



**CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE
DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS
TO
ASM3 MARIO M. VITTONI
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD**

Petty Officer VITTONI is cited for extraordinary heroism while participating in aerial flight on 17 November, 1994, while serving as Rescue Swimmer aboard Coast Guard HH-60J helicopter CGNR 6034. The aircrew was engaged in the rescue of a family of four from the sailing vessel MARINE FLOWER II that was being thrashed by Hurricane Gordon, 400 miles off the coast of North Carolina. Once on scene, Petty Officer VITTONI selflessly volunteered to be hoisted into the raging seas. He then began the monumental task of swimming to the wildly pitching sailboat. After an exhaustive effort, he was unable to significantly close the gap, and had to be hoisted back aboard the helicopter. While attaching himself to the rescue sling, the mountain of water dropped out from under him, causing him to swing wildly. As he dangled beneath the helicopter he plunged face first into the next advancing wave. After Petty Officer VITTONI was safely recovered, enthusiastic "thumbs up" clearly illustrated that he was all right and anxious to complete the rescue. On the second attempt, as the mother with her 4-month-old infant positioned herself on the stern of the sailboat, a huge wave washed them overboard. Petty Officer VITTONI instantly lunged towards them grasping the mother and baby, he then wrestled with the seas, survivors, and rescue basket. While the mother clutched hysterically at one arm, he held the infant in the other. After a heroic effort, he was able to get them into the basket unharmed, and safely hoisted to the helicopter. He was again recovered and redeployed into the ocean to rescue the father and 13-year-old daughter. Petty Officer VITTONI's actions, skill, and valor were instrumental in the rescue of four persons. 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.