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ADMIRALTY,

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17th December, 1946.

The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the VICTORIA CROSS to:

The late Temporary Lieutenant Thomas WILKINSON, Royal Naval Reserve.

On 14th February, 1942, H.M. Ship Li Wo, a patrol vessel of 1,000 tons, formerly a passenger steamer on the Upper Yangtse River, was on passage from Singapore to Batavia. Her ship's company consisted of eighty-four officers and men, including one civilian; they were mainly survivors from His Majesty's Ships which had been sunk, and a few from units of the Army and the Royal Air Force. Her armament was one 4 inch gun, for which she had only thirteen practice shells, and two machine guns.

Since leaving Singapore the previous day, the ship had beaten off four air attacks, in one of which fifty-two machines took part, and had suffered considerable damage. Late in the afternoon, she sighted two enemy convoys, the larger of which was escorted by Japanese naval units, including a heavy cruiser and some destroyers. The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant T. Wilkinson, R.N.R., gathered his scratch ship's company together and told them that, rather than try to escape, he had decided to engage the convoy and to fight to the last, in the hope that he might inflict damage upon the enemy. In making this decision, which drew resolute support from the whole ship's company, Lieutenant Wilkinson knew that his ship faced certain destruction, and that his own chances of survival were small.

H.M.S. Li Wo hoisted her battle ensign and made straight for the enemy. In the action which followed, the machine guns were used with effect upon the crews of all ships in range, and a volunteer gun's crew manned the 4 inch gun, which they fought with such purpose that a Japanese transport was badly hit and set on fire.

After a little over an hour, H.M.S. Li Wo had been critically damaged and was sinking. Lieutenant Wilkinson then decided to ram his principal target, the large transport, which had been abandoned by her crew. It is known that this ship burnt fiercely throughout the night following the action, and was probably sunk.

H.M.S. Li Wo's gallant fight ended when, her shells spent, and under heavy fire from the enemy cruiser, Lieutenant Wilkinson finally ordered abandon ship. He himself remained on board, and went down with her. There were only about ten survivors, who were later made prisoners of war.

Lieutenant Wilkinson's valour was equalled only by the skill with which he fought his ship. The VICTORIA CROSS is bestowed upon him posthumously in recognition both of his own heroism and self-sacrifice, and of that of all who fought and died with him.

His Majesty has also been graciously pleased to give orders for the following Appointment to the Distinguished Service Order, and to approve the following Awards:

To be a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order.

Temporary Sub-Lieutenant Ronald George Gladstone STANTON, Royal Naval Reserve; who was First Lieutenant of H.M.S. Li Wo and her only surviving officer. Upon Sub-Lieutenant Stanton devolved the organisation of the ship; and in her final action he served as a member of the volunteer 4 inch gun crew who fought their weapon with steadfast courage in the face of overwhelming odds.

The Conspicuous Gallantry Medal.

Acting Petty Officer Arthur William THOMPSON, D/JX. 129888 who when his commanding officer's decision was made to fight the ship to the last, volunteered to serve as gun-layer to the 4 inch gun, and laid this weapon with coolness and effect, showing the utmost skill, courage and resource throughout the action. In a brave company, his conduct was outstanding.

The Distinguished Service Medal.

Leading Seaman Victor SPENCER, D/SSX 23078; who fought the port machine gun of H.M.S. Li Wo with resolution and steadiness at close quarters with the enemy.

Able Seaman Albert SPENDLOVE, C/JX 131500; who as a member of the volunteer 4 inch gun crew, fought with courage and effect in the last action of H.M.S. Li Wo.

Mention in Despatches (Posthumous).

Temporary Lieutenant Edgar Neil DERBRIDGE, Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve.

Temporary Sub-Lieutenant J. G. PETHERBRIDGE, Malaya Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve.

Able Seaman Desmond PALMER, P/SSX 19816.

Mention in Despatches.

Acting Chief Petty Officer Charles Halme ROGERS, D/JX 125387.

Leading Seaman William Dick WILDING, C/SSX 18460.

Able Seaman John SMITH, D/J 253892 who showed steadfast devotion to duty in the last action of H.M.S. Li Wo.

For gallant and distinguished services in the Far East:

Mention in Despatches.

Commander Henry John MURPHY, Royal Navy (Retired).

Acting Temporary Lieutenant Commander Norman Alfred Joseph GAUNT, R.N.V.R.

The KING has been graciously pleased to give unrestricted permission for the wearing of the following decoration bestowed by the President of the United States of America:

Legion of Merit, Degree of Officer.

Acting Captain the Honourable Richard Duke COLERIDGE, O.B.E., Royal Navy (Retired).

The following amendment is made:—

In London Gazette Supplement No. 37387 of 14th December, 1945, Page 6084, the Award of Mention in Despatches (Posthumous) to Lieutenant Thomas WILKINSON, R.N.R., is cancelled, this officer's services being now recognised by the Award of the VICTORIA CROSS, gazetted herein.

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