



CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE
AIR MEDAL

TO

AMT3 MICHAEL A. COLBATH
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Petty Officer COLBATH is cited for heroic achievement in aerial flight from 29 August 2005 to 06 September 2005 while serving as Flight Mechanic aboard Coast Guard HH-65B helicopters following Hurricane KATRINA's devastating passage over metropolitan New Orleans. Demonstrating noteworthy skill and innovating rescue techniques for which he was not trained, he saved 79 survivors during ten sorties and over 20 flight hours in an extremely challenging environment. He maintained exceptional focus as his aircrew operated at the very edge of the power-limited HH-65B's performance envelope, with reports of violence and gunfire, thousands of distressed survivors crying for help, and the constant threat of midair collision in the highly congested and uncontrolled airspace. He skillfully performed dozens of difficult hoists amongst debris, telephone poles, wires and trees. Improvising brilliantly, he used the rescue basket to "scoop" a frantic man from floodwaters after he fell off a roof trying to grab the basket. Battling tropical storm force winds he skillfully performed a pinpoint vertical delivery of the swimmer to a smashed vessel strewn with obstacles from a 150-foot hover, rescuing a severely injured woman. He provided invaluable obstacle clearance guidance to pilots flying into severely confined landing zones and near debris-laden bridges, roads, and rooftops. He disembarked on a Mississippi River levee where he helped control a desperate crowd and orchestrated an orderly evacuation of four critical condition survivors. He displayed noteworthy bravery by continuing to prosecute rescue missions after numerous refinery and chemical fires reduced visibility and authorities warned of danger from toxic fumes. Effectively using additional cabin space to increase payload capacity, he assisted hundreds more survivors by hoisting critical food and water supplies to rooftops. Showing extraordinary dedication and stamina, Petty Officer COLBATH'S actions and skill were instrumental in the saving of 79 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.