

CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF  
THE DISTINGUISHED FLYING CROSS

TO

JAMES M. MCKAY

Staff Sergeant James M. McKay distinguished himself by extraordinary achievement while participating in aerial flight as CV-22 Special Missions Aviator, 8th Expeditionary Special Operations Squadron, Joint Special Operations Air Component – Central, Djibouti, Africa on 21 December 2013. On this date, while operating a CV-22, Sergeant McKay's aircraft came under heavy, effective surface-to-air fire from ground forces over a populated United Nations compound while attempting to evacuate American citizens. During the engagement, he identified threats and directed maneuvers that ensured successful clearance of the weapon's engagement zone. Sergeant McKay then conducted a rapid, thorough assessment of the aircraft systems, discovering severe damage including ruptured fuel tanks, flight control degradation, complete loss of the largest hydraulic system on the aircraft and an inoperable emergency lubrication system. His extensive systems knowledge uncovered the need for immediate emergency air refueling and enabled the crew to isolate the worst hit fuel tanks, slowing leaking across the aircraft and preventing a forced landing on the front lines of South Sudan's civil war. Sergeant McKay calmly stepped through emergency checklists and prepared the aircraft for landing in Uganda, alleviating undue burden on the pilots and allowing the rest of the crew to focus on coordinating support for four critically wounded personnel on the lead formation aircraft. His actions resulted in the safe recovery of four crewmembers, nine passengers and his aircraft despite heavy odds against success, and contributed to saving the lives of the four critically wounded service-members on the lead CV-22 aircraft. The professional competence, aerial skill, and devotion to duty displayed by Sergeant McKay reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force.

