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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.
18th January 1977.

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

Lieutenant Commander Timothy Kelsey CANNON, Royal Navy.

Marine Engineering Artificer 2 Carl Laurence ASHCROFT, D120299T.

Acting Petty Officer Marine Engineering Mechanic Martin Philip MIDDLETON, D104933H.

On 2nd May 1976 while berthed at Merseyside, a serious fire broke out in the Diesel Generating Compartment of HM Submarine WARSPITE. Within a minute the compartment and the main machinery compartments (including the Manoeuvring Room) became full of vicious choking black toxic smoke which reduced visibility to almost nil. The initial violent conflagration, in addition to giving off intense heat, caused secondary fires in the Diesel Generating Compartment which, together with the noxious combustion products, increased the already extremely difficult and hazardous task of fighting fires.

Lieutenant Commander Timothy Kelsey CANNON, Royal Navy

Lieutenant Commander Cannon, the Senior Engineering Officer who was not onboard at the time, arrived at the Control Room of the Submarine some 40 minutes after the fire had started. By this time the situation had become very serious indeed. Although without a self-contained breathing set, his first thought was to reach the four nuclear power watchkeepers, a distance of some 30 feet away from the fire. To achieve this he had to plug in his emergency breathing mask to fixed breathing sockets in order to take in air, hold his breath, and then feel his way to the next socket, several times. By his calm, positive

leadership he was able to steady and encourage the watchkeepers whose task is to ensure the safety of the nuclear reactor plant and the ship.

However the heat and smoke soon became so severe that the withdrawal of the watchkeepers became imperative. This was controlled by Lieutenant Commander Cannon who by this time had obtained a self-contained breathing set. One of the watchkeepers lost his breathing mask during the evacuation and was overcome by smoke and fumes: Lieutenant Commander Cannon dragged him to safety and then returned to the manoeuvring room to search by feel to ensure complete evacuation.

For the next 3 hours Lieutenant Commander Cannon monitored vital equipment and took charge of the fire-fighting. Two successive local Fire Brigade teams with breathing apparatus failed to reach the seat of the fire due to the heat and toxic fumes. It was then decided to endeavour to fill the compartment with foam: Lieutenant Commander Cannon led the team and despite the intense heat and dangerous conditions personally inserted the foam branch pipe inside the hatch cover and remained until the compartment was filled. He subsequently returned and refilled the compartment to ensure the effectiveness of the foam. By his very gallant action Lieutenant Commander Cannon not only extinguished the fire but reduced the damage to the submarine by many millions of pounds.

Lieutenant Commander Cannon's personal courage and example were as much an inspiration to the ratings and civilian firemen under conditions of great stress as his thorough technical knowledge was a vital factor in securing the safety of the reactor plant and indeed of the ship. The steadfastness, perseverance and great courage he displayed with disregard to his personal safety throughout the incident were of the highest order.

Marine Engineering Artificer 2 Carl Laurence ASHCROFT, D120299T

MEA2 Ashcroft led the initial team of two civilian firemen to survey the fire. He also searched the diesel room and adjacent compartments for personnel. Wearing a smaller civilian self-contained breathing set he crawled alongside the diesel engines which were on fire and made a complete survey of confined areas by touch to doubly ensure no personnel were present.

Despite the tremendous heat and intense toxic smoke (he could not see the flames) Ashcroft made a second entry to shut off two diesel valves and alter the ventilation flap

valves in order to starve the fire of air. He had no special protective gloves with him but borrowed a pair of felt slippers to protect his hands and partially succeeded in shutting off the fuel valves and altering the ventilation flaps.

For the next hour Ashcroft monitored vital equipment in adjacent smoke filled compartments and then returned to help fight the fire. He led successive teams of civilian firemen down into the diesel compartment and assisted them. The civilian fire-fighting teams were relieved by fresh men at each attempt to reach the seat of the fire but Ashcroft personally accompanied each team.

By his initiative and persistence and with little regard to the very high risk to his own life Ashcroft displayed outstanding bravery and determination throughout the fire.

Acting Petty Officer Marine Engineering Mechanic Martin Philip MIDDLETON, D104933H

A/POMEM Middleton was the first to make the difficult and dangerous entry into the Diesel Room to fight the fire and search for personnel. Visibility was almost nil because of the dense toxic smoke and because of his breathing equipment he continually became caught up and trapped in the cramped compartment. However without thought to his own safety he continued to search mostly by crawling on his hands and knees and feeling his way until he was satisfied that there was nobody left inside.

For the next two hours Middleton made repeated entries into the Diesel Compartment, accompanied by

successive teams of fresh civilian firemen to fight the fire. Because of the confined space, Middleton took charge of the firemen and led them in single file to the seat of the blaze, pushing the fire-fighting equipment ahead of him. After each incursion, he returned to give a lucid description of the situation to the Command. Eventually he was ordered to stop because of his exhaustion.

Middleton's gallant, selfless behaviour, and tenacity in performing his duty at great risk to himself was of the highest order.

Whitehall, London S.W.1.

18th January 1977.

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct to the undermentioned:

Ordnance Electrical Artificer 1 David George PRITCHARD, D091819H.

Acting Ordnance Electrical Mechanician 1 David SMITH, D091446M.

Control Electrical Artificer 2 Raymond Thomas Frederick HADLOW, D107806U.

For their gallant and courageous actions when a serious fire broke out onboard HM Submarine WARSPITE on 2nd May 1976.

LONDON

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