



CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE AIR MEDAL

TO

LIEUTENANT ORIN E. RUSH UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Lieutenant RUSH is cited for meritorious achievement in aerial flight while serving as copilot aboard Coast Guard helicopter 6023 on 22 January 1999. The crew was engaged in the perilous night rescue of six crewmen from the fishing vessel NOWITNA, which was disabled and taking on water in heavy seas 75 miles northwest of Cold Bay, Alaska. Dispatched from St. Paul Island, Alaska, he alternately navigated and piloted CG6023 during the 200-mile transit through turbulent 45-knot headwinds, 1/2-mile visibility, freezing rain and snow showers. Arriving on scene, the crew relied entirely on night vision goggles to evaluate the powerless crabber as darkness, sea spray, and horizontal rain rendered unaided visual assessment impossible. Wind gusts of 60 knots and 30-foot rogue waves were hammering the NOWITNA, which listed and rolled precariously. As the Aircraft Commander made an instrument approach to the stricken vessel, CG6023 experienced an Automatic Flight Control System failure. Lieutenant RUSH immediately confirmed the problem and provided critical backup as the Aircraft Commander manually continued the approach to a hover. As CG6023 moved over the violently pitching and rolling vessel to begin hoisting, he provided the Aircraft Commander with a steady string of backup calls and periodically added power to climb in compensation for oncoming swells that only he could see. Several attempts to deliver a trail line amidships failed as the line repeatedly sailed aft in the wind and eventually got tangled on the ship's wildly swaying mast. After repositioning, CG6023 successfully delivered a trail line to the bow and began hoisting the ship's crewmen from the hazardous deck. Lieutenant RUSH maintained radio communications, enabling the rescue swimmer to work in tandem with the flight mechanic on each demanding hoist. While CG6023 maneuvered to deliver the only remaining trail line for the final hoist, Lieutenant RUSH spotted a huge wave coming and called for an abort. Two waves, considerably larger than the prevailing 25 footers, swept through and drove the NOWITNA's foremast up and through the intended hoist position. With the hazard passed, CG6023 hoisted the sixth and final survivor safely aboard. Lieutenant RUSH then assumed the flight controls and flew the 75-mile transit to Cold Bay, Alaska. With all airport navigational aids out of service due to the storm, Lieutenant RUSH skillfully navigated, planned, and executed a fully self-contained low visibility approach, landing in snow showers and 50-knot winds. Lieutenant RUSH's actions and aeronautical skill were instrumental in the rescue of the fishing vessel NOWITNA'S six crewmen. 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.