

AWARD OF AUSTRALIAN BRAVERY DECORATIONS

2 DECEMBER 1977

STAR OF COURAGE

Mervyn WILLIAMS of 8 Gilbert Grove, Murrumbeena, Victoria.

On 27 March 1977, a young man was washed from rocks at Twilight Beach near Esperance, Western Australia. The sea was very rough and was forming breakers approximately twenty feet high that were breaking against a vertical rock face resulting in strong undercurrents. Mervyn Williams entered the water on a surfboard and made his way out to the man, a distance of about 50 metres, taking a line with him. He supported the man until a lifebuoy could be launched along the line and he then assisted the man into the lifebuoy. Both men were now weak. After a further 30 minutes in the surf both men were exhausted and Mr Williams urged the people on shore to drag them up onto the rockface. This attempt failed as the line broke when they were approximately 3 metres from the rock face. They were then thrown repeatedly against the rocks and dragged out to sea again. Eventually, they were picked up by a wave and dumped in a crevice under the overhanging rocks from where they were hauled to safety.

Although he was weakened by the extremely cold waters and risked being either swept out to sea or dashed against the rocks, Mr Williams kept hold of the man and assisted him until they both were rescued. The rescue would not have been possible but for the conspicuous courage displayed by Mr Williams in putting his own life in peril.

BRAVERY MEDAL

Reginald Charles HANSEN of 247 Formosa Road, Gumdale, Queensland.

On 23 April 1977, Mr Hansen, 18 years of age, and three friends were returning to Manly from Moreton Island, Queensland, when their boat sprang a leak and capsized about 15 kilometres south west of the Southern Cross Oil Rig. Only three life jackets and a petrol can were recovered from the upturned craft. Mr Hansen and his companions decided to swim to the oil rig. After a short distance it was seen that the person using the petrol can, who was not a strong swimmer, was having difficulty swimming with it. Mr Hansen took off his

life jacket, helped his friend into it, and took the petrol can instead. The four companions resumed swimming towards the distant oil rig. The weak swimmer had difficulty in keeping up with the others, and Mr Hansen kept doubling-back to encourage him to stay with the group. He also continued to encourage the two younger members of the group, aged 15 and 14, to keep swimming for the rig. Evening fell and in the darkness the weak swimmer became separated from the others and disappeared. Mr Hansen continued to assist the other two, and eventually they reached the oil rig. The group had been in the water for approximately ten hours. Mr Hansen's determination and courage undoubtedly helped save the lives of his two young companions.

Able Seaman Robert Angus McLEOD, H.M.A.S. Stirling, Fremantle, Western Australia.

Able Seaman McLeod was a crewman aboard HMAS Arrow, which was moored in Darwin early on the morning of 25 December 1974, when Cyclone Tracy struck. During the cyclone the ship broke away from its moorings and became wedged under the wharf. It soon began to break up as a result of the pounding of the sea. The order to abandon ship was given by the Commanding Officer. Able Seaman McLeod and five others proceeded aft and climbed to a position from which they could jump onto the wharf as each wave lifted the ship. Able Seaman McLeod stayed aboard the ship, despite the danger of being washed overboard or hit by flying debris, and assisted fellow crew members to safety before he himself left the ship.

Able Seaman McLeod by his courageous action showed a disregard for his own safety while assisting others to safety.

Harold Bernhardt OVERHUE of 99 Park Street, South Yarra, Victoria.

On 5 May 1977, Mr Overhue, 91 years of age, was in his bank manager's office when four bandits armed with pistols and a sawn-off shotgun held up the bank. The bandits took the manager into the general area of the bank but left Mr Overhue unattended in the office. Mr Overhue left the manager's office and attempted to hit one of the bandits over the head with a chair, but he was pushed to the floor. He then attempted to wrestle a money bag from the bandits and in the ensuing struggle was struck about the head and face with a pistol.

Though unarmed himself, Mr Overhue showed great courage in tackling armed criminals..

COMMENDATION FOR BRAVE CONDUCT

Gary Thomas DILLON of 13 Milligan Street, Bunbury,
Western Australia.

On 28 April 1976, Mr Dillon saw a motor vehicle floating in the Collie River at Australind, Western Australia. The vehicle was about twenty metres from the shore and its' driver was trapped inside. Mr Dillon dived into the river and swam out to the vehicle which by this time had filled with water up to the windows. He managed to open the door sufficiently to grab the driver by the shoulder and pull him free of the vehicle which immediately sank. He then assisted the driver to the shore.

Patrick RAYEROUX of 3 Neilson Street, Granville, New South Wales.

On 15 June 1976, Patrick Rayeroux was in the backyard of his parents' home when he saw a motor vehicle drive into a creek and start to sink. Mr Rayeroux is an asthmatic and does not swim well. However, he ran and told his mother to call the police, and then ran down to the creek. After struggling over some twenty metres of swampy ground entangled with reeds and other growth, and then swimming out to the vehicle, Mr Rayeroux tried to break a window with his fist. This was unsuccessful so he made his way back to shore, ran home to get a hammer, and returned to the creek. By this time the car was submerged, but Mr Rayeroux tried once more to break a window, again without success. In attempting to save the life of the driver of the vehicle Mr Rayeroux placed his own life at considerable risk.

Kenneth Rowland WEEKS of "Avonlea" 645 Warrandyte Road,
Ringwood North, Victoria.

On 10 August 1976, a teacher at the Koonung Heights Primary School, Victoria, was seen carrying a gun and menacing other teachers with it. Mr Weeks, Vice-Principal at the school, approached the teacher and asked him to hand over the gun, but he refused. He was then persuaded to leave the room and go with Mr Weeks to the playground where Mr Weeks persuaded him to drop the gun. However, the teacher immediately picked up the gun again and threatened Mr Weeks. Mr Weeks then moved forward, seized the gun and wrenched it from his hands.

Mr Weeks showed commendable bravery in approaching the teacher and in disarming him.