

AFRAS Gold Medal Award

2001

To

Boatswain's Mate Third Class

Michael K. Carola

Gold Medal awardee Michael Carola is cited for heroic achievement while serving as crewman aboard Coast Guard Motor Lifeboat 47201 (MLB) during the rescue of seven passengers from the fishing boat LITTLE FLY FISHERMAN. The vessel sank shortly after striking the Herbert C. Bonner Bridge on the outer banks of North Carolina. One of the victims, an 82-year old man suffering from exhaustion and hypothermia, became pinned against the inside of the bridge fender system by the raging current.

Since it was impossible for the MLB to maneuver between the concrete bridge piling and fender system, Seaman Carola scaled the bridge fender and attempted to pull the victim to safety. His efforts proved unsuccessful due to the swift current repeatedly dragging the victim beneath the surface. Having no rescue swimmer training, and after witnessing the current pull another victim completely under the bridge fender system, Seaman Carola ignored the danger to himself and entered the water. He placed his body between the victim and the bridge fender, fighting against standing walls of water to hold the head of this 250-pound man above the surface.

Following an unsuccessful attempt by the MLB crew who struggled to pull Seaman Carola and his victim to safety using a life ring with tending line, the exhausted victim told Carola that he was not going to survive and to let him go. Still tightly pinned against the bridge fender, Seaman Carola forced the life-ring over the victim's head and under his arms while desperately encouraging him not to give up. Believing that the elderly man had only minutes to live, Seaman Carola directed the boat crew to take the tending line up to the bow and to use the MLB to pull them clear. Once free of the fender system, Carola swam the then unconscious victim to the safety of the MLB.

Seaman Carola demonstrated remarkable initiative, exceptional fortitude, and daring in spite of imminent personal danger in this rescue, resulting in saving the life of this 82 year old man. His courage and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.