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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

3rd August 1982

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

Chief Officer Christopher Onslow SMITH, Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

Chief Petty Officer (Deck) John Thomas OLLEY, Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

On Tuesday, 8th December 1981, R.F.A. *Engadine* was requested to render assistance to the cargo ship MV *Melpol* which was adrift and heavily ablaze in bad weather conditions 35 miles off St. Catherine's Point. The first action taken in response to the distress call was to despatch two helicopters to the scene to carry out a search and rescue operation. This was successfully completed in darkness and the twenty-eight surviving members of the crew of twenty-nine were gradually lifted to safety. However, the *Melpol* remained a navigational hazard and there seemed every likelihood that she would run ashore, with all the risks that this entailed, if no action were taken. A helicopter was therefore re-launched from R.F.A. *Engadine* carrying Chief Officer Smith and Chief Petty Officer (Deck) Olley, to reconnoitre the vessel and establish whether it would be possible to bring the blaze under control. They reported to the Captain that the fire could be checked and consequently a volunteer boarding party under Chief Officer Smith's leadership, and including Chief Petty Officer (Deck) Olley, was airlifted to the *Melpol* with firefighting equipment.

Tackling the blaze proved difficult and hazardous. Internally the *Melpol* had been reduced to a tangled mass of metal. Ladders and bulkheads had melted in the intense heat and all wiring in the ship had been destroyed. The boarding party had to work for over seven and a half hours to bring the blaze under control and, although they had only limited firefighting equipment available, they succeeded in extinguishing the fires in the engine room and accommodation areas and were able to leave a fire in one of the holds to burn itself out. Finally, they assisted in connecting tows to two salvage tugs enabling the vessel to be towed to safety.

The exemplary devotion to duty demonstrated on this occasion reflects great credit on the individuals concerned and on the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service as a whole. Chief Officer Smith displayed courage, leadership and professional skills of the highest order during this most difficult operation and by his resourcefulness enabled the ship to be saved. Chief Petty Officer (Deck) Olley worked tirelessly and without thought for his own safety throughout, despite all the hazards and the intense heat.

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Whitehall, London S.W.1

3rd August 1982

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

Third Engineer Officer Roger Kenneth STEVENS, Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

Seaman Grade 1A Reginald Frederick WILLIAMS, Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

Seaman Grade 1B Barry Edward KNOWLAND, Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

Seaman Grade 1B Wesley SMITH, Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

For courage, resourcefulness and devotion to duty during the firefighting operation aboard MV *Melpol* on 8th December 1981.

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