



**CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF
THE GOLD LIFESAVING MEDAL
TO**

**AO1 JOSEPH R. BRIDGE
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD**

THE GOLD LIFE SAVING MEDAL was awarded posthumously on 16 November 1955 to Aviation Ordnanceman First Class JOSEPH R. BRIDGE, U.S.C.G.
"for heroic daring during a sea rescue on 18 January 1953"

On 18 January 1953, a Coast Guard PBM plane departed the Coast Guard Air Detachment, Sangley Point, to render assistance to the personnel of a Navy plane which was reported down at sea. Aboard the PBM were the following personnel: Lieutenant JOHN C. VUKIC, Pilot; Lieutenant, junior grade, GERALD W. STUART, Copilot; and J.M. MILLER, Jr., WINFIELD J. HAMMOND, CARL R. TORNELL, JOSEPH R. BRIDGE, T.W. MILLER, AND HEWITT: crew members. While enroute LT VUKIC intercepted a radio message stating that survivors had been sighted in the water but that they were unable to pick up the rafts or any of the survival equipment which had been dropped to them from planes circling overhead. During this time LT VUKIC let down to the surface to survey the sea conditions. Upon arrival at the scene it was established that the wind was 25 to 30 knots, seas 8 to 12 feet high and very steep with crests approximately every 150 to 200 feet moving with a speed estimated at 15 knots. The water temperature was later determined to be 62 F. Several passes were made over the survivors who were on a life raft which was only partially inflated. Four of the survivors were hanging on to the side of the raft. Noting the condition of the survivors and their perilous position, and not having any information on the arrival time of any surface vessels in the area, it was determined that, in order to save the survivors, a landing was necessary despite the hazardous conditions of the sea and the fast approaching darkness. A successful open sea landing was made without any apparent damage to the PBM. Eleven survivors, some in extremely critical condition, were taken aboard under very adverse conditions. It was then established that two other persons from the Navy plane were missing. LT VUKIC taxied his PBM in the area for approximately fifteen minutes in a fruitless search for the men. With injured persons among his survivors and due to the pounding seas, LT VUKIC had his crew get ready for take-off. The take-off run was started and JATO fired. A few seconds later, due to engine failure, the aircraft swerved sharply to the left and crashed into the sea. Although LT VUKIC sustained injuries as a result of the crash, he was able to retrieve an inflated raft and, subsequently, pick up two Navy survivors. J.M. MILLER, Jr. and Hewitt also retrieved a raft and picked up five other Navy survivors. A plane overhead commenced dropping life rafts, but it was almost impossible for other victims in the water to get to them due to injuries and the condition of the seas. About two hours later a surface vessel arrived on the scene and, after a search of approximately two hours, the raft bearing J. M. MILLER, Jr., HEWITT and the five Navy survivors was located and the personnel taken aboard the vessel. About three hours later the life raft bearing LT VUKIC and the two Navy survivors was found by the vessel and survivors taken aboard. The search for other survivors continued throughout the night and the following day by both surface craft and aircraft, with negative results. The decision of LT VUKIC to land his plane to rescue the Navy survivors was believed by the investigative board to be justified and in keeping with the highest traditions of the Coast Guard.