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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

HONOURS AND AWARDS

AIR FORCE DEPARTMENT

Whitehall,
 London, SW1A 2HB.
 22nd October 1974.

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased to approve the following award:

Air Force Medal

V4220298 Flight Sergeant John DONNELLY, Royal Air Force.

On the evening of 19th May 1974, Flight Sergeant Donnelly was the winchman in the duty Search and Rescue helicopter crew of "C" Flight, No. 22 Squadron, Valley, when they were summoned to help the Llanberis Mountain Rescue Team in the recovery of a seriously injured climber from the North Face of Snowdon. The casualty had fallen onto a ledge under an overhanging part of the cliff face about 200 feet from the top; he had broken both legs and a bone in his shoulder and was bleeding badly. The Llanberis Mountain Rescue Team, having reached the injured man, faced a desperate situation. The recovery of the survivor by normal mountain rescue techniques would have been so prolonged that the chances of saving his life would have been minimal. The helicopter landed on top of the cliff because the crew had realised that the aircraft winch cable was not long enough for the task. Flight Sergeant Donnelly, appreciating the plight of the injured climber, immediately volunteered to increase the helicopter cable by the use of a 200 foot length of climbing

rope. He attached himself to the end of the extended cable and the helicopter was gradually moved to the edge of the vertical cliff; the winchman was then lowered until he was level with the survivor some 200 feet from the cliff top. Despite the risk of serious injury to himself, as the cable swung with a pendulum effect and threatened to dash him against the cliff face, Flight Sergeant Donnelly managed to reach the injured climber. With the helicopter held in a steady hover despite the turbulent and down-draughting air and after fifteen minutes of strenuous physical effort working in an extremely hazardous position, Flight Sergeant Donnelly and the Mountain Rescue Team managed to secure the injured climber in a "Thomas" stretcher. On the recovery from the cliff the serious oscillations of the winch cable began again and Flight Sergeant Donnelly now had to protect the injured climber in the stretcher from contact with the cliff face with his body. Fortunately, in doing so, Flight Sergeant Donnelly only sustained minor injuries. Finally, with himself and the casualty still swinging wildly, he landed on top of the cliff edge with the assistance of a ground party. The injured climber and winchman were transferred to the helicopter cabin and the survivor taken immediately to the Bangor Hospital where he was successfully treated for his injuries. Flight Sergeant Donnelly, with total disregard for his own personal safety, coolly volunteered to attempt a rescue technique which he had never practised before and which hitherto had not been used in Snowdonia. By his prompt and unselfish action, he displayed exceptional resource and bravery in the face of great danger to save the life of the injured climber and his example of determination, courage and skill were equal to the highest traditions of the Royal Air Force.

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