



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

TO

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER RUSSELL S. BURNSIDE
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Lieutenant Commander BURNSIDE is cited for meritorious achievement in aerial flight from 29 August 2005 to 06 September 2005, in response to Hurricane Katrina rescue operations. As Aircraft Commander aboard Coast Guard HH-65B helicopters for five consecutive days during the most extraordinary air rescue operation in Coast Guard history, he overcame the stress and fatigue of the intense, extended effort to save 173 survivors during 17 sorties over 34 day and night flight hours, including 10 hours single-pilot. Immediately after storm passage, he battled 50 knot winds with gusts above 60 knots and reduced visibility as he began hoisting several dozen survivors from smashed homes shoved under trees and power lines by the destructive storm surge. He expertly deployed the swimmer to recover one man with a broken back floating on debris, his face only inches from floodwaters. Operating independently, he took the initiative to create staging areas to quickly offload survivors where local officials could assist them. With noteworthy aeronautical skill and judgment, he improvised Urban Search and Rescue techniques for which he had no training. Over and over again, he piloted the aircraft at the edge of its power-limited performance envelope in close proximity to power lines, trees, towers and other hazards, hovering over obstacles with no fly-out or escape option in the event of any engine malfunction, executing dozens of rescues from balconies, windows, porches and rooftops. He maneuvered within ten feet of trees and power lines to land between two rooftop chimneys, rescuing three families; later, he landed "light" on a storm-damaged supermarket rooftop, rescuing dozens of trapped people. Lieutenant Commander BURNSIDE shrewdly prioritized hoists to first assist the injured, elderly, and children ensuring families were not separated during rescue. He continued unabated despite regular reports of gunfire and warnings by authorities of toxic clouds of chemical fumes. Lieutenant Commander BURNSIDE's actions and aeronautical skill were instrumental in the rescue of 173 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.