



## **CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE COAST GUARD MEDAL**

**TO**

### **Aviation Structural Mechanic Third Class RALPH J. BRUNKE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD**

Petty Officer BRUNKE is cited for heroism on 31 July 1974 while serving as turret operator aboard the crash truck of the Coast Guard Air Station, Elizabeth City, North Carolina, when he assisted in fire fighting operations following the crash of a Navy aircraft into a building inhabited by 23 employees. The truck driver had the truck in motion when he observed the Navy aircraft leave the runway and swerve into the building. Petty Officer BRUNKE responded to the crash and, upon arrival on scene, despite difficulties with the equipment and inaccessibility of the fire source, delivered foam on the fire from close range. Subsequently, when the foam supply was depleted, without regard for his own safety, he left the truck and entered the burning building to search for crew members of the aircraft. He courageously walked through burning fuel and approached a hole in the fuselage to search for survivors before being driven out by flames, extreme heat, and noxious/toxic fumes. Once outside, ignoring the very real threat of a catastrophic jet fuel explosion, Petty Officer BRUNKE took over as nozzleman on a 2-inch hose and led a crew into the burning structure in an attempt to reach the cockpit. Shortly after entering the building, when the hosemen were overcome by smoke, Petty Officer BRUNKE was left alone on a wildly swinging hose, struck in the neck by the whipping nozzle, and knocked over an upholstery table into the edge of the fire. He retreated from the area and was treated at the scene for a neck bruise, leg abrasions, and smoke inhalation. Only when the hose was under control and being utilized by a new crew did he permit himself to be taken to an aid station for treatment. Petty Officer BRUNKE's remarkable initiative, exceptional fortitude, and bravery, in spite of imminent personal danger throughout this rescue mission, reflect the highest credit upon himself and the United States Coast Guard