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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

## HONOURS AND AWARDS

### NAVY DEPARTMENT

#### CENTRAL CHANCERY OF THE ORDERS OF KNIGHTHOOD

St. James's Palace, London S.W.1

11th March 1986

The QUEEN has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the George Medal to:

Petty Officer Aircrewman Laurence SLATER, D114895W

Petty Officer Aircrewman Slater was the duty Diver of a Search and Rescue Wessex helicopter crew which was scrambled at 0730 on 11th August 1985 to assist the yacht, *Mister Cube*, disabled in severe gale conditions approximately 55 miles south-east of Lizard Point.

Weather at the scene was sea state 7 with the wind gusting over 50 knots. The yacht was being pounded by 25 foot waves, its sails shredded, masts whipping violently through arcs of over 90° and the hull was lurching heavily in the severe swell.

With considerable difficulty, a light line was passed from the helicopter to the yacht. This was attached to Petty Officer Slater on the end of the helicopter's rescue winch. The helicopter was thus able to hover clear to one side of the yacht, while Slater was lowered on the winch and simultaneously pulled in on the yacht. Fighting his way past sails and whipping rigging he eventually reached the cockpit to find six children and three adults. He quickly reassured everyone and briefed them comprehensively on the rescue method.

Three older children were single lifted to safety. On two occasions, as Slater started double lifting the younger children, severe yacht movement caused the light line to part.

For the fifth time he was transferred to the deck, organising the single lift of two adults, but, as he returned for the final rescue the yacht was knocked onto its beam ends by a giant wave. Miraculously Slater and the last survivor managed to hang on long enough for the aircraft to position itself and lift them clear. Once away from the yacht, Slater calmly cut the light line and was winched with the survivor into the aircraft. The aircraft returned to R.N.A.S. *Culdrose* at 0925.

Later that same day, at 1510, Slater was again launched as part of a Search and Rescue crew sent to the assistance of a Fastnet Race casualty, the yacht *Drum England*, capsized off Porthscatho. On arrival 18 survivors were found crouching precariously on the upturned hull. They indicated that a further six persons were either missing or trapped inside.

Despite a sea state 5 and wind gusting 36 knots, the immediate danger necessitated Slater jumping from the aircraft and free swimming to the vessel.

Totally fearless, and disregarding his own safety, Slater dived beneath the jerking hull. Fighting his way past alarming snarls of torn sail and a tangled array of rigging, he came upon a rope locker and a white hatch. On forcing the hatch open he swam into an accommodation space, and was pulled into an air pocket by the missing survivors.

Despite the eerie situation, his exceptional courage, professionalism and outstanding presence enabled him swiftly to reassure and efficiently brief an escape plan. Remarkably, Slater safely extricated all six, pulling them out past a maze of rigging before returning each to the surface. Slater then remained on board supervising the winch evacuation of 20 survivors.

Throughout both of these exceptionally hazardous rescue operations Slater totally disregarded his own safety. The rescue of 29 people under the most arduous conditions in two very demanding situations on the same day was accomplished due to the great fearlessness, superb stamina and unflinching courage of Petty Officer Aircrewman Slater in the face of enormous danger.