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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

ARMY DEPARTMENT

CENTRAL CHANCERY OF THE ORDERS OF KNIGHTHOOD

St. James's Palace, London S.W.1.

9th June 1970.

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the British Empire Medal for Gallantry (Military Division) to the undermentioned:

21146202 Sergeant SAROJ TAMANG, Gurkha Engineers.

On 10th December 1969 the town of Kluang in the Malayan state of Johore was the scene of very severe flash flooding when the Sungei Mengkibol which flows through the town rose as much as ten feet in some places in a matter of a few hours. Rescue teams from The Gurkha Engineers, with assault boats powered by outboard motor, were deployed to evacuate local people from their rickety kampong houses built alongside or even overhanging the river, and by now up to their eaves in a torrent of very rapidly flowing water.

Sergeant SAROJ TAMANG commanded one of the assault boats involved in the rescue operation. Throughout the day until darkness made further work quite impossible he drove his small crew without rest in a site where conditions were most arduous and most dangerous and where two other assault boats were over turned and sunk. Among the hazards to be faced were a very rapid current against which the motors could barely make headway, and large numbers of submerged and floating obstacles from trees, barbed wire fences and dead animals to complete attap roofs travelling downstream at high speed. He had to manoeuvre his boat through a maze of local houses, many in a state of collapse or semi-collapse. At all times this young Gurkha sergeant displayed coolness, a complete disregard for danger, initiative, leadership and judgment which would have done credit to an experienced officer, combined with the greatest patience and unruffled good humour, which had a noticeably calming effect on the distressed families he was evacuating. Well over four hundred towns people were rescued by The Gurkha Engineers. Twenty-four were drowned, nearly all in Tap Tau Sah where Sergeant SAROJ TAMANG was operating. There is no question that the death toll could have been considerably greater had it not been for his courageous and devoted efforts.

Whitehall, London S.W.1.

9th June 1970.

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the Air Force Cross to the undermentioned:

Major Alwyne Compton Spencer HOLTOM (437089)
Royal Regiment of Artillery (Attached Army Air Corps).

An unprecedentedly heavy monsoon rainfall during the 9/10th December 1969 produced flooding in Kluang that swept through the flimsy buildings along the banks of the Sungei Mengkibol. These floods threatened the lives of the inhabitants who had been forced to take refuge on the roof-tops, with the water up to the eaves, and who were unable to swim to safety because of the strength of the current.

Although the weather conditions were such that under normal circumstances flying would not have been contemplated, Major Holtom, on his own initiative, decided to attempt to rescue the many people who had taken refuge on the rooftops.

Stripping the helicopter of all seats and straps, except for his own, and removing all the doors to increase the visibility, he took off with another pilot as his crewman. In driving rain, with a cloud base of about 100 feet and very limited visibility Major Holtom flew around the houses through a forest of Television aerials and telegraph poles and wires that disappeared into the low cloud. Because of the bad visibility he was unable to get much forward flying speed and had virtually to hover taxi out of ground effect, a condition of flight normally avoided at all costs and known colloquially as the "Dead Man's Curve". He was well aware that under these conditions any failure on the part of the helicopter would almost certainly result in death for both himself and his crewman.

The Scout had no winch and rescues had to be affected by hovering with one skid touching the roof in order to earth the helicopter's static electricity.

The refugees were dragged into the helicopter by the crewman and taken to the school which was situated on higher ground. This operation was repeated time and time again, despite the added hazards of sheets of corrugated iron becoming detached from roofs and threatening to fly up into the main rotor. In all 78 people were rescued in this way. Eventually, after a sortie lasting for one hour and forty minutes, Major Holtom was