



LOCAL NEWS



TO THE RESCUE – paramedics attend to veteran rowers pulled out of the Tyne in Newcastle

Crew survives river ordeal

A CREW of veteran rowers is lucky to be alive today after its boat sank in rough waters on the River Tyne.

Firefighters said the nine men, whose average age was 60, were just minutes from death when they were dragged from the freezing river.

Eight fire engines and a brigade launch were called to the Tyne near the Redheugh Bridge in Newcastle.

Staff from the nearby Copthorne Hotel also helped in the rescue.

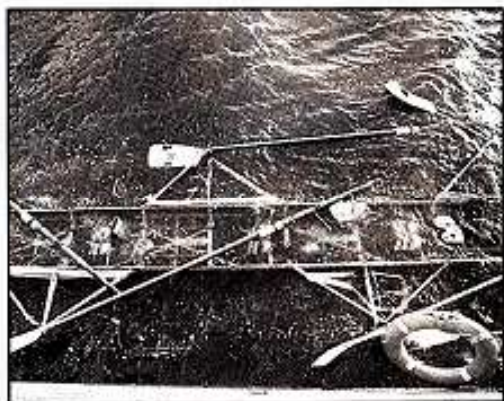
The eight-strong all-male crew and a coxswain from the Tyne Rowing Club were heading upstream from Tynemouth to Newburn when big waves swamped their 60ft boat.

Despite being up to their chests in water the men managed to push the sinking craft towards the shore.

Crew member Dr Ian Wagstaff, a rower for 42 years, said: "I was very anxious as I knew it could have been serious."

"Somebody could have drowned or suffered severe hypothermia. I knew the longer we were in the water the greater the chances there were of somebody being seriously ill. Our fingers and toes were completely numb."

Station officer Tony Steels, of Tyne & Wear fire brigade, said: "Some of the crew had been in the water more than 10 minutes and they were suffering from hypothermia."



SUBMERGED – the boat the nine rowers were in when waves got the better of them