

Captain Christopher George Frank CHARTER (484829), The Queen's Regiment.
 Captain (acting Major) Donald Cameron CLARKE (480776), The King's Own Royal Border Regiment.
 24179686 Corporal Bruce Charles COLLARD, Corps of Royal Engineers.
 23898285 Sergeant Andrew Braid CORNET, Royal Corps of Transport.
 Captain Alastair Howard CUNNINGHAM (487473), The King's Own Scottish Borderers.
 23395262 Warrant Officer Class 2 Joseph EASTWOOD, B.E.M., The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers.
 24226637 Sapper Alexander Michael FRY, Corps of Royal Engineers.
 24177203 Corporal Stephen Lawrence FUSZARD, Royal Corps of Signals.
 24010183 Sergeant David James GARRITY, The King's Own Royal Border Regiment.
 24336058 Lance Corporal Robert Chenery GLADWELL, Royal Corps of Signals.
 Major Richard Harold GRAHAM (477541), The Queen's Regiment.
 Colonel Henry HOWARD (397939), late The Royal Irish Rangers (27th (Inniskilling) Bdr and 87th).
 23974637 Sergeant Raymond Arthur JORDAN, Corps of Royal Military Police.
 24138786 Bombardier (acting Sergeant) John Steven LOVELACE, Royal Regiment of Artillery.
 24214966 Gunner (acting Lance Bombardier) Kenneth Ivor LOXLEY, Royal Regiment of Artillery.
 Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Hubbard MILBURN, M.B.E. (433192), The King's Own Royal Border Regiment.
 23675182 Warrant Officer Class 2 Michael John STONE, Royal Army Ordnance Corps.
 Lieutenant Michael Brian STUBINGTON (493789), Royal Regiment of Artillery.
 Major Colin Gordon THOMSON (461669), The Parachute Regiment.
 Lieutenant Colonel Peter Frederick WALTER, M.B.E., M.C. (432312), The Parachute Regiment.
 Brigadier Bryan Courtney WEBSTER (415013), late The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers.
 Major Brian Ferguson WILLIAMSON (455124), Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

AIR FORCE DEPARTMENT

Whitehall, London, SW1A 2HB.

26th April 1977.

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

Air Force Cross

Flight Lieutenant Gerald Paul HERMER (609412), Royal Air Force.

Flight Lieutenant Hermer is on his first tour of duty as a helicopter pilot and has only recently completed basic flying training after previous service as an engineer officer. On the night of 14th/15th January 1977, Flight Lieutenant Hermer was the duty Search and Rescue pilot of "B" Flight, No. 202 Squadron, Leconfield when, shortly after midnight, he was tasked by the Northern Rescue Co-ordination Centre to go to the assistance of the sinking German ship ANNA MARIE, whose crew of five men were taking to the lifeboats at a position reported as 45 miles east of Flamborough Head. Weather conditions were very bad, with a sea area Tyne and Humber Force 7 gale warning in operation. It was an exceptionally dark night with no moon, a low cloud base and a forecast of snow and hail showers. A Nimrod aircraft had been tasked from Kinloss to act as top cover for the helicopter, which was airborne shortly after one o'clock. Because of a 35 knot headwind, Flight Lieutenant Hermer decided to refuel at the oil rig AMOCO 8A before flying to the estimated position of the incident, despite the fact that he had never previously landed on a rig. En route he encountered increasingly frequent snow and hail showers and had to descend to 500 feet above sea level in order to remain clear of cloud. There were no external visual references and he had to rely solely on his instruments, an extremely demanding task

in the Whirlwind which has no automatic flight control system or rotor stabilisation. He landed successfully on the oil rig, where he carried out a rotors-turning refuel and was then given a revised position of the incident which was now estimated to be 27 miles further out, some 72 miles off Flamborough Head. Shortly after leaving the rig, the helicopter's navigational equipment and radio homing aid became useless because of increasingly heavy hail and snow showers, and he sought radar assistance from Royal Air Force Staxton Wold, whose controller vectored the helicopter to the search area. Visual contact was finally made with two small inflatable dinghies attended by the Swedish tanker CREDO and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel OLN A. These ships were unable to effect a rescue because of a very rough sea running at 30 feet between wave crest and trough. The RFA OLN A was equipped with a helicopter landing platform and fuel; and Flight Lieutenant Hermer assessed that if a rescue attempt were made it would be necessary for him to refuel on the ship before returning to Leconfield. In spite of the difficulties of landing at night on a heaving ship, a manoeuvre for which he had not been trained, and although he had never seen a ship of this type before, he judged that a landing was possible and he therefore elected to attempt a rescue before carrying out a refuel on board.

The dinghies were illuminated by a violently pitching search light from the tanker, but, far from aiding the pilot, the beam created distracting reflections on the windscreen. As the tanker moved, however, these reflections ceased and Flight Lieutenant Hermer attempted a trial hover with no outside visual references. This proved impossible until the CREDO came into view and provided him with a basic datum from which to work. He established a hover at almost the maximum length of the winch cable and with great difficulty in the very heavy sea, succeeded in getting his winchman in contact with the dinghies. At the first attempt, the winchman was dragged away from the dinghies before he could secure a survivor and had to be recovered to the helicopter, but at the second attempt he succeeded in winching one survivor clear. Because of fuel shortage, Flight Lieutenant Hermer then flew to the OLN A to refuel and to offload the survivor before he could attempt a further rescue. This was a difficult and complicated operation, made hazardous by a heavily rolling deck, and Flight Lieutenant Hermer was unable to shut down his aircraft, again refuelling with rotors turning. He then took off again to find that the tanker CREDO had drifted down on the dinghies, which were now sheltered in the lee of the ship, so that the remaining survivors were able to be recovered by the tanker crew as the ship rose and fell against the dinghies. Flight Lieutenant Hermer satisfied himself that everyone had been rescued and returned to the OLN A to refuel yet again before returning to his base. On this occasion the landing was even more difficult than before as the ship was now some 50 degrees out of wind, making directional control of the helicopter and the use of adequate visual references extremely difficult. Nevertheless, he again landed successfully, refuelled and picked up the survivor, and returned to Leconfield, again flying through heavy snow showers under the direction of Staxton Wold radar.

To carry out this rescue at night, flying for 4 hours 10 minutes, in atrocious weather conditions, demanded skill, determination and courage beyond those expected of pilots with far more experience and training than Flight Lieutenant Hermer. During this time he was faced with difficult decisions and taxing demands upon his skill at almost every turn. Each time he displayed a level of judgment and expertise far beyond that which could be expected from one having his limited experience both as a helicopter pilot and in the search and rescue role. He carried out a successful transit to the search area, flying entirely on instruments, landed to refuel on both an oil rig and a ship—neither of which had he ever attempted before—and successfully carried out a hover over a moving target in a very rough sea with minimal visual references—a difficult and demanding task even in daylight—leading to the successful rescue of one of the survivors. Throughout, despite his inexperience, he displayed an exceptionally high level of piloting skill, a high degree of captaincy, marked determination and courage in the face of danger, which was in accordance with the highest traditions of the Royal Air Force.

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