



Pictured L-R: NCOA Chairman of the Board CMSgt Gerald Morey, Paul Seidel of United Healthcare, Vanguard Recipient MSG Andrew Chapoton, and CSM Brian Hester representing the 16th Sergeant Major of the Army Michael Grinston.

The 2023 NCOA Army Vanguard Award, sponsored by United Health Care, was presented to Master Sergeant Andrew D. Chapoton in honor and memory of Medal of Honor recipient Sergeant Alvin C. York.

Master Sergeant Andrew Chapoton voluntarily risked his own life in the heroic pursuit of saving others at a deadly car wreck near Seward, Alaska. On Monday, 30 May 2022 at approximately 1715 hrs, MSG Chapoton, his young family and a visiting friend had just finished a whale-watching trip out of Seward, Alaska. They had started the drive home to Eagle River when a terrible car accident occurred on the highway immediately in front of them.

A man driving south-bound in a 2007 Jeep veered directly into the north-bound lane and collided head-on into a 2007 Dodge Dakota carrying three passengers. The collision severely damaged both vehicles, with the incredibly violent impact sending automotive debris flying in every direction. The three occupants of the crushed Dodge Dakota were severely hurt and unable to exit the vehicle on their own. The occupant of the Jeep was dazed and confused and also unable to exit his vehicle. Smoke and flames were billowing from both vehicles, and gasoline was dripping from the engines. Vehicle explosion was imminent.

Sergeant First Class Chapoton, without hesitation swerved around the accident and parked his vehicle on the shoulder of the north-bound lane. He instructed the family friend to call emergency services. With a sense of urgency, MSG Chapoton exited his vehicle and ran to the scene of the accident. MSG Chapoton flagged down other drivers that were passing by the scene to help assist in the rescue of the vehicle occupants.

His extraordinary act of valor exemplified the highest standards of selfless service and character as he repeatedly put himself in mortal danger to save others trapped in a horrific multi-car wreck. MSG Chapoton dove into the burning vehicles again and again to save three trapped occupants, without regard for his own life. To compound the grave danger to MSG Chapoton's own safety, vehicle traffic continued to pass by extremely close to the accident for a short period of time until the roads were shut down.

He immediately saw that the only way to extricate the trapped occupants in the Dodge Dakota was to put himself in grave danger. The three occupants weren't moving, and the vehicle was about to burst into flame. MSG Chapoton struggled to open the driver's door, which took considerable effort due to the severity of the accident. Once he gained access, he had to move internal vehicle debris to locate and assist the seriously injured female driver with a deep gash on her forehead and a shattered leg. MSG Chapoton was unable to release the seat belt, so he called for a knife from one of the good Samaritans he had flagged down. Working together, they extricated the driver from the vehicle as flames spread.

After helping the driver to safety, MSG Chapoton again plunged into the burning car to free an occupant in the rear passenger side seat who was struggling and unable to get out. MSG Chapoton could not open the damaged door wide enough, so he rammed and wedged himself into the small open space and used considerable force to pry the door open. This allowed him and another helper to extract a badly injured male occupant who was bleeding profusely and seriously injured.

After moving him to safety, MSG Chapoton returned to the burning car a third time to try and save the final occupant. The door was crushed closed and could not be opened. He could not find a pulse in the crash victim, and the person did not respond to verbal commands or shaking. The driver of the other vehicle was still alive, trapped in the burning Jeep, so MSG Chapoton quickly shifted his attention to that vehicle. Without any hesitation, MSG Chapoton approached the flames, grabbed the door, and managed to wrench it open, allowing the occupant to escape the fire.

MSG Chapoton began to perform Combat Lifesaver triage on the female driver of the Dodge Dakota as both vehicles turned into a raging inferno. With the fire's intensity growing exponentially, MSG Chapoton noticed flaming liquid flowing down the road in their direction and realized he needed to get the female occupant to safety further away from the burning vehicles. MSG Chapoton and other good Samaritans secured the female's head and neck and stabilized the severely broken leg to prevent the shattered bone from puncturing the main leg artery. Right after they moved the injured woman, both vehicles experienced multiple explosions, sending debris and shrapnel flying in their direction. MSG Chapoton shielded the female occupant using his own body to ensure she did not get hurt any further. By this time the volunteer fire department had arrived on the scene and began to extinguish the fire. MSG Chapoton continued to take the lead and perform Combat Lifesaving triage on the injured with the assistance of the emergency medical technician from the fire department. When the medical evacuation helicopter arrived, MSG Chapoton assisted the fire department in loading the injured on board.

When the area was secured and all injured occupants were safely aboard the life flight helicopter, MSG Chapoton remained on scene to give the Alaska State Troopers a detailed statement of the events surrounding the accident. It is critical to highlight the dangerous nature of the accident scene itself. The crash occurred near a bend of a single lane highway that has a high level of traffic since it is the only road leading to the town of Seward. Cars still proceeded by the accident while MSG Chapoton first started helping the occupants trapped in the vehicle. He risked being hit by a passing car, and the danger expanded rapidly with the spreading fire.

Although he had gotten other motorists to stop, no one was willing to approach the burning wrecks until he led the way. He kept plunging into the flaming vehicles, again and again, showing exceptional bravery. He risked his life voluntarily four times, managing to save the three people who had survived the initial carnage of the accident.

MSG Chapoton's ability to perform these heroic acts under extreme pressure while simultaneously taking control of the scene is a testament to his OWN values. Fully understanding the extreme personal risk to his life, MSG Chapoton selflessly endangered himself again and again. MSG Chapoton's actions that day elevated him above his peers, serve as an example for all to emulate, and reflect great credit to him as an individual and to our United States Army.