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TUESDAY, 11<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 1996

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

## HONOURS AND AWARDS

## AIR FORCE DEPARTMENT

Whitehall, London SW1A 2HB

11th June 1996

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

*Air Force Cross*

Sergeant Steven Anthony LABOUCHARDIERE (S8217195)

Royal Air Force

Sergeant Labouchardiere was winchman on a Number 78 Squadron Sea King in the Falkland Islands when at 2245 hours on 10th January 1996, the crew was scrambled to a 43 foot yacht, the Maamari, which was in distress seventy nautical miles off shore. The yacht had been inverted twice by freak waves in a force nine gale and had lost both masts, hatch covers and items of radio equipment, rendering it completely disabled and at the mercy of the sea. The crew of the yacht was a British family comprising the parents and two children aged four and two.

When the yacht was located the wind was in excess of fifty knots and the sea swell was thirty feet. The yacht, which was taking on water, was rolling violently in the mountainous seas, some seventy degrees either side of the vertical. The family were huddled together in the small cockpit which was surrounded and partially obstructed by collapsed rigging and numerous jagged protrusions of aluminium and steel. Undeterred by these obvious dangers, Sergeant Labouchardiere continued with the rescue and was winched onto the vessel arriving safely into the cockpit at the first attempt. With complete disregard for his personal safety, he disconnected himself from the winch-cable, attached himself to the yacht and briefed the family, reassuring them with his courage and coolness. Having cut away the debris, Sergeant Labouchardiere elected to remove the children first. He placed the over-size strop on the youngest child, maintained a strong physical grip and was winched into the aircraft. He repeated this procedure for the second child before returning to lift both parents together. During the second and third descents, he was hurled around the deck by the violent and erratic pitching of the yacht, but through dogged determination and outstanding fortitude he reached the cockpit twice more to complete the rescue.

Through his exceptional skill, courage and tenacity, Sergeant Labouchardiere saved the family from a perilous situation.

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