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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

**NAVY DEPARTMENT**

**CENTRAL CHANCERY OF  
 THE ORDERS OF KNIGHTHOOD**

St. James' Palace, London S.W.1.  
 1st September 1970.

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased to give Orders for the following appointment to the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire:

*To be an Additional Member of the Military Division of the said Most Excellent Order for Gallantry:*

Lieutenant Commander John Keith WILSON, Royal Navy.

In August 1969, the wartime wreck of the S.S. ARNOLD MAERSK was found lying submerged, in 55 feet of water, off the Grunes aux Dardes reef, 1½ miles south west of St. Helier, Jersey and barely a mile from the houses and hotels on Normpoint Point. Survey revealed that the vessel's cargo of German 1000 lb. bombs was scattered in profusion, under and around the wreck and shrouded by kelp. It was appreciated that there was a real possibility of accidental detonation of up to 50,000 lbs. of explosive with all the consequent effect of shock and blast over a wide and densely populated area. Accordingly, the Lieutenant Governor of Jersey requested Naval assistance.

The Plymouth Clearance Diving Team, commanded by Lieutenant Commander Wilson, commenced Phase I of this dispersal operation on 20th August 1969. The severe danger of the task immediately became apparent. Tides ran strongly at 4 knots in the area concerned and diving was only possible for up to one hour at low water and for 40 minutes at high water slack. Bombs were located in the wreck and found to be not only in a highly unstable and fragile condition but also covered by a thin spray of iron picrate exuding from the primers. This latter is a most volatile substance, extremely dangerous and subject to detonation by slight percussion or even temperature variation. Under Lieutenant Commander Wilson's guidance, some 23 bombs were individually raised from the wreck in these conditions, lifted aboard the diving vessel, removed to a safe distance, sunk and detonated. Because of gales and adverse conditions, this phase of the operation took some 5 weeks of most expert diving, cool headedness and complete devotion to duty by the whole of the Plymouth Clearance Diving Team. Nevertheless, a survey at the end of this phase showed that 15 effective bombs still remained in the ARNOLD MAERSK.

The Jersey authorities were informed of this situation and after taking advice from the Superintendent, Naval Construction Research Establishment, the Global Seismology Unit, Edinburgh University and Lieutenant Commander Wilson, it was agreed that these remaining 15 bombs should be disposed of by countermining in situ within the wreck.

Phase II took place in January 1970 and demanded the placing of charges, firing systems and sinkers actually within the hold which was scarred with jagged twisted sharp metal, all of which was very dangerous in itself to divers, notwithstanding the effect of the bombs. The operation took place in an area which was completely exposed to south westerly gales and had a heavy ground swell running over it, even during periods of otherwise calm weather.

During the two phases of this operation, Lieutenant Commander Wilson led his team with great determination, skill and personal example of the highest order. Both phases were carried out in very difficult diving conditions with considerable risks even with no explosives around. While the explosives were being removed, the conditions were even more hazardous. Lieutenant Commander Wilson displayed great personal courage and bravery and there was no task which he did not undertake personally. His team, inspired by his example, successfully achieved a most hazardous bomb disposal task.

**CENTRAL CHANCERY OF  
 THE ORDERS OF KNIGHTHOOD**

St. James' Palace, London S.W.1.  
 1st September 1970.

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

Chief Petty Officer Derrick George KING,  
 P/JX 660611.

Chief Petty Officer King was the senior diving rating of the Plymouth Clearance Diving Team which undertook the extremely hazardous task of clearing unexploded bombs from the wreckage of the S.S. ARNOLD MAERSK.

His long experience as a diver, his staunch personal example coupled with superb seamanship and outstanding leadership, provided the mental as well as the physical security which allowed the divers under his supervision to operate repeatedly in marginal conditions in an extremely hazardous environment. If it had not been for Chief Petty Officer King's unrelenting efforts, it is quite possible that both phases of the operation could have ended in disaster for the whole Clearance Diving Team.