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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

HONOURS AND AWARDS

AIR FORCE DEPARTMENT

Whitehall, London SW1A 2HB

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

AIR FORCE CROSS

Squadron Leader Nicholas Richard William HIBBERD
(4232038) Royal Air Force.

On 7th June 1992 Squadron Leader Hibberd was captain of the duty Search and Rescue Sea King helicopter at Leconfield, when he and his crew were scrambled to evacuate a worker with a severed leg from a drilling rig 75 miles away. The RAF helicopter had been requested because the weather was so bad that other helicopters were unable to reach the rig; the whole area was blanketed in fog and the visibility was less than 50 metres. After the radar operator had identified the rig Squadron Leader Hibberd let down into the fog and brought the Sea King to a hover at 40 feet above the sea and about 1 mile from the rig, in conditions so poor that it was possible to hover only by reference to the instruments. Directed by his radar operator Squadron Leader Hibberd carefully manoeuvred towards the rig but was unable to gain visual contact at minimum radar range. At this point Squadron Leader Hibberd would have been fully justified in aborting the rescue attempt but, undaunted, and mindful of the casualty's severe injuries, he persevered and elected to manoeuvre to

the rig support vessel *GUARDIAN* which was approximately 100 metres from the rig. At a distance of 35 metres the *GUARDIAN* appeared out of the fog and Squadron Leader Hibberd was able to hover alongside the vessel. Then, maintaining this position, he persuaded the *GUARDIAN'S* master to inch slowly towards the rig. The *GUARDIAN* moved in until the rig was only 30 feet off the vessel's bow, but the Sea King crew still could not see the rig. Squadron Leader Hibberd then moved slowly along the side of the support vessel until, just as he reached the bow, a searchlight from the rig was spotted; he skilfully manoeuvred the helicopter towards this light until he saw one of the rig's legs. Then, using this leg as his sole visual reference, he climbed the aircraft vertically until the landing platform, 195 feet above sea level, came into view. He eventually landed on the rig one hour and 10 minutes after arriving on scene.

Throughout this rescue Squadron Leader Hibberd displayed exemplary skill and courage under the most demanding circumstances. His calm authority demonstrated leadership of the highest calibre and, through outstanding captaincy, he inspired his crew to effect a rescue under conditions which called for total co-operation and commitment.

QUEEN'S COMMENDATION FOR VALUABLE SERVICE IN THE AIR

Master Aircrew William REM (Q8022897) Royal Air Force.

For his skill and courage when assisting with the evacuation of an injured worker from an oil rig shrouded in thick fog.

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