



**CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF  
THE AIR MEDAL  
(GOLD STAR IN LIEU OF A SECOND)**

**TO**

**LIEUTENANT (JUNIOR GRADE) MATTHEW L. THOMAS  
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD**

Lieutenant (junior grade) THOMAS is cited for heroic achievement in aerial flight while serving as co-pilot aboard Coast Guard HH-3F helicopter 1495 engaged in the perilous and historic rescue of 37 crewmen from the Russian M/V KOMS OMLETS KIRGIZII on the morning of 14 March 1987. The vessel lost engine power and was in danger of sinking, approximately 206 nautical miles south of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Diverted from another search and rescue case, Lieutenant (junior grade) THOMAS quickly made a refueling stop and navigated the helicopter to the scene through 50-knot winds, icing, low ceilings, and severely limited visibility. Arriving on-scene, he coordinated rescue plans with the On-Scene Commander and other helicopters to maximize the use of critical on-scene time. The Soviet vessel was listing 40 degrees to port, its decks rolling and pitching wildly in the 20-foot seas. The grueling hoists required the utmost skill and crew coordination to counter vicious winds, driving rain and sleet, and heavy seas. Lieutenant (junior grade) THOMAS' professional skill and determined efforts provided the necessary margin of safety required to accomplish the mission. He continuously monitored the helicopter's instruments and fuel state. He stayed aware of the increasing gross weight limitations and changing center of gravity, allowing the aircraft commander to focus on the difficult hoist. With the hoisting of 16 survivors successfully completed, Lieutenant (junior grade) THOMAS assumed control of the helicopter and piloted it safely to Atlantic City, New Jersey. His actions and aeronautical skill were instrumental in the rescue of 16 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.