Hours* is Tougias' newest book, *So Close to Home*. It was from researching *The Finest Hours* that he learned that tankers were rapidly but poorly constructed during World War II because they were being sunk so often by German U-Boats. This led him to discover that a U-Boat had sunk an American ship with a family on board in the Gulf of Mexico and then locate the 8-year old boy in the family living in Quincy, Massachusetts. Before he knew it, he was off and running with *So Close to Home* a topic he is going to pitch to Casey Affleck for Tougias' next feature film.

After airing of *The Finest Hours* on Saturday, Tougias will hold a "talkback" with the audience. Jillann Spitzmiller, co-writer and director of the documentary *Still Dreaming* will hold a talk back after the film airs on Friday evening

In addition to *The Finest Hours* and *Still Dreaming*, the Festival will feature some 30 short films, and a silent film with live organ music. Of particular interest to many locals will be the documentary, *The One Percent* which tells the story of 11-year old Mark Himebaugh who disappeared from his Del Haven, New Jersey home in 1991.