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HONOURS AND AWARDS

NAVY DEPARTMENT

Whitehall, London SW1A 2BE
4th September 1979.

The QUEEN has been graviously pleased to approve the following awards:

Air Force Cross

Lieutenant Commander Michael John NORMAN, Royal Navy.

Lieutenant Anthony John Marsden HOGG, Royal Navy.

During the night of 30th-31st December 1978 the trawler *Ben Asdale* broke away from a Soviet factory ship in Falmouth Bay and drifted in storm force winds, heavy seas and continuous snow onto rocks in Maenporth Cove. Attempts to rescue the 14 crewmen by lifeboat and breeches buoy had to be abandoned owing to the atrocious conditions and a request for helicopter assistance was made to the Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose.

Lieutenant Commander Michael John NORMAN, Royal Navy.

Lieutenant Commander Norman was the Captain and Observer of Sea King 592 which took off at 0145 on 31st December. The aircrew had been briefed that the already atrocious weather would deteriorate and that poor radar reception in the blizzard would probably prevent them returning to Culdrose. Flying at low level to minimise the risk of icing, Sea King 592 reached Maenporth at 0205 but was unable to identify the coast, the cove or the wreck because of the darkness and poor visibility in the blizzard. The gale blowing directly into the cove added to the helicopter's difficulties by making an approach from seaward impossible. Using bearings radioed from a coast-guard vehicle on the cliffs, Lieutenant Commander Norman had the aircraft fly a circuit until the vehicle's searchlight became visible. The aircraft was then flown over the vehicle and given a steep descent, establishing it in an automatic hover some 1000 yards from the coast. Since there was no visual or radar contacts with the coast, Lieutenant Commander Norman asked the Coastguard to con the aircraft rearwards to a position over the wreck. Aided by the cliff-top searchlight this was successfully accomplished despite an increase in the wind strength to Force 9. By now three of the trawlermen had reached the shore in a dinghy but three others had been swept away by the heavy seas which were continually breaking over the

wreck, now on its side, sometimes concealing it from the view of the aircraft 50 feet above. Lieutenant Commander Norman judged the conditions to be too treacherous to put his crewman down in a double lift strop and decided to use a single lift strop instead. The rescue began with Lieutenant Commander Norman controlling the aircraft's attitude the 1st Pilot maintaining height on the radio altimeter, the Crewman operating the winch and the Co-Pilot watching what little of the cliff could occasionally be seen whilst maintaining radio contact with the Coastguard. Despite problems in holding position over the wreck the first two lifts were successfully completed. Lieutenant Commander Norman then decided to attempt the next lift with the Pilot in full control of the aircraft to facilitate a better hover and provide easier access to the forward part of the aircraft for the cold and virtually immobile survivors. At this stage the aircraft's intercom began to deteriorate and with the Pilot now having to rely on verbal instructions from the Observer it was even more difficult to maintain position. The third survivor was lifted with a large swing on the wire as the aircraft, caught by the gale, lurched towards the cliffs which were about 50 yards away but not visible. The winch wire snagged and cut into a fairing aft of the cabin door and Lieutenant Commander Norman realised that the only way to free it was to lower the survivor into the sea to take the weight off the wire. This manoeuvre was successfully completed despite the difficulty in communicating with the aircrew. With the snow storm intensifying, the rearward transit into the cove was repeated with Coastguard assistance. At this point Lieutenant Commander Norman seriously considered abandoning the rescue, but realising that there was no other rescue method available to the trawlermen he decided to continue since it was doubtful whether the crew could survive unaided for much longer. The remaining five lifts were completed with increasing difficulty as the intercom worsened and finally failed leaving Lieutenant Commander Norman with no method of communication with his Pilots since it was too dark to see hand signals. With all eight survivors on board, the helicopter attempted to return to Culdrose despite the complications caused by the intercom failure and poor radar reception. Eventually the intercom recovered and Lieutenant Commander Norman was able to direct his aircraft to a position overhead the field using the aircraft's radar. Once the aircraft had been landed, the survivors were taken to the sick bay, and in spite of two cases of hypothermia all those rescued by the helicopter survived.

Lieutenant Commander Norman led his crew in extremely difficult circumstances of weather, sea state and aircraft serviceability in one of the most dangerous rescues undertaken by a Naval aircraft in recent years. It is largely because of the leadership, professional competence, calm, clear thinking, and great courage displayed by him in these atrocious conditions that those who remained on board the *Ben Asdale* were saved.

Lieutenant Anthony John Marsden HOGG, Royal Navy.

Lieutenant Hogg was the 1st Pilot of Sea King 592 which was launched in the early hours of 31st December 1978 to rescue the crew of the trawler *Ben Asdale*.

Weather conditions on take off were atrocious and throughout this hazardous rescue the aircraft was flown well beyond its normal weather limits. As the rescue proceeded the wind strength increased to Force 9, visibility deteriorated as the blizzard intensified and communications worsened as the aircraft's intercom steadily failed, cutting Lieutenant Hogg off from his fellow crew members. Nonetheless, he remained calm and in control throughout although he knew that on occasions the aircraft was being blown dangerously close to the cliffs. The turbulence of the air and rough seas produced extraordinary variations of pitch and roll yet Lieutenant Hogg remained unruffled as he maintained the aircraft's height and monitored its attitude whilst hovering.

On completion of the rescue, with the intercom totally failed, Lieutenant Hogg attempted to fly the aircraft back to Culdrose. However, radar reception in the blizzard was so poor that it was only when the intercom recovered that the aircraft could return, using its own radar information interpreted by the Observer.

Lieutenant Hogg remained composed throughout this highly dangerous operation. He co-operated closely with the Captain of the aircraft to achieve the rescue in the most effective way possible even though this method took a large part of the aircraft's control away from him. He showed great courage, supreme professional competence and devotion to duty in the face of almost impossible conditions.

Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air

Lieutenant Lawrence Maynard JERAM-CROFT, Royal Navy.

For his skill and personal courage as Co-Pilot of Sea King 592 in coping with communications difficulties during the hazardous rescue of survivors from the wrecked trawler *Ben Asdale* on 31st December 1978.

Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air

Leading Aircrewman Christopher John FOLLAND, D105603U.

For his skill and personal courage as the Winchman of Sea King 592 during the hazardous rescue of survivors from the wrecked trawler *Ben Asdale* on 31st December 1978.

Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct

Leading Medical Assistant Brian David STEELE, DO82890Y.

For his courage and devotion to duty as the Medical Assistant of Sea King 592 during the hazardous rescue of survivors from the wrecked trawler *Ben Asdale* on 31st December 1978.

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