

AN EXTREMELY FINE & RARE AIR FORCE CROSS & SOUTH ATLANTIC 1982 MEDALS, INSIGNIA & DOCUMENT GROUP AWARDED TO A HELICOPTER PILOT FOR HIS GALLANTRY AND REMARKABLE SKILL IN PILOTING HIS SEA KING HELICOPTER IN ATROCIOUS FORCE 11 WINDS, HIMSELF & HIS CREW BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR SAVING THE LIVES OF 17 WORKERS FROM THE FLOUNDERING *ORION* OIL RIG, OFF GUERNSEY IN 1978. PILOTING A WASP HAS I OF H.M.S. *ACTIVE* DURING THE FALKLAND'S WAR OF 1982, IN 1988 HE WAS AGAIN CALLED OUT ON A SEARCH & RESCUE MISSION WHEN THE OIL RIG *OCEAN ODYSSEY* EXPLODED INTO FLAMES. IN 1989, HE JOINED THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY (AVIATION), FLYING SQUIRREL HELICOPTERS BEFORE FINALLY RETIRING IN 1995



AIR FORCE CROSS E.I.I.R, OFFICIALLY DATED 1978, 'GLEN TILSLEY' & 'ORION' ENGRAVED, SOUTH ATLANTIC 1982 WITH ROSETTE 'LT G J TILSLEY AFC RN 829 SQDN', MOUNTED AS WORN, WITH CORRESPONDING RIBBON BAR

A.F.C. *London Gazette* 28 November 1978. The citation reads:

"Lieutenant Glen James Tilsley, Royal Navy. On the evening of Wednesday 1st February 1978 at the height of a Force 10 storm the oil drilling rig Orion with a maintenance crew of 33 men on board broke away from its tow and began to drift towards Guernsey where it subsequently grounded on the rocks on the west coast of the island. In response to a call from Brixham Coastguard, Sea King 592 of 706 Naval Air Squadron was launched from the Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose at 2255, followed by Sea King 594 shortly afterwards. Lieutenant Glen James

Tilsley, Royal Navy. Lieutenant Robert George Davidson, Royal Navy. Lieutenants Tilsley and Davidson were the pilot and observer respectively of Sea King 592 which arrived on the scene to find the rig hard aground. The rig's four support legs were raised and towered more than 200 feet above sea level. Waves were breaking through and over the helicopter landing platform which was the only practicable winching area and which was almost at sea level. 592 approached the rig and established a hover over the platform close to the support legs and 80 feet above sea level. In 60 knot winds, considerable turbulence and with only the rig lights for visual reference Lieutenant Tilsley held 592 in position whilst Lieutenant Davidson was lowered onto the rig's platform to affect the rescue using the double lift method. Davidson had to dispel the rig's crew's fear of the breaking waves and dense spray before he could start carrying out the rescue. In all he was winched down 11 times in the most appalling conditions to pick up 11 of the Orion's crew. Having landed the survivors safely at Guernsey Airport it was found that the other Sea King had experienced a primary hydraulics failure and had had to be shut down. Consequently 592 returned alone to the rig to attempt a further rescue.

On arrival it was discovered that the rig had yawed on the rocks through nearly 180 degrees and a cross wind hover with minimal visual references, was the only possible method of approaching the platform. In the same atrocious conditions and with very small clearances for the main and tail rotors, Lieutenant Tilsley again held 592 in position whilst Lieutenant Davidson was lowered, rescuing two more survivors before further movement of the rig made hovering impossible. During the second lift Lieutenant Tilsley experienced considerable difficulty in controlling the helicopter in the violent cross wind and at one point, with Lieutenant Davidson and a survivor swinging 60 feet below the aircraft in the rescue strop, he ran out of tail rotor control and lost all visual references. Only excellent crew co-operation saved the situation. At 0240 rescue attempts were abandoned for the night. At 0940 with weather conditions almost as bad as the previous night, Lieutenant Tilsley and his crew returned to the scene to recover the last survivors from the rig. Throughout the rescue Lieutenant Tilsley displayed professional competence of the highest order. Moreover, as the senior aircrew officer of the two helicopters he accepted responsibility for the conduct of the entire mission, going virtually without sleep from the time he was scrambled until both helicopters returned to Cudrose some 15 hours later. He not only executed the rescue in daunting and extremely dangerous conditions but also kept himself personally at readiness throughout the rest of the night at Guernsey Airport, where he could supervise the safety of his aircraft and be available immediately if needed. His great courage, supreme flying skill and devotion to duty during this hazardous rescue were of a wholly exemplary nature. Lieutenant Davidson also displayed professional competence of the highest order. His great courage and devotion to duty in performing a total of 17 double lift rescues under appalling conditions were in the finest traditions of the Service."

COMMANDER GLEN JAMES TILSLEY, ROYAL NAVY AND AUSTRALIAN ARMY

Glen James Tilsley, born 27 October 1947 in Gillingham, Kent but was raised in Singapore until age of 7. Later lived at Isles of Scilly and attended Truro School, he then worked as private tennis and water ski instructor in Malta. An Olympics standard athlete in long jump and triple jump, a broken leg put pay to his 1968 Mexico Olympic ambitions. He enlisted into the Royal Navy on 3 May 1970 and was appointed Air Cadet. Training as helicopter pilot at Royal Naval College, Dartmouth and awarded wings having completed his basic helicopter flying training on 26 November 1971, serving at R.N.A.S. Cudrose as Sub Lieutenant. Later service included;

824 Squadron piloting Sea king HAS 1 Helicopters aboard H.M.S. *Ark Royal* from 31 May 1972
737 Training Squadron; Instrument Rating Instructor/Examiner from 1973

820 Squadron aboard H.M.A.S. *Blake* (last 6" Cruiser) from 30 September 1975. His flying assessment in December 1976:

"An above average pilot who displays a high standard of airmanship and commands his crew well. An excellent Instrument Rating Instructor both in the air and on the ground"



Central Flying School Helicopter Squadron, January 1977

Graduated as qualified Helicopter Instructor, April 1977

Flying Gazelle helicopters, he was awarded the Llangollen Trophy for highest marks in ground subjects.

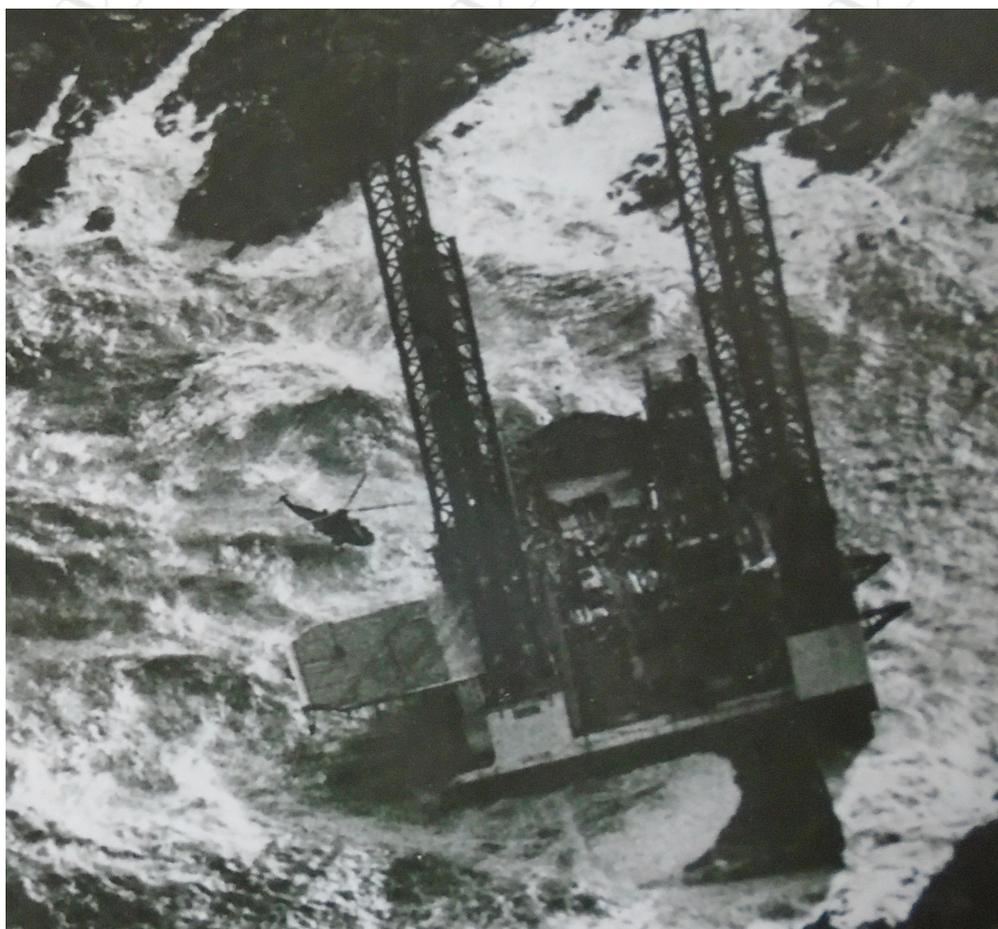
706 Squadron from April 1977, flying search and rescues in Sea King HAS I and Mk2 helicopters from Culdrose. Also with Display Wales Team

ORION OIL RIG DISASTER

On 1 February 1978, the *Orion* oil rig was being towed from Rotterdam to Brazil.

In the early hours, it broke its line 20 miles off Guernsey and drifted towards nearest land. It didn't take long for the 276-foot tall structure, attached to a 400-foot long barge, to embed itself

on rocks off Grandes Rocques. With 30 crew still on board, they needed to be rescued before the storm broke up the vessel. In storm force 11 winds, Sea King's 592 (piloted by Tilsley) and 594 of 706 Naval Air Squadron were launched from the Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose to attempt a rescue. Tilsley's subsequent citation for the Air Force Cross gives a most detailed account of the remarkable rescues, as do the many news cuttings and the publication 'Runaway Rig', all of which come with this group. Much can also be viewed online and about the disaster.



One news report in the Daily Express, 9 November 1978 stated:

"A pilot who flew with his brave crew into "the jaws of Hell" was honoured yesterday as one of Britain's Men of the Year. Lieutenant Glen Tilsley, 31, was at the controls of a Royal Navy Sea King helicopter which took part in a breathtaking rescue of oil-rig men off the Guernsey coast in a storm last February. Flying in highly dangerous conditions he manoeuvred his machine in between the pitching legs of the rig to enable his winch crew to bring 17 men to safety. The young officer was in good company yesterday when he joined 10 other Men of the Year at a lunch in London given by the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation. One who was glad to shake his hand was lifeboat coxswain John Petit of Guernsey - himself one of the heroes of that night. He said: "We all had our hearts in our mouths."

Actual footage of Tilsley rescuing the last of the oil rigs crew during the second day (when winds had died down considerably), can be viewed here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_Y63SfJsDk

Chosen as Naval representative at 'Man of the Year' awards.
Flying Assessment February 1979:

"A well above average QHI who has been a fine example to every pilot in 706 Squadron. Thank you Glen and best of Luck in Australia"

817 Squadron, having been promoted Lieutenant in March 1979, he was selected for exchange helicopter training in Australia. Piloted Sea King Mk 50's, H.M.A.S. *Albatross* before returning to the U.K.



OPERATION CORPORATE

829 Squadron, June 1981, piloting Wasp HAS I's, serving aboard H.M.S. *Active* (Type 21 Class Frigate). After the Argentinean invasion of the Falkland Islands in April 1982, H.M.S. *Active*, with Tilsley piloting the frigate's Wasp HAS I, was selected for active service as part of 'Bristol Group'. Reaching the task force on 21 May. *Active* formed part of the main British Fleet, well east of the Falklands during the day, while escorting supply convoys to San Carlos Water or carrying out shore bombardment missions at night. On the night of 13/14 June, *Active* shelled on Argentine positions during the battle of Mount Tumbledown. During the War, *Active* would take part in five naval gun supports at Bluff Cove, Fitzroy, Berkley Sound, Mount Tumbledown, and Port Stanley.

The primary function of Wasp HAS I's was in the anti submarine warfare role, deploying Mark 44/66 lightweight torpedoes, or armed with wire-guided SS-12 anti-ship missiles deployed against vessels and surfaced submarines. Only eight of these helicopters served during the conflict, two aboard H.M.S. *Endurance*, one each on three frigates (including *Active*) and one each on three ambulance vessels. A Wasp launched from H.M.S. *Plymouth* and two Wasps launched from H.M.S. *Endurance*, fired AS.12 anti-ship missiles at the submarine *Santa Fe*, scoring hits. Other duties for the Wasp's included liaison, search and rescue and supply missions etc.

With the Falklands conflict over, in July 1982, Tilsley received the following report assessment:

"Tilsley is a very experienced pilot with great natural ability and flair: He has been a First Class Flight Commander achieving high standards in all aspects of flying operations"

Having been promoted Lieutenant Commander, in August 1984, he was appointed Captain of newly commissioned Hong Kong patrol vessel, H.M.S. *Starling* and after this served in the following Squadrons:

829 Squadron, H.M.S. *Osprey*, piloting Wasps HAS I's from October 1986

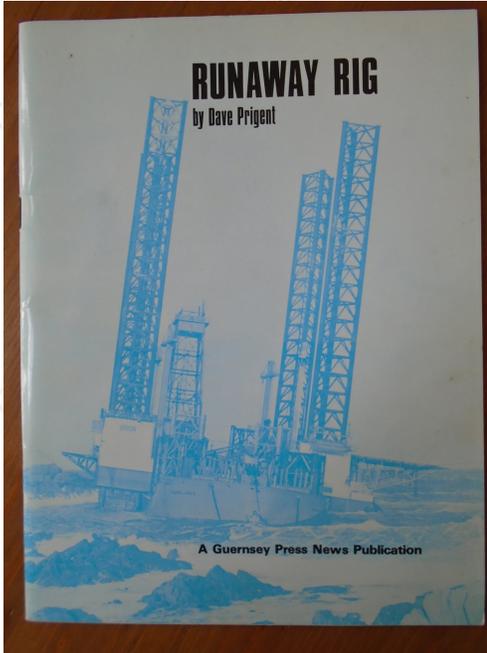
706 Squadron in January 1987, piloting Sea King HAS I's

810 Squadron April 1987



OCEAN ODYSSEY OIL RIG DISASTER

In June 1987, Tilsley joined 814 Squadron as senior pilot, serving aboard H.M.S. *Illustrious*. In September 1988, just over 10 years after the *Orion* disaster, Tilsley piloted one of the Sea King HAS 5's called out on a search and rescue mission when an oil Rig exploded into flames, this time in the North Sea and just two months after the *Piper Alpha* tragedy. The fire on the *Ocean Odyssey* killed one man when it exploded 150 miles east of Aberdeen on September 22, 1988. There had been 67 workers on board as gas began escaping from a well, allowed to build up by a lack of drilling mud



Air Force Cross for Culdrose 'copter pilot

Lt. Glen Tilsley was decorated by the Queen at Buckingham Palace for his role in the air-sea rescue of the *Orion* oil rig crew last February.

Lt. Tilsley 41, was in charge of the helicopter team which flew to Guernsey and rescued 29 men trapped on the rig. Other members of the Culdrose team received the Queen's Commendation, but last week, Lt. Tilsley was personally decorated with the Air Force Cross by the Queen.

He and his wife, Sandie, have two children, Claire (6) and Benjamin (4). They live at 85, Trenchick Parc, Helston. His father, Arthur Tilsley, lives on St. Mary's, Isles of Scilly.

Educated at Truro school, he left there about 12 years ago, and spent two years teacher-training in Buckinghamshire.

Then he joined the Royal Navy in 1970 and became a qualified helicopter instructor with the 706 Squadron at Culdrose.

Soon he will be leaving Culdrose to go to Australia on a two-year exchange job, where he will also be instructing.

Form A-54 Esch. 245 (Revised 3/76) No. 31/81
Identity Card
Rank: Captain
Name: G. J. TILSEY
Service: HMS OSPREY
Period of Validity: While the 20/7/81
The above named HMS Agony

FLYING THE RIGS IS A LI

First light on 592 runs in to take the remaining crew to safety. The Sea King aircraft is described by the lowering legs of the oil rig, literally one of the most dramatic air-sea rescues took place only 150 yards from dry land.

During the worst winter weather last February the North Sea oil rig Orion on passage from Rotterdam to Bristol, perished at sea in storm force 10 winds and drifted helplessly towards Guernsey's Grand Recree. Trapped aboard were 33 crewmen.

TAIL WINDS
 At 2216, two helicopters were dispatched from 706 Squadron Royal Naval Air Station Culdrose.

592 arrived shortly before midnight to find the barge platform 'lit up like a Christmas tree' and already aground.

Although the rig was equipped with a heli-pod 40 ft above sea level, clearly it was useless as a landing site.

None of them had ever worked together as a team before. And, despite the hundreds of flying hours between them, none had ever been up in such conditions.

Tilsley flew the Sea King at 500 ft and 110 knots. So strong was the tail wind, 592's ground speed was more like 60 knots.

Apert from its precarious list, the Sea King almost completely wholed breaking over a landing area 60 ft over the platform.

There was a danger that salt could collect on turbine compressor blades and cause severe loss of power or damage the rotor paddle.

Tilsley decided to attempt a search rescue from 100 ft above the platform.

NIGHTMARE FLYING
 Maintaining a hover is relatively easy in broad daylight. All of one's peripheral vision can quickly detect changes in aircraft attitude.

It is somewhat more difficult at night. It is true that the Sea King is equipped with an Automatic Flight

Survivors were picked up by the rig's emergency standby vessel *Notts Forest* (38 rescued) and the nearby anchor handling tug *British Fulmar* (28 rescued). Four Sea King helicopters from H.M.S. *Illustrious* (including Tilsley piloting XZ582) assisted rescue operations and transferred survivors from *Notts Forest* and *British Fulmar* to the drilling rig *Sedneth 701*.

In early November 1989, Tilsley resigned from Royal Navy, having completed a total of 4,412 hours flying helicopters and on 17 November 1989, Tilsley was appointed Captain in Australian Army (Aviation). Serving as an Instrument Rating Training Instructor with 5 Squadron Training Flight, based at R.A.A.F. Fairburn, ACT, ADF Helicopter School. He flew AS 350b Squirrel Helicopters before finally retiring in 1995. He ended career with a total of 6,114 hours flying time.



SOLD WITH

A large amount of insignia, documents, paper cuttings etc belonging to the recipient. Including:

- Commission document as Sub Lieutenant Royal Navy dated 21 December 1970
- Royal Navy Identity card dated 1983
- Dog tags in aluminum; 'A Avn/ G.J. Tilsley /239073/C of E';
- Pilot wings x 3, bullion, metal and woven
- Pilot wings badge x 2 named to Glen Tilsley
- Pilot name badge for Glen Tilsley
- Fleet Air Arm flight suit badges x 5: 706, 737, 814, 820 and 824 Naval Air Squadrons
- Gilt and enamel lapel badge for HMS *Illustrious*
- Appointment document from the Governor-General of Australia commissioning Glen James Tilsley as an officer of the Australian Army
- Royal Australian Navy bullion shoulder boards for Lieutenant Commander
- Royal Australian Air Force Base, Fairbairn A.C.T. round patch
- Army Air Corps pilot brevet
- Army shoulder boards for Australian Army Aviation Captain
- Light blue officer's lanyard
- Australian Army uniform flag patch
- Australian Army Aviation collar badge
- Royal Hong Kong Golf Club patch
- Photo copies of Pilots Flying Log (very large number of pages)
- Large number of photographs and documents, original and photocopies
- Newspaper clippings, mainly relating to Orion or 'Man of the Year'; original and photocopies

A small publication; 'Runaway Rig' going into detail about the Orion disaster etc etc



Medals condition GVF, some very minor contact wear, mounted as originally worn. A very rare and complete group to a highly skilled helicopter pilot