



CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE
AIR MEDAL

TO

LIEUTENANT WALTER J. ARMSTRONG
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Lieutenant ARMSTRONG is cited for heroic achievement in aerial flight from 30 August 2005 to 06 September 2005, as Aircraft Commander aboard Coast Guard HH-65B helicopters during Hurricane Katrina rescue operations. He played a critical role in the most significant air rescue operation in Coast Guard history, saving the lives of 74 survivors during 12 sorties over 22 flight hours, 17 at night. Demonstrating exceptional aeronautical skill and judgment, he innovated Urban Search and Rescue techniques for which he was untrained. Subjected to tremendous stress and fatigue night after night, he nonetheless demonstrated exceptional focus and cool as he operated at the edge of the HH-65B's power-limited performance envelope, in close proximity to hazards, with continuous reports of violence and gunfire, thousands of distressed survivors needing rescue, and the constant threat of midair collision in the highly congested and uncontrolled airspace. Lieutenant ARMSTRONG saved two severely dehydrated survivors with a night, pinpoint swimmer delivery among power lines to a two story apartment. He skillfully positioned the aircraft at 100 feet with the power lines above the rotor arc and then delivered the rescue swimmer through a second set of power lines onto a balcony. He next operated the HH-65B within ten feet of damaged trees and power lines, expertly balancing aircraft power with survivor load, rescuing a family of four off a home. When two of the survivors leapt into the rescue basket, incorrectly placing them in a position where they could fall during the retrieval, Lieutenant ARMSTRONG demonstrated impeccable on-scene judgment continuing his precise hovering and expediting the hoist to ensure their safe recovery. Displaying exceptional bravery, Lieutenant ARMSTRONG prosecuted rescue missions after numerous warehouse fires reduced visibility and chemical fires created toxic clouds of smoke in the area. Lieutenant ARMSTRONG's actions and aeronautical skill were instrumental in saving 74 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.



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

TO

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Lieutenant ARMSTRONG is cited for extraordinary achievement in aerial flight on Coast Guard HH-65B helicopter 6522 on 23 September 2005 as Hurricane RITA, the strongest measured category 5 hurricane ever recorded in the Gulf of Mexico, came ashore with fierce winds in excess of 120 mph, torrential rains and a devastating storm surge. Demonstrating bravery and superior aeronautical skills, Lieutenant ARMSTRONG flew CG 6522 into the most destructive, dangerous side of the system, saving 2 lives and assisting 20 others during 3 sorties over nearly 6 hours of flight. The crew battled 50-knot winds, 300-foot ceilings and ½ mile visibility while heroically negotiating the hurricane. Near Dulac, LA several feeder bands reduced visibility to almost zero in torrential rains, three times forcing the crew to hover over a water tower as the only visual reference available. CG6522 established comms with a National Guard truck convoy of evacuees trapped by washed out roads. Scouting ahead at treetop level, the aircrew mapped out a safe route for the convoy, ensuring the safe passage of more than 20 hurricane survivors. Twice, the crew was forced to land in residential yards during 60-knot wind gusts, ¼ mile visibility and heavy precipitation. Due to the soaking rains, the aircraft began to sink, nearly submerging the main landing gear. The crew was forced to "fly" the aircraft on deck with full deflection of cyclic in order to prevent further settling and avoid dynamic rollover. CG6522 was diverted 35 miles closer to the advancing eye of the hurricane to seek out 2 overdue hunters. At 150 feet, with winds increasing to 70+ knots and visibility at ¼ mile, pilots wrestled to maintain aircraft control while searching for the missing men. After fighting hurricane-force winds for an hour, CG 6522 was retasked to rescue 2 sheriff's deputies near Cocodrie, LA. At critical fuel, the crew spotted the truck surrounded by floodwaters and quickly hoisted both men as the levee they were standing on began to wash away. Lieutenant ARMSTRONG's aeronautical skill and valor were critical during the rescue of over 22 storm survivors in arduous of conditions. 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.