



Association for Rescue at Sea • Inc.

THE AWARD OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR RESCUE AT SEA

VADM THOMAS SARGENT III GOLD MEDAL

TO AST2 CHRISTOPHER LEON, UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Petty Officer LEON is cited for meritorious achievement in aerial flight on 20 June 2014 while serving as Rescue Swimmer aboard Coast Guard helicopter CG-6531 during the daring night rescue of four persons from the Ocean Rower BRITANNIA 60 miles offshore Monterey, California. Undaunted by the violent waves from the 15-foot seas, Petty Officer LEON volunteered to deploy into the churning water to recover the four survivors. Once deployed he battled the heavy seas to get aboard the vessel, where he rapidly assessed and selected the survivor in the worst condition for the first recovery. Upon reentering the water, Petty Officer LEON and the survivor were violently swept away from the vessel. Displaying extraordinary determination, strength and stamina, Petty Officer LEON fought his way back to the awaiting basket and lifted the survivor into it. Swept 500 yards from the vessel during the evolution, Petty Officer Leon was recovered by the helicopter and, without hesitation, redeployed to the vessel. With time to complete only one more hoist due to minimum fuel, Petty Officer LEON was forced to take the unconventional route of placing two survivors into the basket to be hoisted together, while he remained on the vessel with the lone survivor. The helicopter crew attempted to deploy their life raft before departing scene, but it was swept away forcing Petty Officer LEON to make a split second decision whether to retrieve the life raft and leave the lone survivor in greater peril, or to remain with him aboard the swamped vessel. Demonstrating exceptional dedication to duty and disregarding his own safety, Petty Officer LEON chose to remain with the survivor, huddling over him to protect him from the elements and frigid seas. Petty Officer LEON steadfastly endured the harrowing conditions for over two hours until the helicopter could return to complete the rescue. His actions and skill under the most arduous of conditions saved four lives from certain peril. His courage, judgment, and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the maritime community to come to the aid of others in distress. The Award of the VADM Thomas SARGENT III Gold Medal is authorized.

Steve M. Sawyer

President, Association for Rescue at Sea