Air Station Kodiak Recognized for Rescues

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Friday and Saturday were busy days for the Kodiak Coast Guard Base. Air Station Kodiak accepted two awards for an even busier day they had in January of this year when it took part in two rescue missions. Captain Melissa Rivera is the commanding officer of Air Station Kodiak and said the first award came through the Coast Guard Foundation.

-- (Hero Award 1 :41 “They have an annual award and all the air crews that flew on the January 25th, the morning of the 25th the whole fishing vessel Kimberly and fishing vessel Heritage all the crews involved with that C-130 and H1-60 helicopter crews are being recognized for the foundation award. The other award is through the Coast Guard Aviation Association. We call them the ptaradactyls, but it’s coast guard aviators, probably mostly retired, that have annual awards to recognize, ones for a fixed wing air crew of the year, and one’s for a rotary wing air crew of the year and then another award that’s being recognized there on Saturday the 13th is one of our petty officers whose being recognized as the aviation maintenance petty officer of the year.”)

Rivera said the awards and recognition speaks volumes to the caliber of crews here in Kodiak.

-- (Hero Award 2 :34 “I would say first of all it says to me that we have fantastic folks here who train hard everyday to go out in the most challenging area of responsibility in the coast guard to perform aviation missions. So they train real hard at it, and when a case comes up it’s almost always the real deal. It’s almost always a real emergency, real distress and can be exceptionally challenging with time, distance, weather, terrain and in this case conditions with cold and icing. So they train real hard so they can go out and do a good job when the alarm goes off.”)

Commander Mark Vislay is the operations officer for Air Station Kodiak and said he remembers the two cases of the fishing vessel Kimberly and fishing vessel Heritage very well.

-- (Hero Award 3 :42 “The recognition is wonderful for the crews that actually flew. Myself I was just kind of the manager of the case if you will that evening. It was a busy night, the Kimberly Heritage case was probably one that will always go down in my memory. Some particulars of it the evening started out with basically after we got the call about the Kimberly that was aground and in pretty bad shape and we found out there were some heavy winds and our aircraft went and lost comms. So we actually lost comms with our aircraft for roughly about an

hour and fifteen, hour and a half. And sometimes when a 60’s down low in a hole like that comms can get pretty bad. So that kind of stirs up adrenaline, emotions start running. So me and the CO actually came in, previous to Capt. Rivera it was Capt. Deal. We came in that evening, basically we’re now concerned of our own folks. Luckily about that time when I called Capt. Deal the second time we had regained comms.”)

Vislay said the helicopter couldn’t get to the crew of the Kimberly at the time but maintained continuous coverage to make sure no one went in the water.

-- (Hero Award 4 :38 “So we had aircraft our plan was to continually keep aircraft going out to scene constantly, but aircraft and crew were getting beat up pretty bad. So we can fly up to six hours in one shot, if you will, and then we have to go into crew rest. That evening crews were getting about four hours on them the weather was so bad, when they were coming back completely fatigued and exhausted so we were switching out crews. And it just so happened in the middle of this I think it was the third aircraft we were launching to the Kimberly, as soon as they got airborn we all over heard it, the channel 16 call when the ops ended, we’re going down. So we immediately made the call to divert that helo, the Kimberly, we have eyes on it, the C130’s overhead so we diverted that crew.”)

Vislay said the crews were able to rescue the crewmembers of both the Heritage and the Kimberly that day and he said the awards are fitting because the crews made something very difficult seem easy. The rescues were done in 25 foot seas, 60 knot winds in the dead of night with blowing snow and no moonlight.

The foundation award was given in New York City on Friday and the aviation association award was presented on Saturday.