

ALVOR LIFEGUARD INTERPRETATION CENTRE

EXHIBITION JOURNAL

16th december, 2023 Alvor

THE LIFEBOAT: THE "ROWING" OF A MARITIME COMMUNITY

CENTRO
INTERPRETATIVO
DO SALVA-VIDAS
DE ALVOR



FROM LIFEGUARD STATION TO MUSEUM

A WISH OF THE ALVOR COMMUNITY

Physically we inhabit a space, but sentimentally we are inhabited by a memory.

José Saramago



This is what we hope will happen at the Alvor Lifeguard Interpretation Centre, which is now being inaugurated. May the spirit of this place be preserved and the collective memory of the people of Alvor, who struggled for the "Lifeboat Museum", be honoured in the transition from a life-saving station of the Instituto de Socorros a Náufragos to a museum. This "struggle" is reflected in the episode that took place in 1983, when an attempt was made to take the lifeboat away from Alvor, after it had been in service here for more than 40 years:

Coltiva vidas mais de 40 anos

População de Alvor quer o "Alvor" em terra

A Junta de Freguesia e o Alvorense de Alvor lembram-se de um episódio que foi vivido há mais de 40 anos em Alvor, quando se tentou levar o "Alvor" para Lisboa. A população de Alvor não quis e conseguiu impedir a remoção do salva-vidas para a cidade de Lisboa. A população de Alvor conseguiu impedir a remoção do salva-vidas para a cidade de Lisboa. A população de Alvor conseguiu impedir a remoção do salva-vidas para a cidade de Lisboa.

in: Diário da Manhã, 28/1/83



João Carlos Vieira Branco, as president of the parish council, was the one who accompanied the proceedings that the Capitania do Porto de Portimão (Portimão Captaincy), together with the Ministro da Marinha (Minister of the Navy), carried out at the time, in order to (...) remove the boat from the shelter where it was and take it to Lisbon, with the intention, they said, of restoring the boat and placing it in the Museu da Marinha (Navy Museum).

(...) At the time, the parish council issued a communication saying that it was responsible for restoring the boat and preserving it in a museum. Basically, corresponding to a feeling also conveyed by the population. But the authorities didn't think it was a good idea (...) and ended up pressuring them (...) until an ultimatum was given and they came to Alvor to carry out this diligence. (...) The boat was really leaving and would have to be towed because it was unseaworthy... armed sailors appeared, military pressure.

Naturally, the people answered, (...) they answered with their hearts and their heads, and with that gesture they showed how much they loved that boat. (...) "We want this", "This is ours (...) Here is the memory of so many people, my grandparents, my parents, my siblings. And we're all still here thanks to it and it won't leave!". The bell tolled, (...) and the people gathered in large number near the fish auction and near the lifeboat and with their presence, and with their strength, they prevented the boat from leaving at that moment. The authorities retreated.

(...) I remember that this process took a while... I was president of the Alvorense board at the time and we were at a board meeting. (...) And João Carlos came to knock on the door (...): "Look, I came to ask for your help (...) because I know that tomorrow, the harbour master is coming here with the authorities and is taking the lifeboat. (...) It was almost midnight (...) we all went down to the river (...) There was only the Alvorense Board and the members of the Parish Council (...). And then we removed the whole rail, because we knew that the boat wouldn't leave without the rail (...) and the late Jorge Oliveira, who was a mechanical locksmith, (...) went to the house and welded the gates... When they arrived the next day, was in that situation. And this was, in our opinion, the reason why the authorities gave up, in other words, they no longer wanted to take the boat. Renato Mendes (Museu de Portimão, 2021)

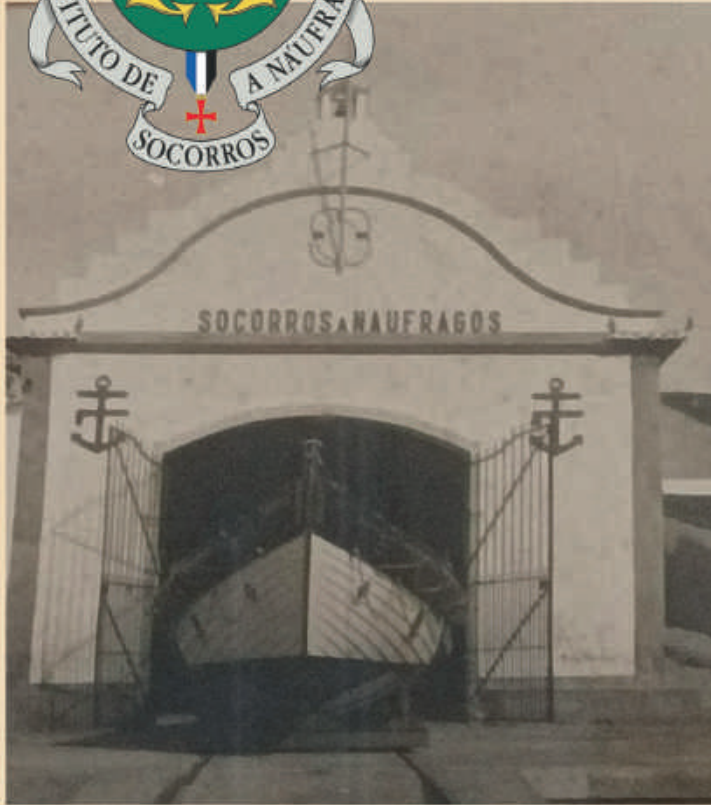


In 1983, peg removed from the rail where the lifeboat descended

The station of the Instituto de Socorros a Náufragos (1933-1983) and the "Alvor" lifeboat represent a local symbol of protection for fishermen and the fight for life at sea. The history of this "place of memory" reveals the daily lives of the men and women who make their living from fishing, since the time they used rowing and sailing boats, orientated by the north star, to make their luck in an unpredictable sea, right up to the current challenges of this activity.



THE ALVOR LIFEGUARD STATION AND THE MISSION OF INSTITUTO DE SOCORROS A NÁUFRAGOS



Alvor Lifeguard Station
Instituto de Socorros a Náufragos



The Instituto de Socorros a Náufragos (Portuguese Institute for Lifesaving) station in Alvor reflects the aim of the Institute, created in 1892 by Queen Amelia, to provide the Portuguese coast - whose rocks, sandbanks, currents, winds and lack of lighthouses posed a challenge to navigation, especially until the first half of the 20th century - with support and rescue points for boats and surveillance of beaches and bathers.



In 1899, when the Villa Nova de Portimão Local Commission of the Real Instituto de Socorros a Náufragos (Portuguese Institute for Lifesaving) was founded, Alvor was watched over by sea corporal José Lourenço Carrajola. In 1909, this commission trained seafarers in first aid, in cases of casualties and drowning, and on 12 December of that year a rescue was carried out in the Alvor bar by seafarers Alexandre Matheus, José Carlos, José Alexandre, João Matheus and Francisco Alexandre. The persons rescued were Francisco Sant'Ana, João Sant'Anna and João Bernardo.

Even so, the Alvor bar takes lives, as in the case of João do Nascimento Ganço, who drowned there in 1916.

Faced with the difficulty of entering the bar, the people of the village demanded a lifeguard station, which was inaugurated in October 1933 in a fish warehouse next to the river, and which also had a launching platform, a boss's house and the "Alvor" lifeboat...

In 1933, the ISN station in Alvor was part of a total of 52 rescue centres in the country.

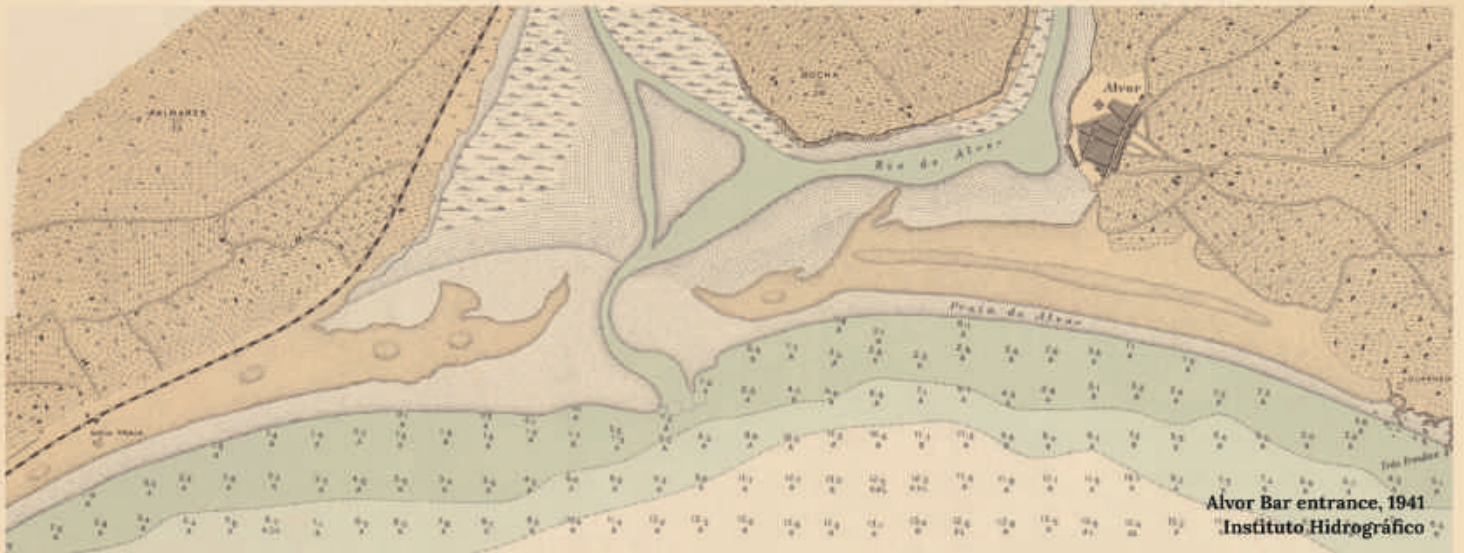
THE ALVOR LIFEBOAT

The "Alvor" lifeboat is a Danish-style wooden boat with a cracked hull, 10 oars, a tiller and a bastard sail, of the whaling boat type - with a similar bow and stern, thin and raised - considered one of the most suitable for beaching and investing in a river bar. It has an iron-plated keel, increasing its robustness; watertight boxes inside to withstand stormy seas and the ability to return to the normal position if it capsizes; sea doors to withstand violent swells and drain water; a side reinforced with cork straps to increase buoyancy and withstand violent collisions when berthing boats.

THE STORY OF THE LIFEBOAT TOLD BY VARIOUS VOICES

Several generations of seafarers rowed in the "Alvor" lifeboat (1933-1974), waiting at the bar for their mates to enter safely, because "today it's you, but tomorrow I might need it!".

The boat had 12 crew members: the boss or master of the boat - Manuel Vicente (1933), Francisco Batista (1936), José João Vidal (1945) and Manuel Lóló (1981); the second skipper Manuel Lóló (1951); and 10 rowers "picked up by the hour" who, multiplied by the years of service on this boat, reached more than two hundred.



A LIVE BAR:

The bar was sand, today there was a stream here, tomorrow it was closed and was always like that, was never in the same place, today it was here, tomorrow it was over there and the boats looked for the deepest place to enter when the tide was high, they didn't enter at receding tide!

José Filipe costa

The outer sea, they count 3, 7, 9 [waves] and so on until the "chanada" [the sea calms down]. After the "chanada", the sea becomes shallow, and that's when they go in.

Paulo Dias Caracol

The south-easterly sea was the worst we had here, which is a deeper sea (...).

Joaquim Maria

The Alvor River was very low and dangerous. Even these small boats, we would often arrive at the bar early in the morning and arrive at the fish auction late, because there was no tide and we had to wait for it to fill up.

Luis Batista

A Boss and a Second Skipper:

José João Vidal and Manuel Lóló, brothers, were the lifeboat's last bosses and those who remain in the local collective memory.

José João Vidal, known as "Zé Jorge", was considered "a serious man", who seemed to have been made for the job of lifeguard boss because of the responsibility he had. Despite his relationship with men not always being easy, they all liked him and saw him as a good person. A seafarer, he worked with purse seine and angling and, together with his father, José Vidal Lóló, bought fish in Lagos, which they salted in a warehouse near the river, to sell to the muleteers of Monchique. He was appointed boss of the Alvor lifeboat on 14 July 1945, in a vote by local seafarers and possibly by members of the Comissão Local do Instituto de Socorros a Náufragos (Local Committee of the Portuguese Institute for Lifesaving). Living in a house attached to the lifeboat, he was the one who looked after the boat, called the men when there were outings and, on board, was the man at the helm.



Boss José João Vidal and second skipper Manuel Lóló

It was he who invited his brother, Manuel Lóló, also a seafarer, to take over as his second skipper in 1951, following his return from the army in the Azores, where he learnt to read and write and was the one who wrote the lifeboat outings reports. Manuel Lóló, with a cheerful and good mood spirit, encouraged the men on board and, in the event of a shipwreck, was the one who launched the rescue buoy. After his brother's retirement, he took over as boss of the life-saving station in 1981. After it closed, and for several years, he was dedicated to maintenance of the station and the "Alvor" lifeboat, which he held in high esteem.



They were both recognised for their services to this life-saving station over several decades.

Information provided by their families

YOU THERE, LIFEBOAT! LET'S GO IN PRAISE OF GOD!

José Jorge was a very curious man. He listened (...) to some kind of bulletin on the radio. And when was south-easterly, it was the most dangerous weather (...) he always went to the rock to see if the sea was good (...) If he saw that the sea was rough, he'd come straight over, like an army captain, passing here, passing there. He'd come straight out, "eh, you now, down". And when sometimes he saw the sea getting bigger, even if he didn't have the whole crew, he would go out with the lifeboat and pick up people who were in the river or coming from fishing in the river, and put them aboard the lifeboat.

Joaquim Maria



REPORT OF A SCARE AT SEA:

Sobrem a marinha de guerra
e uma nau de guerra de nome de guerra
chamada de Graça nº 152. O dono
desta nau de guerra é o Sr. Matias de Jesus
Belchior Isabel Rocha e o seu nome
é o Sr. Matias de Jesus Belchior
e o seu nome de guerra é o Sr. Matias
de Jesus Belchior. A nau de guerra
foi lançada ao mar em 6 de março
de 1974. O Sr. Matias de Jesus
Belchior é o dono da nau de guerra
e o seu nome de guerra é o Sr. Matias
de Jesus Belchior. A nau de guerra
foi lançada ao mar em 6 de março
de 1974. O Sr. Matias de Jesus
Belchior é o dono da nau de guerra
e o seu nome de guerra é o Sr. Matias
de Jesus Belchior.

Lifeboat exit report written by Manuel Lóló,

The boat - the ramp is still there - was moving along, it got to the water's edge, before it reached the water's edge everyone got in, the guys got in, with their oars in their hands, everyone with their oars in the air. It would drag a little more, hit the water, the boat run, stay on top of the water and we'd continue. (...) The first thing Zé Jorge said was "God be with you and may the Virgin Mary be with us".

Joaquim Paulo da Silva

Eh, we sometimes dodged when we saw that the master was after us. Because we might not go to sea, but we had gear to "safar", to get the hooks right so that when we needed to, we were ready to go. That was our life here.

Luis Batista

The man was sailing, he was careless, he went in, the sea came and turned him over. (...) The lifeboat picked him up there and then we towed the boat up with the tide. The second skipper is at the bow of the lifeboat, he throws the buoy to catch the man in the water. There was the buoy and the ball. The ball was the first one he threw, which was lighter, so they could hold. And then he'd throw the other one, when he had to, he'd throw the other buoy. We'd then hoist him into the lifeboat.

José Filipe Costa

It was the second skipper and the boss, they were both there, one at the bow, one at the stern, they gave the order "-Come inside, Come in now!". "Come in now!", that's when we went in.

Paulo Dias Caracol

" Help without giving assistance to the vessel called Nossa Senhora da Graça - 152. Owner Master Matias de Jesus and mate Belchior Isabel Rocha. The lifeboat did not give assistance because the vessel was rescued by another vessel that was nearby."

Excerpt from the lifeboat report, 6 March 1974

We caught a very big gale from the south-east, we were coming into the Alvor bar. The first sea we caught, the boat capsized, went straight to the bottom, capsized and I was stuck to the boat. And there were two fishermen on the bar, (...) one was Domingos Fortunato [the other was José Carlos Jacques], who went to save us. The lifeboat came later from Vale da Lama, to help bring the boat to the other side. We were 12 men, we helped and brought the boat, that's how we were saved.

Belchior Rocha



THE FISHING COMMUNITY OF ALVOR, YESTERDAY AND TODAY

I – ORIENTATION AND NAVIGABILITY - FROM THE "NORTH STAR" TO THE "ELECTRONIC SEAS"

Among the testimonies of those who have lived through different times, talking about the lifeboat is inseparable from talking about a time, especially until the end of the first half of the 20th century, when engines and equipment for orientation and navigability at sea were practically non-existent. Rowing and sailing boats dominated the local seascape.

The wind, a crucial factor in fishing, sharpened the senses of men who, through experience, learnt to know and distinguish the sea wind (south wind, from the sea to the land) from the north wind and from there set their routes...

When we left here, we knew if it was south-east wind, if there was windward side... The sea was wheezing. If the sea sizzled towards the bar, we had a north-westerly, south-westerly or westerly wind. When it "sang", here towards Vila Velha, or the Três Irmãos, it was a clean south-east, didn't fail

Joaquim Paulo da Silva

When it's northerly, we touch the wood, it's as dry as a stick... and the coast doesn't sizzle anywhere! And when there's mareiro, which is a sea wind to bring ashore, the shore sizzles and the wood is all wet. (...)

That's how we knew where to go, either east or west. The sea wind made it possible to go anywhere! If there was a north wind, I'd go to Windward side, which is closer to the rock, to come [back]... It's earthier... We'd go there, against the weather, here to come in favour of the weather, because we'd sail, we'd sail and row.

Manuel Pedro Pacheco

While during the day were orientated by the "land marks", at night they went out to sea guided by the north star, a fixed star that doesn't change its position, and by the land lights. The alignment of their positions adjusted the route, along with the calculation of the distance or depth to fish by measuring the fathoms (each fathom is about 1.80 metres) with hand probes. The depth at which they fished had to do with the type of bottom (clean or stone) the men were looking for and according to the fishing gear they used



Jorge Mendes Jorge



Francisco Gonçalves de Jesus and Francisco de Jesus

Any fisherman relied a lot on the "North". "North" is a star (...) We learnt from our elders where to go. With the "North" to this part, sometimes the "North" could go here to Alvor, a possibility, or with the "North" to Burgau in x number of fathoms. X number of fathoms, [measured] with a stone and a string of buoys or a cable, we would count until we reached the bottom to sound the sea. We used to hear the old people say, "37 fathoms went north to Alvor...", "went north to Torralta..."

José Carlos Jacques

Once at sea, the weather could change suddenly and the men sometimes had to fight against adverse conditions such as fog. Lights, such as the lighthouse buoy, which, in addition to signalling the art at sea, allowed larger boats to identify and respect the safety distance of smaller vessels. Sound instruments like the whelk, before the fog horn, and the needle or compass that men began to use in Alvor in the course of their cod fishing experiences, were also of great use here in terms of safer navigation.

And I once dropped the pots here close to the beach with the needle, in a heavy fog. With the needle I adjusted myself to drop the pots.

Manuel Pacheco Pedro



Automatically with that whelk, sailing in the fog, stops oars, stops everything, and every now and then it gives a whistle like that. If there happens to be a boat nearby, he hears, (...), a boat or something like that can answer. -

José Carlos Jacques

In bad weather, one of the most important factors was the solidarity and mutual help between men of the sea, such as the assistance that seine vessels sometimes gave to smaller artisanal fishing boats by towing them to the bar on northerly days, or the seafarers who were the protagonists of several rescues of mates in danger, respecting the maxim that exists among them "at sea there are no enemies".

By Grace and the Holy Spirit, arm oars and sail forward!

José Moreira Miguel

The people of Alvor, like other fishing communities, fight the uncertainty and danger of life at sea with a devout religious belief in the local saints, such as Senhor Jesus de Alvor or Nossa Senhora da Boa Viagem, to whom local processions are dedicated.

Many men left for sea with an evocation that, each in their own way, made to themselves: "Praise is Jesus Christ!". Holy days were respected, they didn't go to sea on Holy Friday (Easter), Ash Wednesday and there were also those who respected Carnival.

People didn't want us to whistle at night because it caused wind!

Aquilino Jacques

It was also important to respect certain beliefs, like not whistling at sea because it would bring wind, never wishing for a good catch, and warding off the evil eye when went to sea, because it's a labour in which all luck is welcome. In fishermen's warehouses there are sayings to ward off the evil eye and horns are hung on doors or boats to protect good luck and ward off unwanted energies.



II - CHANGES AND FISHING UPDATES

Nowadays, going to sea is synonymous of more safety with modern equipment, from the first charcoal probes to the electronic probes with which men began to identify the types of bottom and shoals, the GPS with which they now mark fishing spots and the location of the gear they throw into the sea with the greatest security, VHF radios to communicate in the event of an accident at sea, or all the tools that make up safety equipment, like life jackets, lights, fog horns, first aid, fire extinguishers, etc...

However, better equipment brings others challenges.

(...) Before, it was by eye and you probed and looked here and there. Now you don't, it's marked there, more here, more there, you're there, you don't miss it. So, it also increases the exploitation of the seabed. [The GPS] was the best thing: you've got a gear here, you set off, you go there, you go under the fog, you don't have any problems. But for me it was the best and it was the worst. There's more exploitation.

Carlos Almeida

I have a VHF radio; I have to have that. I now have an EPIRB to put in my waistcoat, so if I fall overboard and my life jacket is on, they'll know where I am.

(...) I see that it [the sea] is dangerous, I leave or I don't go there, but it's always dangerous to go out alone. Sometimes I can be dropping a gear and sticking a hook in and then I don't have... anyone to help me.

João Duarte



Francisco Duarte

As times change, the issues surrounding fishing give rise to new thoughts that go beyond safety at sea. Given its unpredictable nature, based on environmental factors, the biological cycles of species, overfishing, but also due to the expense inherent in this activity, the reduction in fishing miles, or the instability of auction prices, many men in Alvor go out to sea alone, considering the return from fishing to be insufficient for a larger "companionship". Special attention should be given to the "long line", an ancient, selective and less polluting fishing method, which is now considered secondary due to the labour and investment involved, giving way to the growing octopus fishery.



Francisco Duarte

In my father's time (...), my mother worked, my grandmother helped, all the neighbours, everyone came to help. Nowadays I'm not going to tell my wife to leave her job to come here in the morning until the end of the day, to help me "safar" and bait. While I go to the river, she's "safar", I come from the river, I have to bait. And every day we both have to live on this alone. It's impossible.

Nelson Caracol

THE LIFEBOAT'S NEW LIFE

At the end of the 1990s, the lifeboat was restored by the Alvor Parish Council and took on a new active role as part of the procession of Nossa Senhora da Boa Viagem, patron saint of fishermen, thus legitimised by the community for its role as maritime protection and part of the local heritage. At the same time, the boat, always inside the lifeboat station, was looked after by members of the community such as Manuel Lóló and José Carlos Jacques, the latter working for the Parish Council.



ALVOR LIFEGUARD INTERPRETATION CENTRE - Technical data

Câmara Municipal de Portimão
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Capitania do Porto de Portimão
Instituto de Socorros a Náufragos
Junta de Freguesia de Alvor
Museu de Marinha
Museu Marítimo de Ílhavo
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Translations:
Isabel dos Reis Veloso

Thanks:
Aquivo Histórico da Marinha Portuguesa
Centro de Ciências do Mar -
Universidade do Algarve
Docapesca, Portos e Lotas S.A.
Instituto Hidrográfico
Luis de Sousa Martins
Miguel Gaspar - IPMA - Instituto Português do Mar e da Atmosfera
Museu Municipal de Etnografia e História da Póvoa de Varzim
Portinave - Estaleiros de Reparação e Construção Naval

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Vera Almeida
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A heartfelt thanks to all the staff and community of Alvor, whose voice, commitment and ability to share were essential in the creation of this Lifeguard Interpretation Centre.

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