Helicopter crews rewarded for rescue

LONDON

The Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm has received the Prince Philip Helicopter Rescue Award for the remarkable rescue of an injured man in hazardous Antarctic conditions.

Lt Cdr Nigel Thomson, Detachment Commander of 826 Naval Air Squadron (Sea Kings), Lt Cdr John White, Commanding Officer of HMS Endurance's Wasp Flight; and Ldg Acm "Scouse" Doyle of 826 NAS received the award from the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators.

Lt Cdr Clive Waghorn was the leader of a joint service expedition to Brabant Island, on the edge of Antarctica, in March this year. He had fallen from an ice bridge over a crevasse, broken his leg, and was lying in considerable pain 3,500ft up a snow-covered glacier. The temperature was -30°C.

The rescue started on March 5 and lasted three days and nights. RFA Olna was despatched with two 826 NAS Sea Kings embarked to join HMS Endurance and her Wasp Flight off Brabant Island.

On March 7 RFA Olna joined HMS Endurance. Rescue attempts were continually frustrated by low cloud, severe turbulence, gale-force winds, and snow white-outs.

On March 8 there was a short break in the weather which allowed the Wasp to be launched to try again to locate the campsite where Lt Cdr Waghorn and another expedition member were lying. The camp was spotted through dense low cloud. The Wasp, with very little fuel remaining, approached the tent to ascertain the survivers' condition.

The Wasp remained on station while the Sea Kings approached through a thick bank of fog. When the two aircraft arrived the Wasp remained on station while the Sea Kings approached through a thick bank of fog. When the two aircraft arrived the Wasp returned to HMS Endurance with barely enough fuel remaining for the journey.

The Sea King crews successfully completed the rescue, hovering with virtually no visual references and with large amounts of driven snow making visibility very poor.

The crew of the Sea King "Rescue 29" were: Lt N. Thomson, S/Lt F. Reed, Lt G. Hickey, PO Acm K. Weller, and Ldg Medic M. Phillips;

The crew of the Sea King "Rescue 37" were: Lt D. Naismith, Ldg Acm J. Doyle, Lt A. McKie, and S/Lt A. Attrill; the crew of the Wasp were: Sgt C. Henderson (Royal Marines), Lt Cdr J. White, Surg Lt J. Miel, and Lt Cdr K. Terrill.

Lightning crashed in A-10 ACM

LONDON

On July 13, 1984, a pair of Royal Air Force Bae Lightning F.6s took off from a West German base while taking part in the Nato Tactical Leadership Programme.

Lightning XS920 was leader of the pair tasked to simulate attacks against four USAF Fairchild A-10 Thunderbolts. Once airborne, the Lightnings were vectored by a GCI station towards the A-10 formation. The A-10s were flying as two pairs about 10 n.m. apart and a tail chase developed as the Lightnings approached the rear pair of A-10s. When the Lightnings had closed to approximately 1 n.m. behind the twin Thunderbolts, the A-10 pilots saw them and flew two 90° turns to the right. Lightning XS920 was seen to attempt to attack one of the A-10s before disengaging. The two A-10 pilots, having seen XS920 break off, turned through 180° to continue on their original track.

At the same time XS920 turned back towards the A-10s with the result that it was almost head on to the left-hand A-10 at a range of 12,000ft and slightly high, but descending on a collision course. The left-hand A-10 made two heading changes and descended slightly to avoid the potential collision.

At an estimated range of 1,500ft from the Lightning, the A-10 pilot considered that the danger of collision still existed, so he turned hard right and descended. The Lightning passed to the left of the A-10 and was then seen in a hard right turn, nose slightly low, and at a relatively slow speed. Some three seconds later there was a bright blue flash as the Lightning flew through some power cables. The left-hand A-10 made no attempt to eject and was killed.

Examination of the wreckage revealed no evidence of pre-impact structural or system failure. Both engines had been selected to a high power setting and were operating at high r.p.m. on impact. A check of the cockpit warning system showed that an engine fire warning had been lit at impact, but it was impossible to discover whether it had been triggered before the aircraft hit the power cables. There was no evidence of a pre-impact fire and it was concluded that while the fire warning could have distracted the pilot at a critical moment, an aircraft fire was not the primary cause of the accident.

While analysing the final flight path of the Lightning it was noted that the A-10 camouflage was particularly effective and that it was often difficult to tell if the aircraft was being viewed from head-on or tail-on. It was considered that these two factors could have contributed to the near collision between the Lightning and the A-10. It was also noted that in avoiding the near collision, the A-10 manoeuvred immediately in front of the Lightning and it was thought possible that XS920 could have been affected by the wake turbulence of the A-10. But in the absence of any material evidence it was not possible to identify conclusively the final sequence of events.