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TUESDAY, 27TH MAY 1986

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

HONOURS AND AWARDS

**AIR FORCE DEPARTMENT**

Whitehall, London SW1A 2HB

27th May 1986

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased to approve the following award:

*Air Force Cross*

E4287582 Master Air Loadmaster Melvyn WARD, Royal Air Force.

On 24th January 1986, Master Air Loadmaster M. Ward was the winchman aboard a Search and Rescue Sea King of C Flight 202 Squadron, Royal Air Force Coltishall, which at 0723 hours was scrambled to assist the Orleans, a tanker on fire sixty miles to the north east.

In a force ten gale, with thirty foot waves and burning oil on the sea the tanker was found blazing fiercely from amidships towards the stern, where the crew was gathered in thick smoke. Despite the hazards, Master Air Loadmaster Ward volunteered to be lowered to the deck where, although even breathing was difficult, he managed to calm and organise the confused and alarmed foreign crew sufficiently to permit four seamen to be winched up to the helicopter.

Thickening smoke and a snowstorm then forced the helicopter to stand off. Hearing loud explosions below decks, Master Air Loadmaster Ward decided the ship

should be abandoned immediately. Since the helicopter would be able to recover survivors from the sea, but not from the ship, and with no other means of saving the crew, Master Air Loadmaster Ward launched a liferaft, briefed the crew to follow him in pairs, and jumped some eighty feet into the water. However, none of the crew followed and so he swam clear of the stern and was recovered into the helicopter.

Since conditions now permitted the helicopter to hover over the ship, he again volunteered to return to the deck, despite both the danger and having swallowed a quantity of sea water and oil. Although mobbed by the crew he prepared two seamen for lifting, but during the lift the winch cable caught and broke on a jackstaff, leaving the two men suspended over the sea. Master Air Loadmaster Ward promptly recovered them by climbing over the rail and dragging them onboard.

With the helicopter disabled, Master Air Loadmaster Ward then organised the crew to launch a lifeboat to which improved conditions only now afforded access. Despite breaking all the oars fending off the tanker, this operation succeeded and all occupants were subsequently rescued by a nearby rig support vessel.

Throughout the operation to evacuate the crew of the Orleans, Master Air Loadmaster Ward displayed, in rapidly changing circumstances, exceptional determination, resourcefulness, coolness and courage. His brave and selfless conduct was in the highest traditions of the Royal Air Force.

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