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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

HONOURS AND AWARDS

NAVY DEPARTMENT

CENTRAL CHANCERY OF
THE ORDERS OF KNIGHTHOOD

St. James's Palace, London S.W.1.
17th August 1976.

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the Queen's Gallantry Medal to the undermentioned:

Petty Officer Aircrewman Roy WITHELL, DO66729S.

On Sunday, 22nd February 1976, a request was received by 824 Naval Air Squadron embarked in HMS ARK ROYAL to assist in the evacuation of a seriously ill crewman, who needed immediate medical attention, from the U.S. submarine BERGALL situated some 450 miles away in the area of the Azores. In spite of deteriorating weather conditions, 2 Sea King Helicopters were launched and, after a difficult 300-mile flight taking nearly 3 hours, they reached the U.S.A.F. base at Lajes. However, due to adverse weather conditions, a night transfer of the sick man was not possible. The next morning the helicopters were able to reach the U.S. submarine.

The transfer began with the Aircrewman (P.O. Withell) being lowered, with a metal stretcher, on to the submarine's casing. The Sea King then stood off close by while the patient was brought up on to the casing, Withell fitted him with a life jacket and secured him in the stretcher, which was being held by two U.S.N. ratings. Suddenly a large wave washed over the submarine, sweeping the stretcher from the grasp of the two U.S.N. ratings and into the sea. Without hesitation Withell followed the stretcher into the water. He inflated his own life saving waistcoat and kept the patient's head above water while hooking the stretcher to his double lift harness. His task was aggravated by the handicaps of a fully inflated life saving waistcoat, the turbulence, and the dangerously close proximity of the submarine's propeller.

The Sea King meanwhile manoeuvred into position overhead and winched the two men to safety within 90 seconds of the patient being washed off the casing of the submarine.

P.O. Withell acted with great courage and a complete disregard for his own personal safety. He undoubtedly saved the patient's life and his action was in the very highest traditions of the Service.

AIR FORCE DEPARTMENT

Whitehall, London, SW1A 2HB.
17th August 1976.

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

Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air

Flight Lieutenant Richard Harry HARDEN (593938), Royal Air Force.

For his great skill, courage and presence of mind when, on 13th May 1976, against heavy odds, he saved his Buccaneer aircraft from destruction after it had suffered engine failure. He headed for the nearest airfield. Unable to jettison fuel and faced with a runway shorter than he was accustomed to, and with an overweight, under-powered, single-engine approach, for which there was no recommended landing speed, he nevertheless landed the aircraft safely.

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