



CITATION TO ACCOMPANY THE AWARD OF THE AIR MEDAL

TO

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER CHRISTOPHER J. CONLEY UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

Lieutenant Commander CONLEY is cited for meritorious achievement in aerial flight from 30 August 2005 to 05 September 2005, while serving as aircraft commander aboard Coast Guard HH-60J helicopters during Hurricane Katrina rescue operations. Demonstrating exceptional aeronautical skill, Lieutenant Commander CONLEY flew 38 hours, flying 8 night hours amid the urban disaster area of New Orleans. Assuming command of a helicopter in Alexandria, Louisiana, Lieutenant Commander CONLEY developed a rescue plan while en-route to New Orleans, detailing triage criteria and hoist priorities in the absence of guidance or knowledge of on-scene conditions. As floodwaters were rising, Lieutenant Commander CONLEY directed the immediate rescue of seven survivors clinging to a collapsing building. With time of the essence, the hoist became extremely complex, as altitudes of 110 feet were required to minimize the effects of rotor wash on the weak structure. On subsequent hoists, he hovered at 160 feet to rescue three survivors from beneath a porch overhang located under a network of power lines. Following a refueling evolution, Lieutenant Commander CONLEY was forced to operate his aircraft at the extreme edge of performance capabilities, hoisting 14 survivors with a zero power margin. One hoist evolution lasted 15 minutes, testing Lieutenant Commander CONLEY'S stamina as he threaded the basket through a set of wires to save a diabetic survivor trapped on his balcony. On 31 August, he hoisted a family of five from a roof, discovering one survivor trapped inside under chest deep water. Using night vision goggles and surrounded by obstructions, Lieutenant Commander CONLEY hovered, knowing any drift could be disastrous. Placing his swimmer into position against a vertical surface, the swimmer broke through a window and saved the woman from the grave conditions. On 01 September, he evacuated 50 patients from a hospital, narrowly escaping the hazards created by an industrial explosion. Lieutenant Commander CONLEY's actions and aeronautical skill were instrumental in saving 144 lives. His courage, judgment and devotion to duty are most heartily commended and are in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Coast Guard.