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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.
4th October 1983.

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

Petty Officer Aircrewman John Stephen COLEMAN
DO74677K.

Petty Officer Aircrewman Coleman was the Diver in the Search and Rescue helicopter which was despatched from H.M.S. *Osprey* on 22 February 1983 to render assistance to the trawler *Petit Forban*, reported as sinking 25 nautical miles off Beachy Head with three of her crew missing. When the helicopter arrived at the scene, the vessel was almost vertical in the water with only about three feet of the bow still above the surface. The weather conditions were bad and the sea state was 5 with an 8 to 13 feet swell and a wind of 30 to 40 knots. The trawler frequently disappeared completely under the waves.

Petty Officer Aircrewman Coleman elected to try to search the vessel for survivors. He was lowered into the water with a 90 foot heaving line, with the crewman in the hovering helicopter tending the other end. This arrangement did not provide sufficient line, however, so the crewman was signalled to release and Coleman re-attached the line to a guard rail on the trawler. He then started a search, entering the wheelhouse and what he believed to be a hold. His intention was to find his way to the bow section, which would have been the most likely place to find any survivors, but the visibility was very poor, due to oil, fuel and debris, and he became disorientated. Not knowing the layout, he was unable to find a route forward.

Whilst he was in the hold, the aircraft dropped a sound signal to warn him that he had been in the water for 15 out of 20 minutes of air, so he equalised his breathing set and exited. On being picked up by the helicopter, he explained his problem to the pilot and it was decided to seek the vessel which had picked up some survivors, so that he could discuss with them the best way to conduct a further search. Whilst they were trying to establish the whereabouts of the survivors the trawler sank, precluding any further action.

Throughout this incident Petty Officer Aircrewman Coleman displayed great courage and a disregard for his own safety which were in the highest traditions of the Service.

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