



William J. Bickford

Captain
Class of 1955



**The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting
the Coast Guard Medal to
Captain William J. Bickford
United States Coast Guard**

For service as set forth in the following Citation:

Captain Bickford is cited for heroism on the morning of 5 April 1976 while en route from Juneau, Alaska to Ketchikan aboard a commercial airliner. During the landing at Ketchikan, the jetliner overran the end of the runway, plummeted into a ravine, broke into several pieces, ruptured her fuel tanks and burst into flames. As a result of his extensive service as a Coast Guard aviator, Captain Bickford, serving as the Seventeenth Coast Guard District Staff Inspector, had the keen foresight to mentally pre-plan his escape. Thus, upon final impact and without hesitation, he began the exodus of passengers through the forward cabin door. This effort was culminated by his assisting an injured stewardess from the burning aircraft and bodily carrying her across a stream of volatile jet fuel to a place of refuge. After assuring himself of the safety of the others, Captain Bickford returned to the cockpit area of the burning wreck to aid another Coast Guardsman in an attempt to free the trapped flight deck crew. Learning of possible survivors still remaining in the passenger cabin, Captain Bickford, his clothing soaked with fuel and with total disregard for his personal safety, courageously climbed back onto the wing and made a final search before leaving the aircraft. He then proceeded up a nearby hillside and directed the awaiting airport firefighting crew into action. This final decisive act undoubtedly retarded the spread of the conflagration sufficiently to permit others to successfully complete the rescue of the hapless flight deck crew prior to the aircraft becoming engulfed in flames. Captain Bickford demonstrated remarkable initiative, exceptional fortitude, and heroic daring in spite of grave personal danger during this aircraft disaster. His unselfish actions, courage, and unwavering devotion to duty reflect the highest credit upon himself and the United States Coast Guard.