HONORABLE SENATOR CARLA J. JOSEPH
34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands
P.O. Box 1690
St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands 00804

4/7/2021

BILL NO. 34-0019 a RESOLUTION HONORING AND COMMENDING RONAQUA RUSSELL, LIEUTENANT UNITED STATES COAST GUARD.

Honorable Senator:

Good Morning the Honorable Senator Carla Joseph, Chair of the Committee on Government Operations and Consumer Protection, Members of the 34th VI Legislature, viewers and the listening audience.

Thank you for your strong support of Lieutenant Ronaqua Russell, those that are serving in uniform, military veterans, and the United States Coast Guard.

My name is Alvin Dalmida Jr, a 26-year U.S. Coast Guard Veteran and a Virgin Islander. I am honored and humbled to testify before you today. It is my distinct pleasure to address this committee on BILL NO. 34-0019 a RESOLUTION HONORING AND COMMENDING RONAQUA RUSSELL, LIEUTENANT UNITED STATES COAST GUARD.

I write this testimony, giving Ronaqua Russell, a native Virgin Islander, my strongest support. I have had the great pleasure of knowing her since she entered the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in 2008 and I first became one of her many proud mentors while we both served the Department of Homeland Security U.S. Coast Guard.

On February 21, 2019 Ronaqua, became the first African-American woman aviator in the U.S. Coast Guard to receive the Air Medal. The Air Medal is one of the highest service medals, awarded for ...Heroic or meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight.

The Coast Guard Air Medal Citation reads in part:

Lieutenant Russell is cited by the U.S. Coast Guard for meritorious heroic achievement in aerial flight from 24 August to 11 September 2017 in response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Harvey. This category four hurricane released more precipitation than any other tropical cyclone in U.S. History. Making landfall on three separate occasions, Harvey discharged as much as 52 inches of rain throughout 28,000 square miles for more than five days. As an HC-144 First Pilot, Lieutenant Russell’s aeronautical skill was paramount to the successful response in the face of extremely hazardous weather.
Due to widespread outages to the air traffic control infrastructure, she provided expert navigation through embedded thunderstorms, heavy turbulence and moderate icing just hours after the hurricane made landfall. As a second aircraft attempted landing at Air Station Houston, Lieutenant Russell acted as pilot monitoring in heavy rain with less than one mile of visibility. After breaking out, she quickly assessed the landing environment, provided visual traffic separation from numerous low flying helicopters, and deftly chose the best runway to land, allowing the safe delivery of eight mission essential personnel and 800lbs of life saving equipment. Lieutenant Russell’s actions and aeronautical skill were instrumental in the rescue and recovery effort in Houston. Her courage, judgement, and devotion to duty are commended and, are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.

_Several weeks after Hurricane Harvey, Ronaqua was also formerly recognized with a Coast Guard Achievement Medal. The Achievement Medal is awarded for service that goes above and beyond the bounds of regular duty performance in a non-combat situation, and the citation reads in part:_

On 28 September to 7 October 2017, as a Co-Pilot, Lieutenant Russell supported the Coast Guard’s response to Hurricane Maria. This category 5 hurricane was the tenth most Intense Atlantic hurricane on record, ravaging eight Caribbean Island nations over the course of 17 days, leaving 3.5 million Americans without power, causing over 103 billion dollars in property damage, and causing over 103 civilian deaths. Lieutenant RUSSELL executed logistical missions from Miami, Florida to Puerto Rico by diligently flight planning and providing guidance through airspace with little to no radar coverage, navigating thunderstorms and icing conditions. Most notably, her actions ensured the evacuation of a high-risk pregnant woman and her accompanying medical team. Lieutenant RUSSELL’s actions and aeronautical skills were instrumental in assisting countless people in the devastated regions of Puerto Rico.

Ronaqua was also previously cited for superior performance of duty while serving as an HC-144 Aircraft Commander, Safety Manager, and Flight Scheduler at Coast Guard Air Station Corpus Christi from August 2014 to July 2018. As the Flight Schedules Officer, she expertly planned 830 flight events encompassing 2400 hours in support of U.S. Coast Guard missions. She carefully choreographed the schedules of 20 pilots, three boat stations, and five cutters to maximize operational efficiency and training. Meticulously tracking pilot qualifications, she ensured the completion of four pilot and five aircrew upgrades. Operationally, she accumulated over 1200 flight hours, completed 200 law enforcement patrols, and two deployments in support of the Coast Guard. Her outstanding acumen led to the successful prosecution of 19 search and rescue cases to save 11 mariners in distress.

Ronaqua has not only brought tremendous credit and pride to the Virgin Islands but continues to contribute and demonstrate selflessness in her tutoring and mentoring students as a Partnership-In-Education program volunteer. This young woman has made a huge difference in so many lives! She is a true Guardian, who is serving her country well!

Ronaqua’s accomplishments are also in line with those of several other Virgin Islands women who have established themselves in the U.S. Coast Guard and also deserve recognition during this celebration of Women’s History: they are: Lieutenant Commanders Karima Greenaway-Hantal, Biann Creque, Kia Clarke-Ausley, Cathy Prince (Retired) and Diana Isidore (Retired); Lieutenants Rebecca Seifer, Danique Hodge, and Nikole Barnes; and Warrant Officers Claricia Gautier, and Vanessa Lang (Retired).
Ronaqua’s commitment and dedication is an inspiration for those that will follow in her footsteps, and All Virgin Islanders join me today in saluting her for a job extremely “well done.”

Semper Paratus,

ALVIN DALMIDA Jr.
Lieutenant, U.S. Coast Guard (Retired),
Federal Government Employee, Information Technology (IT) Consultant, and IT Program Manager

Enclosures: 
(1) Coast Guard Air Medal
(2) Coast Guard Achievement Medals

Copy: Lieutenant Ronaqua Russell, U.S. Coast Guard
CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF
THE AIR MEDAL
TO
LIEUTENANT RONAQUA A. RUSSELL.
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Lieutenant RUSSELL is cited for meritorious heroic achievement in aerial flight from 24 August to 11 September 2017 in response to the devastation caused by Hurricane Harvey. This category four hurricane released more precipitation than any other tropical cyclone in U.S. history. Making landfall on three separate occasions, Harvey discharged as much as 52 inches of rain throughout 28,000 square miles during a five-day deluge. As an HC-144 First Pilot, Lieutenant RUSSELL’s aeronautical skill was paramount to the successful response in the face of extremely hazardous weather. Due to widespread outages to air traffic control infrastructure, she provided expert navigation through embedded thunderstorms, heavy turbulence, and moderate icing just hours after Hurricane Harvey made landfall. As the second fixed wing asset to attempt landing at Air Station Houston, Lieutenant RUSSELL acted as pilot monitoring while executing a non-precision circling approach to minimums in heavy rain with less than one mile of visibility. After breaking out, she quickly assessed the landing environment, provided visual traffic separation from numerous low flying helicopters, and deftly chose the best runway to land, allowing safe delivery of eight mission essential personnel and 800 lbs of life saving equipment. Lieutenant RUSSELL’s actions and aeronautical skill were instrumental in the rescue and recovery effort in Houston. Her courage, judgment, and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.
CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF
THE COAST GUARD ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL
TO
LIEUTENANT RONAQUA A. RUSSELL
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Lieutenant RUSSELL is cited for superior performance of duty while deployed to Air Station Miami from 28 September to 7 October 2017 as an HC-144 Co-Pilot in support of the Coast Guard’s response to Hurricane Maria. This category 5 hurricane was the tenth most intense Atlantic hurricane on record, ravaging eight Caribbean island nations over the course of 17 days, leaving 3.5 million Americans without power, causing over 103 billion dollars in property damage, and causing over 103 civilian deaths. In response to the devastation, the Coast Guard deployed more than 1,000 personnel, 32 aircraft, and 19 cutters to the affected area more than 1,000 miles from the continental United States to provide critical evacuation assistance and humanitarian relief efforts. Lieutenant RUSSELL executed logistical missions from Miami, Fl. to Puerto Rico by diligently flight planning and providing guidance through airspace with little to no radar coverage, navigating thunderstorms and icing conditions. In addition to the normal co-pilot duties, Lieutenant RUSSELL worked hand in hand with the loadmaster to manage the logistics of 75 passengers on six separate flights totaling 44 hours. Most notably, her actions ensured the evacuation of a high risk pregnant female and her accompanying medical team. Lieutenant RUSSELL’s actions and aeronautical skill were instrumental in assisting countless people in the devastated regions of Puerto Rico. Her diligence, perseverance, and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.

The Operational Distinguishing Device is authorized.

Enclosure (3) Coast Guard Achievement

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF
THE COAST GUARD ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL
(GOLD STAR IN LIEU OF A SECOND)
TO
LIEUTENANT RONAQUA RUSSELL
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Lieutenant RUSSELL is cited for superior performance of duty while serving as an HC-144 Aircraft Commander, Sector Safety Manager, and Flight Scheduler at Coast Guard Sector / Air Station Corpus Christi from August 2014 to July 2018. An outstanding safety steward, Lieutenant RUSSELL led the Safety and Environmental Health committee consisting of six Officers, 23 Enlisted personnel, and one civilian. In this capacity, she was responsible for managing 34 safety and environmental health related programs throughout the AOR and ensured all Sector units were in compliance with Federal, state, local, and Commandant mandates. As the Flight Schedules Officer, she expertly planned 830 flight events encompassing 2408 hours in support of Eighth District and Atlantic Area. She carefully choreographed the schedules of 26 pilots, three boat stations, and five cutters to maximize operational efficiency and training. Meticulously tracking pilot semi-annual minimums and qualifications, she ensured the completion of four pilot and five aircrew upgrades. Operationally, she accumulated over 1200 flight hours, completed 200 law enforcement patrols, and two deployments in support of Coast Guard’s Seventh District. Her outstanding acumen led to the successful prosecution of 19 search and rescue cases to save 11 mariners in distress. Lieutenant RUSSELL’s diligence, perseverance, and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.

The Operational Distinguishing Device is authorized.

Enclosure (3) Coast Guard Achievement