Enlisted Hero Walk Lackland AFB

Airman Second Class John L. Levitow

Congressional Medal of Honor

Vietnam War

On Feb. 24, 1969, Levitow stepped in for a fellow Airman as the loadmaster on an AC-47 gunship during a night mission over the besieged Army Base of Long Binh. While handling Mark 24 magnesium flares, his aircraft was severely damaged by a mortar round, injuring everyone in the cargo bay. The aircraft, nicknamed 'Spooky 71,' was struck by a North Vietnamese Army 82-millimeter mortar shell in its right wing, causing an explosion that wounded Levitow with more than 40 shrapnel wounds. With life-threatening inflictions, Levitow displayed courage when he spotted his crewmember down near the cargo door while trying to toss out a Mark 24 Flare. In the midst of dragging his wingman back towards the cabin, Levitow noticed the smoking flare rolling towards the fuselage within dangerous proximity of 19,000 rounds of live ammunition. In the low end of a 30 degree bank, Levitow selflessly crawled towards the flare, hurled his body upon it, and made his way towards the cargo door. Despite his previous injuries and a sweltering flare cradled in his arms, Levitow heaved it out of the cargo door moments before it fully ignited. He was returned to the United States to receive the Medal of Honor from President Nixon on Armed Forces Day, May 14, 1970. As an airman first class at the time of the events, Levitow is the lowest ranking member to ever receive the award.