



News Release

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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CHARLESTON AFB SERGEANT EARNS BRONZE STAR

CHARLESTON AFB, S.C.--A Charleston AFB sergeant will be presented the Bronze Star Medal Thursday, 5:30 p.m., at the 15th Airlift Squadron auditorium here.

Tech. Sgt. John Travis, 437th Fuels Management Flight Support NCOIC, will receive the medal for his actions March 5 at a forward location in Afghanistan.

An Air Force MC-130E landed on an austere, abandoned runway in Afghanistan and sank into mud near the end of the strip, said Travis. A team immediately formed to figure out how to get the aircraft out in a hurry.

One of the group's plans was to remove some fuel from the C-130 to make it lighter. Since Travis was deployed as forward area refueling point specialist, he said it was his job to get fuel from the aircraft onto two Royal Air Force British MH-47 helicopters.

A response team, consisting of aircrew members, security forces personnel and maintenance specialists, was transported via British helicopters to the stuck MC-130E. The helicopters could make one stop to drop the team off, and one stop approximately four hours later to pick the team up, said Travis.

"We had to either get the plane out and fly out on it or leave when the choppers came back," said Travis. "We had to be out of there before it got totally dark, or stay overnight. Staying overnight was not an option."

Immediately after arriving at the site, the team came to the conclusion digging the aircraft out would be their best chance for success, said Travis. Everyone jumped in and started working.

"It was a team effort," said Travis. "The (officers) were in there digging with the enlisted. Everybody did their part."

According to the narrative of the award package, the area where the team was digging was not very secure.

"It was also reported that fighting was still extremely heavy near Gardez, where Operation ANACONDA was still being executed, and that intelligence had lost track of Al-Qaida forces reported moving toward the airfield the previous night," stated the citation. "It was believed that they would still be near the airfield and that enemy attack of the airfield and aircraft posed a very significant threat."

Another obstacle in the way of moving the C-130 was a large concrete slab blocking the route the aircraft would need to move. According to the package, Travis took chains from the aircraft and attached them to the block. He worked quickly with friendly Afghan personnel and overcame the language barrier to have one of their trucks drag the block about 50 feet away from the proposed path of the aircraft.

The threat of enemy forces in the area turned out to be real, as Travis said a mortar hit the other end of the runway about 2.5 hours into the digging. Two more mortars landed near the area while the team worked frantically to free the aircraft.

"We knew we only had about an hour left, and the mortars were getting closer, so we decided to try to pull it out and see if the digging worked."

The plan worked, and the aircrew was able to pull the plane from the mud. The team boarded and left the area as quickly as they went in.

"Everything went as smooth as it could have," said Travis. "The (Air National Guard) unit that flew the plane did a great, skillful job. They worked the same as the active folks, and everyone pulled together to do what we came to do."

Travis' downplaying of the medal and the incident that led to it is typical of his attitude and work ethic, said Capt. Jason Nulton, 437th Supply Squadron Combat Operations Support Flight commander. Travis always does more than he's expected to do without wanting any of the credit.

"He's a reliable NCO who always gets the job done," said Nulton. "He's one of those guys who gets in there, gets dirty and then gives the credit to everyone else. He's just an all-around great NCO."

Travis said he was honored to receive the award, but he was quick to point out other members of the team also received awards.

"That turned out to be a highly-decorated trip," said Travis. "The whole group deserves credit. No one person could have done it without the other."

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(This story, written by Staff Sgt. Jason Smith, 437 AW Public Affairs, is public domain. You may use any part of it for your publication. For more information or interviews, contact Capt. Linda Pepin at 963-5537 or Staff Sgt. Pam Smith at 963-3383)