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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

HONOURS AND AWARDS

AIR FORCE DEPARTMENT

Whitehall, London SW1A 2HB

10th May 1994

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

Air Force Cross

Flight Lieutenant Timothy John WITCOMBE (8029607) Royal Air Force

Flight Lieutenant Witcombe was posted to Number 72 Squadron at Royal Air Force Aldergrove in July 1991. A capable and enthusiastic officer, he has served in a variety of roles during his tour including Deputy Flight Commander, Squadron Authorising Officer, VIP Captain and Helicopter Tactics Instructor.

On 18th April 1993 Flight Lieutenant Witcombe was detailed as the 72 Squadron Search and Rescue aircraft captain. That night he was scrambled in response to a report of a critically ill casualty on a vessel in the mouth of Carlingford Lough. Although the Wessex has a very limited capability for night winching, Flight Lieutenant

Witcombe proceeded to the last reported location of the vessel. Discovering that it was not there he immediately commenced a search of the area and eventually located the vessel. However, conditions at the time were extremely dark with a very poor natural horizon due to limited visibility. Moreover, the lights on the vessel prevented the use of Night Vision Goggles and so conventional night techniques were adopted. Initially a spotlight was used from height but this caused disorientation; however, Flight Lieutenant Witcombe managed the difficult and demanding change from forward flight to the hover in stages and with constant reference to his instruments, until the aircraft was over the vessel. The spotlight was then used to illuminate the deck and the aircraft manoeuvred again before descending to a safe winching height from where the winchman and doctor were lowered. Flight Lieutenant Witcombe then moved the aircraft clear of the vessel and flew a race track pattern while the casualty was examined. Unfortunately the casualty was pronounced dead at the scene. Finally, the winchman was recovered, the doctor remaining on board and Flight Lieutenant Witcombe returned the aircraft to Aldergrove.

Throughout the sortie Flight Lieutenant Witcombe displayed outstanding captaincy, crew co-operation and co-ordination in extremely difficult and demanding circumstances.

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