



Captain Melissa L. Rivera

Chief of Staff, 17th Coast Guard District U.S. Coast Guard



Captain Melissa Rivera currently serves as the Chief of Staff for the 17th Coast Guard District. Headquartered in Juneau, Alaska, the men and women of the 17th District conduct all 11 of the Coast Guard's statutory missions in an area encompassing nearly four million square miles of the Pacific and Arctic Oceans including the Bering Sea.

Capt. Rivera most recently served as the Commandant of Cadets at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. In that position, she was responsible for the professional and leadership development of the Corps of Cadets, developing leaders of character worthy of commissions as officers in the U.S. Coast Guard.



Capt. Rivera is a career aviator and has an extensive history of service in Alaska including two tours at Air Station Kodiak and one tour at Air Station Sitka. As Commanding Officer of Air Station Kodiak, she led 380 Coast Guard personnel and the employment of 15 aircraft conducting operational missions across a four million square mile area of responsibility. This included the first-ever Coast Guard operational response capability in the Arctic, meeting national and service strategic objectives at the edge of the Last Frontier.

Capt. Rivera's first tour at Air Station Kodiak was as the Standardization Officer and Flight Examiner on the MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter. In 2002, she and her deployed aircrew rescued 23 survivors from a fishing vessel ablaze in the Bering Sea. Her crew received the Association of Naval Aviation and National Helicopter Association Aircrew of the Year awards, and she was also selected for the Order of Daedalians Exceptional Pilot Award. During her tour at Air Station Sitka, she served as the Operations Officer and Chief Pilot.

During a tour at Coast Guard headquarters, Capt. Rivera was the first Aviation Special Missions Manager. In this capacity she developed aviation counter-terrorism policy while coordinating development, operational testing and mission employment of tactical aviation capabilities. She also served as Executive Officer at Air Station Borinquen, Puerto Rico, flying the MH-65 Dolphin helicopter.

After graduating from Naval Flight Training in Pensacola, Florida, as CG Aviator #3251 on Aug. 4, 1995, Capt. Rivera's first operational aviation assignment was to Air Station Elizabeth City, North Carolina, where she flew the HH-60J helicopter. In the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd in 1998, she commanded one of the first helicopters on scene and executed night rescues of 43 survivors trapped by rising floodwaters in Eastern North Carolina.

Capt. Rivera graduated from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in 1991 with a Bachelor of Science in Government. After graduation she served as a deck watch officer aboard the USCGC VENTUROUS in Long Beach, California

She earned a Master of Arts degree in National Security and Strategic Studies from the Naval War College, graduated from the College of Naval Command and Staff with distinction and earned a Certificate in Homeland Security Studies from the National Graduate School.

Capt. Rivera was born in Galesburg, Illinois and raised in Kent, Washington. Her personal military awards include five Meritorious Service Medals, two Air Medals, two Coast Guard Achievement Medals and an Army Achievement Medal. She is married to retired Coast Guardsman Epy Rivera and has two daughters.