



CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE AIR MEDAL

TO

**PHILIP J. ORNOT
AVIATION SURVIVAL TECHNICIAN FIRST CLASS
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD**

Petty Officer ORNOT is cited for meritorious achievement in aerial flight on 23 February 2012 while serving as rescue swimmer aboard Coast Guard helicopter CG-6582. As part of the duty aircrew, Petty Officer ORNOT was responding to reports of illegal migrant activity in the vicinity of Monito Island, 50 miles southwest of Puerto Rico. Once on scene, the crew observed that the migrants had been abandoned inside a sea cave at the base of a sheer 100-foot cliff with no possible escape route. He fearlessly volunteered to deploy into the 8-foot swells which were relentlessly pounding the helpless migrants against the jagged rocks. Once safely deployed into the water he boarded the USCGC CUSHING's small boat to deliver him closer to the victims. Despite their best efforts, the building seas crashing against the base of the cliff prevented the small boat from getting any closer than 75 yards to the cave's entrance. Demonstrating extraordinary skill and knowledge of wave hydraulics, he expertly timed the swells and swam into the cave where the frothy seas and pounding waves were repeatedly submerging the victims as they desperately clung to the rocks. He swiftly evaluated and identified the most severely injured victim who had sustained a broken arm and was losing consciousness from the loss of blood caused by deep lacerations on his head. Taking the man in tow, Petty Officer ORNOT again navigated through the swift currents to the small boat where he transferred the victim to the boat crew. Staving off exhaustion, he skillfully avoided the razor-like rocks as he repeated this process three more times to recover the remaining victims. Once back on the small boat with the last survivor, Petty Officer ORNOT quickly determined that the first survivor needed immediate medical care that could only be provided via air transport. Entering the perilous seas yet again, he and the survivor were hoisted into the helicopter where he continued to provide critical first aid while enroute to medical assistance. Petty Officer ORNOT's actions and skill were instrumental in the rescue of four 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.