

'Human bridge' hero tells of his new view on life

THE WIFE of the "human bridge" hero of the Zebruge ferry disaster which killed yesterday that she had recently contemplated suicide because of the guilt of living when so many had died.

As Mrs Eleanor Parker talked about her feelings over the tragic day last March her husband, Andrew, said he would wear his George Medal for himself "and for all those who showed such courage that night".

The fit, slim bank official used to have to span two metal barriers and allow at least 22 passengers to walk across him towards safety Mr Parker, Eleanor and their daughter Janice, then 12, survived.

The couple said in an interview with the

Press Association that the vivid memories of the ferry disaster in which 165 were killed had a daily influence on everything they did.

Mr Parker (33) now valued every minute of his life and realised how trivial some of the goals he once treasured really were.

Mrs Parker, born in the Philippines, said she and her husband would use the New Year to prepare for March 6, 1988, the first anniversary of the disaster — it would be like a bad dream.

She said: "It is difficult to understand, but we always feel guilty about being alive. There was one time this year when I contemplated suicide. I know that is hard for anyone outside to understand."

Mr and Mrs Parker were speaking after returning from holiday with their two children in Herne Hill, South-East London.

Mr Parker said he felt humble about receiving the award and was embarrassed about the publicity. "I had no idea that on that night there were lots of acts of bravery, and perhaps mine is a representative medal."

"I still feel I've been singled out in a way, perhaps unfairly — they all deserve recognition as far as possible."

A second George Medal goes posthumously to Mr Michael Skippen (30), the ferry's head waiter, who died rescuing others.

His wife, Lynda, described the medal as "the happiest moment of my life since the accident". She said the award "shows he was a hero".

Michael was not an out-and-out seaman, his mother, Mrs Judy Powell, said. He went to sea for a time after leaving school, then joined the police, grew restless and went on to work for furniture company before working for Townsend Thoresen.

"He was getting restless again and felt like looking for a new job. I only wish he had gone. The two men are among 31 recipients of awards in connection with the ferry disaster — 13 of them going in an honorary capacity to Belgian citizens. There are 14 awards for gallantry and 17 for "meritorious service".

Department of Transport officials pieced together evidence of the crew of the ferry whose bravery should be recognised. As well as the two George Medals there are 10 Queen's Gallantry Medals and two Queen's Commendations for brave conduct.

The 17 meritorious conduct awards include one CBE, two OBEs, six MBEs, 10 MBES — five to Belgians, one BEM, and three Awards of Plate — two to Belgians.

The rare Secretary of State's Award of Plate dates from the mid-19th Century in recognition of saving life at sea. The recipient selects a suitable memento, such as a nautical barometer, which is then inscribed.

Ire over broken awards embargo

By John Hibbs

THE Government was last night considering tough reprisals against the media after premature disclosure by the "Sun" newspaper of awards in the Queen's New Year's Honours list.

The Prime Minister was reported to be furious that the staff embargo on the news had been broken.

The premature publication has thrown into question the whole system under which advance copies of official documents are provided to journalists.

The awards published in advance involved two heroes of the Zebruge ferry disaster who have been given the George Medal, the highest civilian award for bravery.

Others who appear in the honours list include a baby producer, Prof Robert Edwards, and Mr Patrick Steptoe, both made CBEs.

Beattie producer George Martin (61), made a CBE for services to the record industry, said he assumed it was "being allowed to stay the course — I've been in the music world a long time since the 1950s and there aren't many survivors left of our business".

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MR GORDON

CHAIRMAN and managing director of whisky distillers, Donohoe & Sons, Mr Gordon becomes a CBE for his services to the industry.

Mr Grant (60) (57) is the great-grandson of the founder of the firm who owns the Glenfiddich and Balvenie distilleries at Dufftown.

Educated at Rugby and Cambridge, where he earned a double first in law, he joined the family firm in 1954 as a management trainee and became joint managing director with his brother, Charles, in 1963.

He became sole director in 1968 and in 1978 was appointed company chairman.

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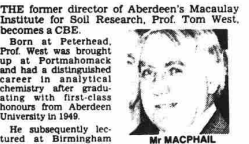
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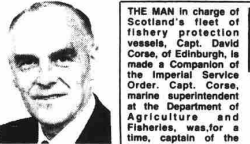
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CBE for roving Sandy Gall

By John Hibbs

THE MAN in charge of Scotland's fleet of fishery protection vessels, Capt. David West, becomes a CBE.

Mr West, who has been a member of the Imperial Service Order since 1974, was a senior marine superintendent at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, where he was, for a time, captain of the fishery protection vessel Westra.

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CBE for former soil-research chief



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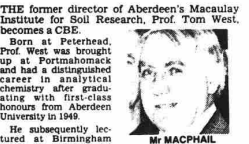
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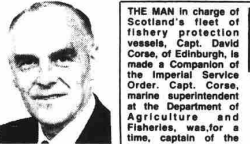
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IMMEDIATE past president of the Law Society of Scotland, Mr John McNeil, who is one of the longest-serving members on the society's council and also served on the committee of the Scottish Whisky Association, has been awarded a CBE.

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EDINBURGH consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist, who was at one time a lecturer at Aberdeen and Dundee Universities, receives the OBE. Mr Dundee (63), who retired recently from the Eastern Region of the Independent Television Companies Association, has been awarded a CBE.

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THE 80-year-old maestro, who was based on Bozong Day, won the Open championship in 1931, 1934 and 1944 in a glorious career which began when he was 16, the first public schoolboy to become a paid golfer.

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COMMONWEALTH

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