



SECOND SUPPLEMENT TO
The London Gazette
of Monday, 22nd October 1979

Published by Authority

Registered as a Newspaper

TUESDAY, 23RD OCTOBER 1979

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

HONOURS AND AWARDS

NAVY DEPARTMENT

Whitehall, London S.W.1
25th September 1979

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

Air Force Cross

Lieutenant Commander Nicholas Jan de HARTOG, Royal Navy.

On Tuesday 13th February 1979 H.M.S. *Arrow* was one of a number of Royal Navy ships crossing the Bay of Biscay on passage to Gibraltar. The wind was gusting to 45 knots and a swell of 25 to 30 feet had grounded all other helicopters in the force except for H.M.S. *Arrow's Lynx*, piloted by Lieutenant Commander de Hartog.

At 1040 in response to a distress message from a West German vessel, the M.V. *Paaschburg*, some 75 miles to the south, the aircraft was recalled to H.M.S. *Arrow*, refuelled and relaunched at 1050. The *Paaschburg* was eventually located at 1115 by which time the wind had increased to 50 knots and visibility was down to three miles in the heavy squalls. The ship had steering problems, her cargo was shifting and she was in imminent danger of being broached and overwhelmed by the 40 foot seas which were causing her to roll some 30 degrees and pitching her bow and stern between 60 and 80 feet. The crew of seven would have stood very little chance of survival if they had abandoned ship in the prevailing conditions. Lieutenant Commander de Hartog assessed that a normal winch transfer would be impossible and decided that a high line transfer from a 4 foot by 8 foot area on the port bridge wing would be the only feasible method of lifting the first three men off the ship. At 1300 the *Lynx* closed for the extremely difficult manoeuvre. As the line was lowered it was found that despite being weighted it was being blown almost horizontally astern of the aircraft by the 50 knot winds. The Observer's Navigation Bag was then attached to the end of the line and with exceptional skill and concentration Lieutenant Commander de Hartog successfully lowered the

line to the violently moving vessel below. A hover was established some 20 feet clear of the superstructure and the helicopter's winch wire was then pulled inboard by the ship's crew. It took 35 minutes of outstanding airmanship by Lieutenant Commander de Hartog to lift off the three crewmen during which time a moment's relaxation would have led to disaster, as the rotor disc was at times only 10 feet from the ship's mast and transient losses of power were being caused by salt accretion from the spray.

The rescued crewmen were then transferred to H.M.S. *Berwick* now 12 miles away. Flying of the highest order again was required as she was corkscrewing wildly and pitching some 60 to 80 feet. On completion of the transfer Lieutenant Commander de Hartog returned to H.M.S. *Arrow* to refuel and prepare to rescue the remaining crew of the *Paaschburg*.

At 1445 Lieutenant Commander de Hartog reached the *Paaschburg* once again and repeated his very fine feat of airmanship by lifting off the master and the remaining three crewmen and successfully transferring them to H.M.S. *Berwick*, in spite of the added difficulty of fatigue. Lieutenant Commander de Hartog finally landed back on H.M.S. *Arrow* at 1520 after being airborne, almost continually, for five hours.

This was a very hazardous rescue operation in appalling weather conditions during which Lieutenant Commander de Hartog displayed exceptional courage and stamina. His calm professionalism and outstanding airmanship was instrumental in saving the lives of seven men.

Queen's Commendation for Valuable Service in the Air
Sub Lieutenant Ross THOBURN, Royal Navy.

For his outstanding skill and initiative as the Observer of H.M.S. *Arrow's Lynx* helicopter during the hazardous rescue of seven men from the M.V. *Paaschburg* on 13th February 1979.

Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct
Aircraft Artificer 1 (A/E) Victor Charles FLEMWELL,
D085048D.

For his calm and professional conduct while assisting the Pilot and Observer of H.M.S. *Arrow's Lynx* helicopter during the hazardous rescue of seven men from the M.V. *Paaschburg* on 13th February 1979.