



## **CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE AIR MEDAL**

**TO**

### **LIEUTENANT BRUCE I. MERCHANT UNITED STATES COAST GUARD**

Lieutenant MERCHANT is cited for meritorious achievement in aerial flight on 13 September 1978 while serving as pilot and aircraft commander of Coast Guard HH3F CGNR 1477 engaged in a fisheries patrol in the Gulf of Alaska 60 nautical miles south of Yakutat, Alaska. The patrol had originated at Coast Guard Air Station Sitka and the helicopter was 40 miles offshore when a massive oil leak occurred in the helicopter's main transmission, followed immediately by secondary indications that catastrophic transmission failure was imminent. Quickly evaluating the situation, Lieutenant MERCHANT determined that an emergency landing in the existing sea conditions would be unsurvivable. He then directed the copilot to fly a heading toward the nearest landfall at an altitude and airspeed which would minimize stress on the failing transmission and instructed his crew to prepare for ditching should it become necessary. For the next 35-minutes Lieutenant MERCHANT constantly maintained a dead reckoning plot of the helicopter's position and passed this information to intercepting aircraft while continuing to evaluate the air worthiness of his stricken craft. At approximately 30-miles offshore the transmission oil pressure dropped to zero as loud noises were heard from the failing transmission. As the aircraft entered a strong weather front with its associated high winds and reduced visibility, Lieutenant MERCHANT ensured that the helicopter maintained the most direct course possible to a safe landing, thus minimizing the time airborne. While still beyond the heavily breaking surf, approximately 2-miles from shore, the main transmission chip light illuminated, indicating that internal disintegration of the transmission had started and total failure was certain. Realizing that landing in the raging surf was impossible, Lieutenant MERCHANT maintained discipline and steeled his crew to endure the final minutes of the harrowing flight. When at last a successful landing was accomplished, Lieutenant MERCHANT took immediate action to protect the aircraft from damage by the weather front they had just penetrated, and the incoming tide. Lieutenant MERCHANT's innovative actions, expert aeronautical skill and courage throughout this mission resulted in the saving of the crew and an irreplaceable airframe. His initiative, sound judgment and unwavering devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.