

airborne in the lee of a hangar. The "Amberley" radioed that they were in a storm with very high to precipitous seas and added "Sea is very bad. Cannot stay with her much longer. Helicopter is only chance." Flying conditions were very rough but, with gale force winds behind it, the helicopter covered 62 nautical miles in only 25 minutes. The "Amberley" then made a final call for help—"Situation now critical. Make all speed. Unable to launch lifeboats." Flight Lieutenant Braithwaite decided to reach the stricken vessel as quickly as possible, even though this meant going through the heart of a heavy snowstorm. Low cloud forced his aircraft lower and lower and snow packed the windscreen until the wipers jammed, reducing forward visibility to nil. Instrument flying in these conditions would have been impossible, but by flying very low the pilot could remain in visual contact with the sea by looking sideways out of the open aircraft window. Snow was building up to a dangerous extent when the aircraft broke out of the snowstorm and the "Amberley" was sighted less than a mile away. The foundering 2,000 ton ship was listing about 60° to starboard and pitching and rolling violently. Most of the survivors were at the rear of the ship clinging to the poop deck; the remainder were on the bridge. Flight Lieutenant Braithwaite had heard that 2 other Whirlwind helicopters were on their way from Royal Air Force Coltishall and knew that they should be able to lift all 10 remaining survivors between them if he could save the first 6 men. He therefore jettisoned as much fuel as possible to enable him to pick up the maximum number of survivors. As the ship was in danger of sinking at any moment, he ordered the winchman to wear a back-pack dinghy when he was lowered to the deck. It was agreed that the winchman would detach himself from the winch cable to feed survivors up to the aircraft singly instead of using the normal double lift method. The intention was to reduce danger to the winchman and perhaps save invaluable time. The pilot was not in a position where he could see the ship when hovering over the poop deck and the wind was gusting up to 65 knots, which made winching from the heaving deck almost impossible. It took 20 minutes to uplift 6 seamen and recover the winchman. Flight Lieutenant Braithwaite was well aware that he had exceeded the maximum permitted overload weight of the aircraft by some 200 lb., the weight of the 6th survivor. He also knew that this was the only way that all the ship's crew could possibly be saved. By careful engine handling he was able to ensure that he did not exceed maximum power limitations and no damage was caused to the aircraft's transmission system. He landed the 6 survivors safely and uninjured at Wells-next-the-Sea, the remaining survivors being picked up by the other helicopters shortly afterwards. Flight Lieutenant Braithwaite displayed professional skill, a sense of duty and cool efficiency in the face of most dangerous conditions and, by his outstanding captaincy, courage and determination, played a vital role in saving the lives of 6 seamen from a perilous situation.

Master Air Electronics Operator Alister MORE (J3509025), Royal Air Force.

On 2nd April 1973, Master Air Electronics Operator More was the duty winchman of the rescue helicopter of No. 202 Squadron, Leconfield, Yorkshire, which was scrambled to the Motor Vessel "Amberley", drifting helplessly in a gale off the Norfolk coast. The "Amberley" radioed to the helicopter en route to the scene that the sea was very bad and the crew could not stay with their ship much longer. Master Air Electronics Operator More had discussed the method of proposed rescue from the ship with his pilot. It was agreed that when he reached the deck he should detach the winch-hook and feed the survivors up to the aircraft singly, as this would probably be quicker than the normal double-lift method. Survivors were clinging to the poop deck at the rear of the ship and on the bridge. The weather conditions were appalling; the ship was listing badly and was rolling and pitching in very high seas in gale force winds. The wind was about 45 knots, gusting to 65 knots, which meant that during his descent the winchman was streaming behind the aircraft in an unusual attitude, swinging violently even in the hover. He took with him a personal survival pack and a multi-seat dinghy for the crew should the ship sink, an event which seemed likely to happen at any moment. As Master Air Electronics Operator More was swung into the ship he bounced off a lifeboat davit and cannoned into a ventilator shaft. As he said afterwards, this very effectively arrested his forward progress. He unhooked himself, placed the rescue strop round the nearest seaman and signalled for him to be

winched away. He broadcast relevant information about the survivors on his crewman's radio and then continued to feed survivors up to the helicopter. After the 4th survivor had been lifted off, the ship rolled even more violently than before, past the 90° position, so that the sea poured down the funnel. At great risk to himself, Master Air Electronics Operator More was able to grab a seaman sliding helplessly down the deck and hold on to him until the rescue strop was lowered again. The ship's movement had by then become more sluggish with so much water on board and in the lulls between winching Master Air Electronics Operator More was able to explain to the remaining survivors how the multi-seat dinghy worked and tell them to stream their own emergency dinghy, which they did. After the 6th survivor had been lifted, Master Air Electronics Operator More realised that the aircraft, already overladen, could carry only one more man. He radioed for permission to remain on board the sinking vessel and to send up a 7th man in place of himself, but was ordered to return to his aircraft. He obeyed his captain's instructions and the remaining seamen were rescued by other helicopters which had by now arrived on the scene. The ship foundered shortly afterwards. Master Air Electronics Operator More displayed gallantry, determination and professional conduct of the very highest order, saving the lives of 6 seamen from a sinking ship, without hesitation, under appalling conditions, at great risk to himself.

*Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air*

Master Navigator Robin Alfred DEDMEN (K4041673) Royal Air Force.

For his great courage and calm professional ability as navigator and winch operator of a helicopter, which went from Royal Air Force Leconfield on 2nd April 1973, through a heavy snowstorm, to help in the rescue of the crew of a rolling, pitching ship, the Motor Vessel "Amberley", sinking off the Norfolk coast. The safety of the aircraft and its crew was dependent on his ability to guide his pilot and control the winch, in most testing circumstances. Six survivors were winched into the helicopter. To allow for the weight of the sixth survivor, fuel was jettisoned up to the limit estimated by Master Navigator Dedmen.

Royal Air Force Coltishall:

*Air Force Cross*

Master Signaller Kenneth MEAGHER (E1921091), Royal Air Force.

On 2nd April 1973, Master Signaller Meagher was duty winchman of the first standby Search and Rescue helicopter crew of No. 22 Squadron detachment at Royal Air Force Coltishall, Norfolk. In the late afternoon the standby helicopter was scrambled by Northern Rescue Co-ordination Centre through Cromer Coastguard to rescue 16 crew members aboard the Motor Vessel "Amberley" drifting helplessly, in Force 10 winds and heavy seas, towards the Dudgeon Shoal off the North Norfolk Coast. During the transit flight to the "Amberley" the following messages were received from the Captain—"Situation now critical. Make all speed. Unable to launch lifeboats." On arrival at the scene, the vessel was found to be lying beam on to a 30 foot breaking sea and listing heavily to starboard. The ship was gyrating violently and unpredictably under the combined effects of wind and sea. With complete disregard for his personal safety, Master Signaller Meagher allowed himself to be lowered to the "Amberley". During his approach to the stricken vessel he was buffeted by 65 knot gusts of wind and subjected to flying spray and occasional hail. Nevertheless, he succeeded by great agility and determination in boarding the restricted area of the bridge, which was rolling violently and so slippery that it only afforded a precarious footing. Regardless of the danger to his own life, Master Signaller Meagher detached himself from the aircraft and prepared to send the survivors singly to the helicopter. Two seamen were rescued by this method. While the second survivor was being winched to the helicopter, the ship rolled even more violently and the stanchion which Master Signaller Meagher was using as a handhold broke. He was thrown heavily against the wheelhouse, badly bruising his leg, but he continued to direct the winch operator. At this stage the Master and Radio Operator refused to leave the ship and so Master Signaller Meagher rescued the third survivor by double lift accompanying him to the helicopter. Disregarding his injury and fully aware of the dangers involved, Master Signaller Meagher was lowered twice more to rescue a further two sailors from the stern area of the "Amberley",