

Real-Life Heroes Inspire Epic Entertainment On The Silver Screen

(NAPSA)—Courage and strength of the human spirit have always been favorite themes in literature and movies. Nowhere is that more dramatically demonstrated than in Walt Disney Studios' "The Finest Hours," the heroic action thriller based on the remarkable real-life story of the U.S. Coast Guard's legendary maritime rescue off the New England coast in 1952.

The movie, now available for home viewing in various high-definition formats, begins on February 18, 1952, when a massive nor'easter pummeled New England towns along the Eastern seaboard. A teletype described the waters as "hazardous," the seas "mountainous," the darkness "extreme," the falling snow and winter gales "violent."

When Warrant Officer Daniel Cluff (Eric Bana) received word that a 500-foot oil tanker, the Fort Mercer, was in trouble, he dispatched his best men to aid various units in the large rescue effort that eventually saved 34 crew members. However, upon learning that a second 500-foot oil tanker, the Pendleton, was also damaged and adrift, Cluff ordered coxswain Bernie Webber (Chris Pine) to quickly assemble a crew and take out the CG36500 lifeboat to look for Pendleton survivors.

Webber and three men boarded the 12-seat motorized wooden boat and set off on the perilous mission with bleak prospects, at best. Even before Webber and his three-man crew cleared the Chatham Harbor, the 36-foot motorized boat's windshield and compass were destroyed. "It was a suicide mission," says Casey Sherman, co-author of a book on which the film is based. Yet the men persevered, and managed to rescue 32 of the Pendleton's 33 men in the midst of the turbulent storm. The four men not only became local heroes; they would later receive the rare Gold Lifesaving Medal, the service's highest



The CG36500 lifeboat and crew battling the storm on the most daring rescue mission in the history of the U.S. Coast Guard. It inspired Disney's heroic action thriller "The Finest Hours."

decoration for heroism during a rescue operation.

As one of the five U.S. Armed Forces, the U.S. Coast Guard regularly exemplifies its motto "Semper Paratus," meaning "Always Ready," with "Search and Rescue" being one of the most sacred missions. While the Pendleton rescue is considered among the most daring of all, it's still just one of many the U.S. Coast Guard has deemed extraordinary.

Here are six more:

• **Hurricane Katrina.** Search and rescue operations saved 24,135 lives from imminent danger, usually off the roofs of the victims' homes as floodwaters lapped at their feet. Coast Guardsmen "evacuated to safety" 9,409 patients from area hospitals. In total, 33,545 lives were saved.

• **Prinsendam Rescue.** After a fire broke out on the Dutch cruise vessel Prinsendam off Ketchikan, Alaska, on Oct. 4, 1980, all 520 passengers and crew were eventually rescued without loss of life or serious injury. The rescue is particularly important because of the distance traveled by the rescuers and coordination among independent organizations.

• **Dorchester Rescue.** On Feb. 3, 1943, the torpedoing of the transport Dorchester off the coast of Greenland saw cutters Comanche and Escanaba respond. The frigid water gave the survivors only minutes to live in the cold North Atlantic. With this in mind, the Escanaba crew used a new "retriever technique" when pulling



Chris Pine is Bernie Webber in Disney's "The Finest Hours."

people from the water—swimmers clad in wet suits swam to victims and secured a line so they could be hauled onto the ship. Escanaba saved 133 men, Comanche, 97.

• **Mississippi River Flood.** During this disastrous flood in January–February 1937, the Coast Guard rescued a total of 43,853 persons who were "removed from perilous positions to places of safety." Additionally, Coast Guardians saved 11,313 head of livestock. In all, 674 Coast Guardsmen and 128 Coast Guard vessels and boats served in the relief operations.

• **Keeper George N. Gray and the Charlotte, N.Y., Lifesaving Station.** Overcoming grueling conditions, one woman and four men were saved on December 15, 1902 from the wreck of the schooner John R. Noyes. Frostbitten and ice-covered, the rescuers were "under oars" (rowing) for nearly 60 miles in heavy seas without a break.

• **Joshua James and the Hull, Mass., Lifesaving Station.** Over two days (Nov. 25 to 26, 1888), Captain Joshua James and his crew, showing versatility, endurance, skill and dedication, rescued some 28 people from five different vessels during a great storm.

"The Finest Hours" arrives May 24 on Blu-ray™ Combo Pack, Digital HD, Disney Movies Anywhere, and On Demand, packaged with a host of bonus features that detail the making of the movie and the true-life events that inspired it.