

it was decided to assemble an off duty crew to assist the first standby helicopter which had already been scrambled. Sergeant Bragg volunteered without hesitation for duty as the Winchman. At the scene of the incident the conditions were appalling with a wind of fifty knots with gusts to seventy knots and a very high sea state giving wave heights of sixty feet. The first Sea King had been forced to abandon its attempts to put a line on the vessel's deck and a civilian S61 helicopter, after making several similar attempts, had also been forced to withdraw from the scene. The Finneagle's captain had assembled the crew and passengers on the vessel's foredeck. He was forced to maintain an into-wind course because of the severe weather conditions and the need to prevent the fire and resulting fumes from reaching those on board. The helicopter captain had no choice other than to attempt to position the Sea King for winching from the vessel's bow, despite the fact that this would necessitate manoeuvring in very close proximity to a foremast and a high forward superstructure. The Finneagle had lost electrical power and the only illumination available was from the helicopter's own lights and the glow from the fire. Showing exceptional courage in the face of great danger and in weather conditions more hazardous than any he had previously experienced Sergeant Bragg was lowered from the helicopter in an attempt to position him on the vessel's foredeck. The Finneagle was pitching and rolling extremely violently and the pilot's efforts at maintaining a steady hover caused Sergeant Bragg to swing through a dangerously wide arc. In view of the very real danger to Sergeant Bragg's life the helicopter captain ordered him to be recovered to the cabin. The helicopter crew then decided to adopt the Hi-line winching technique which obviates the necessity for the helicopter to maintain an absolutely precise overhead position. Sergeant Bragg positioned himself to assist the Winch Operator for the duration of the winching operation. From his station at the rear of the helicopter he was fully aware of the hazardous nature of this undertaking. Below and slightly to his right, the vessel's amidships continued to burn fiercely with intermittent explosions, whilst the foremast followed an erratic path close to and frequently at the same height as the rear fuselage of the helicopter. With two rescue strops on the winch hook, the first eight survivors were safely lifted from the vessel. It was then learned that the Finneagle's cargo was considered to be highly dangerous and included a consignment of carbide. The vessel was well on fire and the remaining fourteen survivors on board were experiencing difficulty in breathing due to the fumes from the burning cargo. At this moment the

Finneagle's captain radioed that he considered the vessel to be in imminent danger of sinking. The rescue was continued regardless of the obvious dangers and Sergeant Bragg continued with his tasks of assisting with the positioning of the rescue strops and getting survivors on board the helicopter. The remaining fourteen crew members were successfully winched to safety despite the fact that the Hi-line required renewing and repositioning twice during the winching period. With complete disregard for his personal safety, Sergeant Bragg ignored the effects of the fire's intense heat, the intermittent explosions and the possibility that he was breathing dangerous fumes during the entire winching operation, which lasted for a period of one and three quarter hours. In addition to his great coolness, courage and determination in attempting to board the vessel, his subsequent efforts while assisting the Winch Operator undoubtedly prevented the total winching time being perilously extended.

Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct

Squadron Leader Hamish Sutherland GRANT (5200783),
Royal Air Force.

For his outstanding coolness and devotion to duty during a search and rescue operation when rendering medical assistance to 22 survivors rescued by winching during the night of 2nd October 1980 from the burning and disabled M.V. Finneagle.

Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air

Flight Lieutenant David Anthony SIMPSON (5202710),
Royal Air Force.

For his coolness, courage and outstanding professionalism shown during the course of a search and rescue operation in the night of 2nd October 1980 when 22 persons were winched to safety from the burning and disabled M.V. Finneagle.

Whitehall, London S.W.1.
14th April 1981.

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the Air Force Cross to:

Captain Anthony MARKHAM (503566), Army Air Corps,

for his bravery when evacuating two serious casualties, in extremely adverse flying conditions, following a traffic accident in Northern Ireland.

LONDON

Printed and published by HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE: 1981

PRINTED IN ENGLAND

Price £1.20 net

ISBN 0 11 658583 8