



**CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF
THE AIR MEDAL**

TO

**LIEUTENANT ERNEST P. RIVAS
UNITED STATES COAST GUARD**

Lieutenant RIVAS is cited for meritorious achievement in aerial flight on the afternoon of 4 October 1980 while serving as copilot of Coast Guard HH-3F 1469 engaged in the rescue of 20 survivors from the stricken passenger liner M/V PRINSENDAM which had caught fire 120 miles south of Yakutat in the Gulf of Alaska. The fire had forced the passengers and crew of PRINSENDAM into lifeboats in the dark hours of early morning. Dispatched from Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak, the helicopter arrived on scene and located a lifeboat being tossed by 25 foot cresting seas. Despite 35 knot winds and visibility often down to one-half mile, the helicopter was positioned over the lifeboat. With the boat varying from 5 to 30 feet below the helicopter, Lieutenant RIVAS carefully monitored each evolution, assuring that safety of flight and crew coordination were maintained and providing separation from the six other helicopters hoisting. Additionally, he guarded three different frequencies which were jammed with traffic from the 14 air and surface units on scene, ensuring that the helicopter was ready for possible new directions from the On-Scene Commander as well as getting the proper sequence for landing on the T/V WILLIAMSBURGH to deplane survivors. Lieutenant RIVAS' innovative actions, expert aeronautical skills, and courage throughout this rescue mission resulted in the safe evacuation of 20 victims. His initiative, sound judgment and unwavering devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.