

The NCOA Air Force Vanguard Award is presented in honor and memory of Medal of Honor recipient Sergeant John L. Levitow.

The 2020 NCOA Military Vanguard recipient for the U.S. Air Force is Chief Master Sergeant James M. Traficante.

Chief Master Sergeant James M. Traficante distinguished himself as Wing Command Chief, 103rd Airlift Wing, Bradley Air National Guard Base, CT.

On October 2, 2019, Chief Traficante was traveling as an off-duty passenger on an FAA Living History Flight Experience when, three minutes into the flight, the aircraft experienced crippling malfunctions and attempted to return to the Bradley International Airport. The aircraft crashed on the airfield hitting a vehicle on the ground and a deicing fluid storage tank. The aircraft was largely destroyed in a post-crash fire.

Despite suffering injuries from the crash, Chief Traficante immediately located and opened an escape hatch creating an exit for passengers behind him to exit the burning aircraft. After exiting the aircraft, he realized no one else had exited. He then returned to the aircraft to search for survivors.

He located a severely-injured and blinded passenger and assisted him away from the aircraft and out of immediate danger to responding firefighters. Despite the intense heat, Chief Traficante returned to the engulfed fuselage once again and located a second passenger emerging from the flames. He assisted the passenger in exiting the aircraft. Realizing the passenger was on fire; he removed the burning clothing and extinguished the passenger by hand.

CMSgt Traficante then succumbed to his injuries and was treated on the scene and was hospitalized. Seven of the thirteen people onboard the aircraft perished. Chief Traficante is credited with ensuring the survival of two passengers on the ill-fated B-17.

The selfless actions of Chief Traficante reflect credit upon himself, the Air National Guard, and the United States Air Force.

