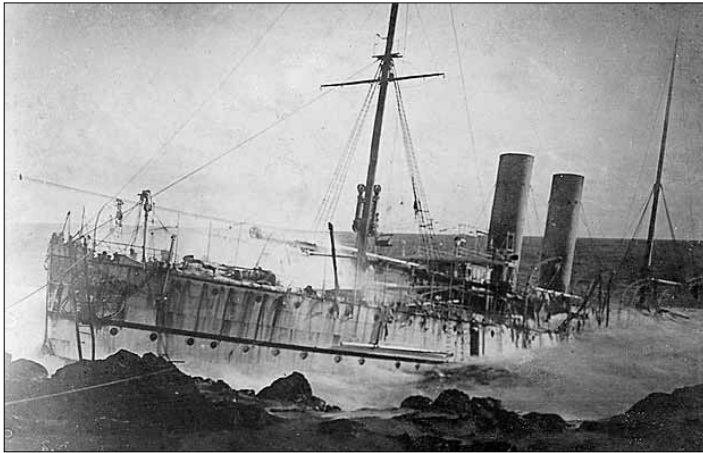


The “Warren Hastings”



Wreck of the Royal Indian Marine Troopship “Warren Hasting”.

The 1st Bn 60th after a quiet year in Jullunder was placed under orders in November 1896 to move to Mauritius and the Cape.

Under the command of Lt Col M. C. B. Forestier-Walker they set sail on the “Warren Hastings” (Commander G E Holland DSO, RIM) on December 10. Arriving at Cape Town on December 28, B, D, E and F Companies disembarked under Major R H Gunning. The ship continued its journey on January 6, 1897 for Mauritius having on board the 60th Headquarters and A, C, G and F Companies. Also on board was a half Battalion of the 2nd York and Lancaster Regiment and 25 men of the Middlesex Regiment. Seventeen wives and 10 children were also on board.

The full report was presented to Parliament in March 1897 and could be purchased for 3d from the HMSO.

There were many participants in the report including the Commander of the ship but the story of the dramatic ending of the voyage cannot be better told than it is in Colonel Forestier-Walker’s report, which is given in full.

The only piece of silver that was rescued from the wreck is the Tusk of Gullala.

Gullala was a great elephant which in peace carried 1st 60th officer’s mess main tent pole. At Mooltan he pulled in to position the siege guns for Major Maughan RA.

After supporting 1st 60th for two and a half years on the Frontier, Major Maughan gave a centre piece for the Officer’s Mess. On the top is shown Rifleman Burke wresting the standard from the dying Pathan horseman. A camel, a bullock and a rhinoceros sit at the foot of a section of Gullala’s Tusk.

From Lieut.-Colonel M. Forestier-Walker, King's Royal Rifles, late Commanding Troops, R.I.M.S. "Warren Hastings," to the Deputy-Assistant Adjutant-General, Mauritius.

Mauritius,
28th January 1897.

Sir,

1. I have the honour to forward, for the information of the Major-General Commanding, the following report of the circumstances connected with the loss of the R.L.M.S. "Warren Hastings," of the troops on board of which I was in command.

2. The ship left Cape Town on 6th instant with the head-quarters and four companies of 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, four companies, 2nd York and Lancaster Regiment, and one Warrant Officer and 24 men, Middlesex Regiment, en route to this island, where she was due at mid-day on 14th instant. The total number of troops on board was 22 Officers, four Warrant Officers, 940 non-commissioned officers and men, four ladies, 13 women, and 10 children.

3. At 2.20 a.m. on the night of the 13th and 14th instant, I was awakened by a shock, and realizing from the grating found what had occurred, I dressed hurriedly and went up to the bridge to report myself for orders to the Captain of the ship, Commander G. E. Holland, D.S.O., R.L.M. All this time drenching rain was falling in torrents, and making a great noise, pouring on the awnings and decks, and the night was so intensely dark that it was impossible to distinguish anything more than a few feet away, and impossible to make out where the vessel was, or to see anything at all of the land, or the nature of the rocks on which she was lying, though it was believed that the vessel had struck on the coast of the Island of Reunion. The sea at the time was calm, though there was a moderate swell. The engines were then working at full speed ahead, and were kept so until stopped by the water.

4. I received orders from Commander Holland to have all the troops fallen in down below, the guard alone being on the upper deck, and these were ordered down almost immediately after, leaving only such sentries as were necessary.

5. On receiving a report that the rock against which the ship's bows were resting appeared to afford landing space, Commander Holland, at 3.26 a.m., sent Lieutenants Dobbin and Windham, R.I.M., down over the bows, with blue lights, to investigate and report, and informed me that, if practicable, he would commence landing the men in a similar way, as soon as possible. In order to facilitate this, I gave directions that the men should be formed up by regiments, the King's Royal Rifles on the port side and the York and Lancaster and details on the starboard side of the ship, so that the two forward companions could be used simultaneously.

6. Up to this time, though the vessel was bumping heavily, she was lying on a fairly even keel, and Commander Holland therefore considered that the disembarkation of the ladies, women, and children could with safety be deferred till daylight, as it could then be carried out with so much more safety and convenience to them; and orders were therefore issued, on his learning from the Officers sent that landing was feasible, for the disembarkation of the men to commence. I had previously given instructions that such of the men as were able should fetch their rifles and boots, and at 4 a.m. disembarkation commenced by rope ladders on either side of the bow.

7. At the same time, by Commander Holland's direction, I detailed two Officers, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, the one, Major Gore Browne, to land with the men and take command on shore, the other, Captain Prendergast, whose excellent knowledge of French was likely to be of good service, to proceed to the nearest village and try and make any arrangement possible for the reception of the ladies, women and children, and men. Very soon after 4 a.m. the vessel gave a heavy bump, and a lurch to starboard, and as she appeared heeling over everyone was ordered on the upper deck. The men came up by various companies, and the regularity of the disembarkation was not interfered with. At 4.20 a.m., owing to the list increasing, Commander Holland deemed it necessary that the ladies, women and children, and such sick as required assistance,

should be landed at once, and for this purpose suspended the disembarkation of the men till it was satisfactorily completed.

8. The sea was by this time beginning to wash over the upper deck on the starboard side, and I received instructions to get all the men as far as possible over to the port side of the ship, and as Commander Holland considered that she was now in imminent danger of heeling right over and probably sinking in deep water, it became necessary to expedite the disembarkation, and orders were therefore given to discard both rifles and boots; this order was the more necessary as it was impossible to move along the deck without using both hands to support oneself. At about this time, 4.35 a.m., the electric light, which most fortunately had lasted so long, gave out, but happily it was almost daylight.

9. The list to starboard still continuing to increase, Commander Holland, about 4.55 a.m., gave permission to men who were good swimmers to drop off and swim ashore on the port side, a distance of some 30 yards, and the first man who did so, Private McNamara, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, was successful in carrying a line to the land, by aid of which some three or four ropes were carried and made fast, and were the means of assisting a considerable number of men to the shore. Though the swell at the time was only moderate, the waves were breaking on the rocks with considerable force and the backwash was sufficient to prevent anyone landing without assistance, and groups of men were all along the shore helping others as they came near. By this time, too, in addition to the ladders already mentioned, one or two ropes had been hung over the bows, by which men clambered down on to the rocks.

10. The disembarkation of the troops was completed by 5.30 a.m., and I then, by Commander Holland's directions, left the bridge and went ashore. Here I learned that we were on the Island of Reunion, and within about half a mile of the village of Sainte Phillippe, and that Captain Prendergast was there making all the arrangements he could. A little later, as it seemed that the vessel had settled down and showed no immediate signs of any further heeling over, Commander Holland authorized attempts being made to save the light baggage and anything else possible, and for this purpose I ordered two parties of 60 men each to be detailed from the King's

Royal Rifles and York and Lancaster Regiment to assist, and to form a chain over the rocks from the wreck to the mainland of the island, where the baggage could be collected, a distance of about 100 yards. The party of the former regiment was subsequently increased by about 26 or 30 more men, and the remainder of the troops I directed to be marched to the village. It was then found that, providentially, no lives among the troops had been lost.

11. About 9 a.m. the parties mentioned above were relieved by some 80 or 100 men of the York and Lancaster Regiment, and these continued to work until 10 a.m., when the 1st Lieutenant of the ship, Lieutenant St. John, who was in charge at the time, considering the wreck to be unsafe, directed everyone to leave, and the whole of the troops, with the exception of a small guard placed over the baggage saved, with sentries close to the ship to prevent any looting, were then collected in the village of Saint Philippe. The baggage was subsequently brought up the village, and the sentries, being relieved by the local French police, were withdrawn. Commander Holland had previously proceeded to the village and placed himself in telegraphic communication with the British Consul at Saint Denis, and had also made every possible arrangement for the supply of rations to the troops, a considerable portion of which had to be brought from Saint Joseph, about 101 miles distant, a sufficient quantity not being procurable at Saint Philippe. This involved a certain amount of delay, but, fortunately, some preserved beef and biscuits had been saved from the wreck and were available for immediate issue.

12. During the day a reply was received from the Consul stating that the B.I. ss. "Lalpoora" was at Pointe des Galets, and available to take on the troops, and I was informed she would probably be chartered for this purpose. Saint Pierre, the nearest place with a harbour where there would be any chance of embarking the men, is distant from Saint Philippe about 21 miles, and it was absolutely necessary that everyone should be got on there as soon as possible, as the smaller towns and villages would be unable to find the requisite provisions for so large a force. Carriage for the ladies, women and children, and sick, was essential, and, in addition, there were some 350 men without boots, who could not possibly march the distance; Commander Holland had, therefore, asked the aid of the local authorities at Saint Pierre and Saint Joseph to secure as

many carriages and carts as could be got, and, having arranged that the men capable of walking should march the following day, the 15th instant, to Saint Joseph, and that the ladies, women, children, and sick, and as many men as the carts procurable could carry should also start the following morning and go right through to Saint Pierre, he left for the latter place at 8 p.m., 14th instant, taking me with him, with a view to making all further arrangements necessary.

13. The command of the troops remaining at Saint Philippe devolved on Major Kirkpatrick, York and Lancaster Regiment.

14. The people of the village had been most kind in providing the best accommodation at their disposal, the sick being put up in the Mairie and the women and children in the convent. The men were quartered in two empty enclosures, the best sleeping accommodation which was available being given them, and they were made as comfortable as could be expected under the circumstances. Commander Holland and I reached Saint Pierre about 2.15 a.m. on the 15th instant.

15. It had been his intention to have the B.I. ss. "Lalpoora" brought round there, but she could not have entered the harbour, and the sea, on the morning of the 15th instant, was too high to admit of any boats passing in or out, so she was ordered to remain at Pointe des Galets, and, as the railway begins at Saint Pierre, arrangements were made for a special train to convey everyone to the former place to embark. The old barracks at St. Pierre were placed at our disposal and afforded sufficient and excellent accommodation, especially as it was not intended that anyone should stop there more than a few hours.

16. I had directed Major Kirkpatrick to proceed in command of the party, about 600 strong, marching from Saint Philippe to Saint Joseph, and left it to him to decide whether, after a rest and a meal there, the men were fit to complete the march to Saint Pierre the same day. About 12 o'clock I received a telegram from him saying he intended to halt at Saint Joseph for the night. The ladies, women, children, and sick arrived during the course of the day in carts and carriages, and at 8 p.m. a special train was got off, in which Commander Holland left, with the whole of them,

nearly all the crew of the R.I.M.S. "Warren Hastings," and as many of the men without boots as had arrived up to then, together with two Officers, in all about 400.

With the kind assistance of the Mayor of Saint Pierre more carts had been placed at our disposal for the purpose of bringing up the remaining men from Saint Philippe, and instructions were sent by Commander Holland to Lieutenant St. John, who with Captain Prendergast, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, had remained in charge, telling him to bring everyone along, and to arrange to arrive at Saint Pierre by 3 p.m., on the 16th instant.

I also sent orders to Major Kirkpatrick to march so as to arrive not later than 11 a.m. that day, so as to enable the men to get the meal provided for them, and to be ready to entrain at 12.30 p.m. Going down to the barracks at 8 a.m. on the 16th I found that Major Kirkpatrick's party, about 600 strong, had arrived all right, and as Commander Holland, after inspecting the "Lalpoora" at Pointe des Galets, returned to Saint Pierre by the forenoon train, I left myself with about 400 men by the 12.50 p.m. special train, and embarked with them on the "Lalpoora," where I found the ladies, women and children, and the whole of the men who had gone on the preceding night, already settled down. I had left Major Gore-Browne, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, in command of the men remaining at Saint Pierre, and this party being joined by those with Lieutenant St. John and Captain Prendergast from Saint Philippe, left that night with Commander Holland, and reached Pointe des Galets about 4 a.m. on the 17th instant, when the whole of those from the R.I.M.S. "Warren Hastings" (with the exception of Lieutenants St. John and Windham, R.I.M., and 10 lascars remaining behind for salvage purposes) were embarked on the "Lalpoora," which sailed at 3 p.m. that afternoon and reached Port Louis, Mauritius at 6 a.m., 18th instant.

17. It is impossible sufficiently to thank Mr. Bennett, the British Consul, for all he did for us. Not being able to leave himself at that particular time, he immediately on receipt of the news of the disaster sent his Secretary, Mr. Piat, down to meet us, and he joined Commander Holland and myself, between Saint Joseph and Saint Pierre, on the night of the 14th instant, and was untiring in his efforts to assist us in every possible way from that time until we sailed.

18. I have already mentioned the kindness and hospitality of the inhabitants of Saint Philippe when we landed there. All, from the Mayor downwards, showed the greatest anxiety to be of service to us, and the many isolated acts of kindness, the giving of coffee, food, and clothing to individual men are much too numerous to mention, I would however draw special attention to what was done for us by Monsieur Coulon, who placed his house and everything he possessed at the disposal of the ladies, and had food available all day for any of them, or of the Officers who required it, and finally, when practically eaten out of house and home, was with the greatest difficulty prevailed upon to accept any recompense.

Monsieur Alfred Chaton, sous-officier of gendarmerie was also most obliging and, unsparing in his efforts to save the men fatigue by taking on himself and his gendarmes. nearly all the guard duty necessary at Saint Philippe, which, after what everyone had gone through, was an inestimable boon.

Major Kirkpatrick reported to me that he had received very material assistance from the Mayor of Saint Joseph, and I can speak myself to the services cheerfully rendered to us by the Mayor of Saint Pierre in the collection of extra carts, without which it would have been impossible to get the men up from Saint Philippe as soon as we did. I might mention numerous other instances, but I trust these will be enough to show the really kindly spirit in which these shipwrecked British troops were received by the officials and inhabitants of the Island of Reunion, and I would further respectfully express a hope that when this is represented to the Government, some steps may be taken to convey to the Governor and officials of this island our grateful thanks for all they did for us.

19. I enclose a report received from Major Kirkpatrick, York and Lancaster Regiment, giving his account of what took place, and I have to express my entire concurrence in his remarks.

20. During the time everyone was being got ashore from the wreck, I was an eye-witness from the bridge of numerous acts of devotion and gallantry in saving life, and several other cases were afterwards brought to my notice, which I did not see myself, hut which I consider are thoroughly well authenticated, and I have therefore the honour to submit the following list, with the hope that the conduct of those named may be brought to the notice of

the proper authorities. In this list I have, to avoid repetition, omitted any mention of names already brought forward by Major Kirkpatrick, in the report already alluded to, except in one case, where the details came more under my own personal observation:

(1.) No, 7679, Private N. McNamara, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, was the first man to attempt to swim to the shore on the port side, as has already been mentioned carrying a light line, by means of which ropes were carried over and made fast, thus enabling many men to escape.

(2.) No. 6168, Private E. Carr, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, swam out some distance to the assistance of Mr. Gadsden, R.I.M., chief engineer of the ship, and brought him ashore.

(3.) No. 4421, Private G. Howes, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, at the time a patient in hospital, dived in and attempted to save a native cook, who was drowned. He had afterwards to be himself helped out of the water.

(4.) No. 7291, Lance-Corporal R. Newby, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, dived from the ship and assisted a man of the York and Lancaster Regiment (name unknown) to a rope, by which he was got ashore.

(5.) No. 5680, Private W. J. Grisley, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, swam out with a buoy to the assistance of Private J. Brown, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, by which he was saved.

(6.) No. 6131, Private M. Arrowsmith, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, was on the rocks near the bow of the ship, when a child of one of the York and Lancaster Regiment, was being brought down the ladder, slipped and fell into the sea, Private Arrowsmith, although unable to swim, jumped in with a rope and was pulled out again with the child in his arms.

(7.) No. 6547, Private L. A. Wootton, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, swam out to the assistance of Private G. Taylor, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, and, after bringing him ashore, went in again with a buoy to Private Danner, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, who was getting exhausted. Private Danner missed the buoy and Private

Wootton then supported him to the rocks.

(8.) Lieutenant Windham and Sub-Lieutenant Huddleston, R.I.M., were instrumental in saving several lives, but I have been unable to get particulars, except in the case of Lance-Corporal Robinson, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifle Corps, who could not possibly have got ashore but for assistance, and who was saved by them both; and Private Diamond, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, whom Sub-Lieutenant Huddleston saved, being afterwards himself dashed insensible against the rocks, and picked out of the surf by Sergeant J. Allen and No. 7030, Private C. Croft, both 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, at great risk to themselves.

(9.) Mr. Tyler, Bandmaster, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, was in the water, on the starboard side, and unable to make any headway against the backwash of the waves, or to get near the shore; Lieutenant Gosling, 1st Bn. King's Royal Rifles, endeavoured to reach him, but after going some 20 yards was washed back, thrown on the rock and injured. 2nd Lieutenant Forman, Royal Artillery, at once went in with a rope and a life-buoy, and swimming out to Mr. Tyler, gave him the buoy. When, however, the men on the shore began to haul on the rope, it parted. 2nd Lieutenant Forman stayed with Mr. Tyler, and Lieutenant Gosling then made a second attempt to reach him, but failed and was brought ashore. 2nd Lieutenant Bayley, York and Lancaster Regiment, then swam out with a rope, and the whole three were then brought close in to the shore, when 2nd Lieutenants Forman and Bayley were hauled up on the rocks, over which the sea was then washing. In endeavouring to pull Mr. Tyler in the buoy slipped, and the backwash carried him out at once. Just at the time one of the boats belonging to the ship, which had washed loose, was drifted sufficiently near the rocks to be got hold of, but was all the time being dashed against them, and actually, being broken up. It was caught and manned by Colour. Serjeant Jones, who was at the time a hospital patient, on board were also Serjeants H. Howarth and R. Down, Corporals R. Hodgson and C. Young, and Privates Nos. 6206, W. Parkinson, 6040, G. Kaley, 6064, T. Jones, 5756, J. Connell, 7441, T. Steele, 8094," P. Pickersgill, all King's Royal Rifles, and attempted to be rowed out to where Mr. Tyler, who was much exhausted, was.

Not being able to get the boat out, Sergeant Down dived from

the stem and swam to him, supporting him till he could be got on board; but the sea afterwards swept him out of the boat and he was pulled in again by Corporal C. Young and No. 6231, Private C. B. Jones, and was eventually landed in safety, though insensible, together with the crew of the boat.

21. In conclusion, I would wish to bring to the notice of the Major-General Commanding the admirable behaviour of all the troops on board from the time the vessel struck.

The most perfect discipline was maintained; everyone fell in quietly when the order was given, and remained awaiting further orders, without noise or any sign whatever that anything more than usual was expected of them. When it is remembered that the great majority of the men were below decks at the time, and could not see, though they could not but be conscious of the danger in which they stood, of the extent of which, however, they had no chance of forming an opinion, the order maintained appears the more praiseworthy.

From my position on the bridge, where I could see distinctly, I was particularly struck by the way in which, when the disembarkation of the men was stopped to allow the ladies, women and children to get ashore, the former quietly stood on one side to permit them to pass, and then resumed their own disembarkation in perfect order, when, all the time, it appeared to be a question of moments when the vessel would heel over.

I have, &c.,

M. F. WALKER, Lieut.-Colonel, K.R.R.,
Late Commanding Troops, R.I.M.S. "Warren Hastings"

Wreck of the Royal Indian Marine Troopship “Warren Hastings”

ARMY ORDER 40 OF APRIL 1897
ISSUED AS A SPECIAL ORDER ON 13TH APRIL 1887

The Commander-in-Chief feels gratification in making it known to the Army the substance of a report received from the General Officer Commanding at Mauritius, recording the remarkable courage and exemplary discipline displayed by the troops under most trying circumstances on board the Royal Indian Troopship “Warren Hastings” when the ship steaming at full speed struck the rocks during a pitch dark night and was wrecked near the village of St Phillippe in the island of Pleuniar at 2am on the 14th Jan last.

The troops on board consisted of the 1st Batt the King’s Royal Rifle Corps, the Head Quarters and four Companies 2nd Batt York and Lancashires and a detachment of the Middlesex Regiment.

They at once fell in on the main deck, in perfect order, and waited in this position until 4am when the Commander Q E Holland DSO of the Royal Indian Marines, having ascertained that there were sufficient room on the rocks, ordered the disembarkment by rope ladders from the bows. Up to this time the vessel, though bumping heavily, remained on a fairly keel, and soon after she gave a heavy lurch to starboard and every one was ordered to the upper deck. The men were marched up and the disembarkment then continued regularly.

Commander Holland, considered the landing of the women and children and sick might be deferred until daylight, but at 4.20am the position of the vessel appeared critical that he at once ordered the disembarkment of the men to cease, and the women and children and sick to be passed out. This order was promptly carried out, the men clung to the side as they stood and passed the women and children through, no man murmured or moved from his post. At 4.35am the sea began to wash over the upper deck on the starboard side and the vessel being in imminent danger of heeling over and sinking in deep water, it became necessary to expedite the landing. The troops were ordered to discard both rifles and boots, and at about 4.55am as the list to starboard increased, permission was given to good swimmers to save themselves. In consequence of the heavy seas and backwash off the rocks the rocks this was accompanied by many risks, but all but two natives - a cook and an Officer’s servant - to the number of 993, besides the crew, reached the shore, saved in many cases by individual gallantry of comrades. The following Non Commissioned Officers and men are named by Lt Col Forester-Walker 1st Batt KRRC who was in command and was the last soldier to leave the ship, as having particularly distinguished themselves upon the occasion:

1st KRRC:

C/S Jones	Rfn 6131 M Arrowsmith	Rfn 6067 G Haley
Sgt J Allen	Rfn 6168 E Carr	Rfn 7679 N McNamara
Sgt R Down	Rfn 5750 C Croft	Rfn 6206 W Oarkinson
Stg H Howarth	Rfn 5680 W J Grisley	Rfn 8094 P Pickersgill
Cpl R Hodgson	Rfn 4421 G Howes	Rfn 7441 T Steele
Cpl C Young	Rfn 6231 C B Jones	Rfn 6547 C A Wotten
L/C R Newby	Rfn 6064 G Haley	

2nd Yorks and Lancaster Regt
No 3631 Private Thomas Flannery

? Roe

Commander Holland speaks in the highest terms of Lt Col Forester-Walker who is entitled to great praise for his conduct. From Lt Col Forester-Walker that the conduct of the Officers generally was admirable and gives exceptional credit to the following:

1st Batt KRRC:

Major Gore-Brown

Captain G N Prendergast

Lt C Goshing

2nd Batt Yorks and Lancashires

Major W J Kirkpatrick

2/Lt A Seleous

2/Lt G E Bayley

Royal Artillery

2/Lt A Foreman

Commander Holland reports the behaviour of the troops throughout as beyond praise. Discipline was twice very severely tested; first, when after the vessel struck, the men were ordered to fall in between the main and the troop decks, secondly, when the disembarkment was suspended to enable women and children to be landed. Had there been attempts to crash or struggle forward there would have been great loss of life, and owing to the position of the vessel, it was impossible to walk on the deck without holding onto the rails or ropes and any struggle or pushing would have resulted in many being drowned. From first to last perfect discipline was maintained and all orders were instantly obeyed without noise, hesitation or confusion. The Commander-in-Chief is proud of the behaviour of our troops during this trying time. He regards it as a good example of the advantages of subordination and strict discipline for this alone under God's Providence, that the heavy loss of life was prevented.

The Commander-in-Chief cannot close this order without expressing his admiration to the coolness and courage and resource shown by Commander Holland and sympathy with him and his brave Officers.