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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.