



CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE AIR MEDAL

TO

JAMES D. BERLEMANN AVIATION MAINTENANCE TECHNICIAN THIRD CLASS UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Petty Officer BERLEMANN is cited for meritorious achievement in aerial flight on 27 August 2005 while serving as flight mechanic aboard Coast Guard helicopter, CGNR 6574. The helicopter was launched to assist the fishing vessel MR. NATURAL, which was foundering in 45 knot winds and 15 foot seas 35 miles southwest of Naples, Florida. The boat was returning to port from a fishing trip when it encountered destructive weather in the outer bands of Hurricane Katrina and began taking on water. As the helicopter crew battled severe turbulence, heavy rain, and near zero visibility to reach scene, Petty Officer BERLEMANN scanned the ocean surface through night vision goggles searching for the sinking vessel. Once over the MR. NATURAL he readied a dewatering pump for delivery, but quickly shifted to rescue swimmer operations when the panicked fishermen abandoned their vessel and jumped into the raging sea. Petty Officer BERLEMANN began lowering the rescue swimmer as the rain and wind intensified, tossing the swimmer violently and causing the hoist cable to gyrate wildly. Over four arduous hoists, he worked tirelessly to control the swinging cable while providing precise conning and advisory commands to the pilots who were struggling against the buffeting winds, high seas and pitch black night. With remarkable focus, Petty Officer BERLEMANN remained calm and reassured the pilots even as the hoist cable painfully pinned his hand against the door frame and nearly knocked his helmet off his head. During the recovery of the rescue swimmer, as he sensed the pilot losing his hover reference, he issued a rapid series of commands to halt a dangerous backward slide that nearly snapped the hoist cable. Taking decisive action to ensure the swimmer's safety, he assessed the damaged cable, and elected to rapidly drag the swimmer through the waves before another shock parted the cable and stranded the swimmer at the sea. Petty Officer BERLEMANN's actions and aeronautical skill were instrumental in the rescue of two lives. His courage, judgment, and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.