

**THE QUIET MAN**  
**WHEN THE CADETS AT THE US AIR FORCE ACADEMY**  
**REALIZED THAT THEIR JANITOR WAS A MEDAL OF HONOR WINNER**



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**INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM CRAWFORD**

**WELL WORTH WATCHING –7:42 IN LENGTH – SHOWS HIS ACTIONS**

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**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uX729a2YV0o>**

Some men's greatness is not immediately apparent to observers, and that was undoubtedly true of William Crawford. The quiet, seemingly unremarkable man worked as a janitor at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in the 1970s.



*United States Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado*

The young cadets who rushed past him each day, full of eagerness and bravado, had no idea that a Medal of Honor winner was among them. Crawford preferred to keep his experiences in World War II to himself.



*A humble man who kept to himself, Crawford never would have suspected his secret would be discovered in his old age.*

But in fact, he had seen more action in the European theater of operations than most of those young people ever would. It was his actions in 1943 that brought Crawford such spectacular acclaim, even as he wasted away in a German prisoner of war (POW) camp.

One day in September 1943 in Italy, Private Crawford was with his Platoon, the 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of the U.S. Army, when orders came for them to seize a hill near Altavilla Silentina. It was not an easy task, as his Company was hemmed in and fired upon whenever they tried to move.

On impulse, Crawford decided to act. He inched his way forward, belly to the ground, and once close enough; he tossed a grenade squarely at three German soldiers trying desperately to keep the hill. His comrades then followed, inching their way up to meet Crawford.

Again, Crawford crawled forward and took out another enemy machine gun nest with a direct grenade hit. After his comrades caught up, he repeated the process yet again with another group of Germans huddled around a machine gun.

The remaining Germans ran off, and the Americans captured the hill. Crawford had eliminated three enemy positions almost by himself.

But not all went smoothly afterward. In the heat and confusion of battle, his fellow soldiers thought Crawford had been killed. They told their superiors of his brave deeds, and he was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

His father had accepted his Medal at the formal ceremony, believing his son had been killed.



It wasn't until all the POW camps were liberated that the Army discovered Crawford was still alive- and that he had no clue that he had received this prestigious honor.

Despite these events, or perhaps because of them, Crawford stayed in the Army until 1967, when he retired with the rank of Master Sergeant.



*The Chapel at The United States Air Force Academy in Colorado, Spring, Colorado*

Not surprisingly, retirement did not suit this soldier. So he took the job as a janitor at the Academy in Colorado Springs, where he worked anonymously until one day in 1976, a young cadet, James Moschgat, began reading a book about the Allied invasion of Europe.

He was dumbfounded when he read Crawford's name and quickly told his classmates who the man who cleaned their quarters was.

Astonished by what they had just learned, they quickly asked why he had never mentioned it before. Crawford's reply once again showed his humility. He said, "That was one day in my life, and it happened a long time ago."

Word quickly spread around campus that there was a Medal of Honor recipient in their midst.

The story could have easily ended here with a known recipient of the Medal of Honor working as a janitor at the Air Force Academy. Most people would have never heard the story.

However, the cadets weren't done.

They eventually found out that because of the circumstances, mainly that Crawford was a POW at the time, he had never had a formal ceremony to present him with his Medal.



In 1984, Mr. Crawford was a guest of the graduating class. Many past graduates, generals, and VIPs attended this graduation. President Ronald Reagan arrived and presented the Medal of Honor to Crawford and formally recognized Crawford's action. In his remarks, President Reagan cited a few leadership lessons they learned from their janitor.

President Reagan then began to warn the cadets about their future endeavors and spoke about life. Yes, life will not always hand you the best cards in the deck, but pursuing glory will not make you win, either. Instead, pursuing excellence will allow you to do your duty and pursue success at the same time - just like Crawford did. Despite his previous experiences, Crawford swept the floors and cleaned the windows because it was his duty. As he said this, the crowd eagerly awaited Crawford's response.

Reagan continued his praise of William Crawford. He began to speak once again of leadership and that 'leaders should be humble.' Those who succeed and celebrate in loud and obtrusive ways are never as successful as they may think. Instead, it is those people who quietly celebrate their achievements that are the real heroes. Because he was so busy with his janitorial work, Crawford never celebrated his accolades, which makes him even more admirable.

The cadets and Colonel Moschgat took a considerable amount away from President Reagan's speech - including the act of courtesy. He realized that you need to be courteous to every single person in your life, no matter their age, occupation, or demeanor, because you never know when a hero may be walking among you. Moschgat and the cadets ignored their hero for years, and Moschgat said this to Crawford, who once again felt on the spot and uncomfortable.

As Reagan and Moschgat ended their speeches at the medal award ceremony, the whole crowd was waiting for Crawford's response. However, Crawford didn't believe himself to be a hero, for he was only a private when he received his Medal of Honor. President Reagan did not accept this response because anyone can be a hero. He told Crawford to stop selling himself short because the country would be forever in his debt.

Later, these lessons were formalized by the former cadet, now COL (Ret.) James E. Moschgat. (The same man who, as a Cadet in 1976, identified Crawford)

Bill Crawford, our janitor, taught me many valuable, unforgettable leadership lessons. Here are ten I'd like to share with you.

1. Be Cautious of Labels. Labels you place on people may define your relationship with them and bind their potential. Sadly, and for a long time, we labeled Bill as just a janitor, but he was so much more. Therefore, be cautious of a leader who callously says, "Hey, he's just an Airman." Likewise, don't tolerate the O-1, who says, "I can't do that. I'm just a lieutenant."

2. Everyone Deserves Respect. Because we hung the "janitor" label on Mr. Crawford, we often wrongly treated him with less respect than others around us. He deserved much more, and not just because he was a Medal of Honor winner. Bill deserved respect because he was a janitor, walked among us, and was a part of our team.

3. Courtesy Makes a Difference. Be courteous to all around you, regardless of rank or position. Military customs, as well as common courtesies, help bond a team. When our daily words to Mr. Crawford turned from perfunctory "hellos" to heartfelt greetings, his demeanor and personality outwardly changed. It made a difference for all of us.

4. Take Time to Know Your People. Life in the military is hectic, but that's no excuse for not knowing the people you work for and with. For years, a hero walked among us at the Academy, but we never knew it. Who are the heroes that walk in your midst?

5. Anyone Can Be a Hero. Mr. Crawford certainly didn't fit anyone's standard definition of a hero. Moreover, he was a private on the day he won his Medal. Please don't sell your people short, for any one of them may be the hero who rises to the occasion when duty calls. On the other hand, it's easy to turn to your proven performers when the chips are down, but don't ignore the rest of the team. Today's rookie could and should be tomorrow's superstar

6. Leaders Should Be Humble. Most modern-day heroes and some leaders are anything but humble, especially if you calibrate your hero meter on today's athletic fields. End-zone celebrations and self-aggrandizement are what we've come to expect from sports greats. Not Mr. Crawford- he was too busy working to celebrate his past heroics. Leaders would be well-served to do the same

7. Life Won't Always Hand You What You Think You Deserve. We in the military work hard, and we deserve recognition, right? However, sometimes you have to persevere, even when accolades don't come your way. Perhaps you weren't nominated for a junior officer or airman of the quarter as you thought you should; don't let that stop you.

8. Don't pursue glory; pursue excellence. Private Bill Crawford didn't seek glory; he did his duty and then swept floors for a living.

9. No job is beneath a Leader. If Bill Crawford, a Medal of Honor winner, could clean latrines and smile, is there a job beneath your dignity? Think about it. Pursue Excellence. No matter what task life hands you, do it well. Dr. Martin Luther King said, "If life makes you a street sweeper, be the best street sweeper you can be." Mr. Crawford modeled that philosophy and helped make our dormitory area a home.

10. Life is a Leadership Laboratory. All too often, we look to some school or PME class to teach us about leadership when, in fact, life is a leadership laboratory. Those you meet every day will teach you enduring lessons if you take the time to stop, look, and listen.

*I (the former cadet, now COL (Ret.) James E. Moschgat - the same man who, as a Cadet in 1976, identified Crawford) spent four years at the Air Force Academy, took dozens of classes, read hundreds of books, and met thousands of great people. I gleaned leadership skills from all of them, but one of the people I remember most is Mr. Bill Crawford and the lessons he unknowingly taught. Don't miss your opportunity to learn.*

As Moschgat wrote in his blog, times in the Air Force Academy were never the same again. Soon, every single cadet at the Academy had heard of the intense bravery of their janitor. Now, the cadets greeted the Medal of Honor winner every time they passed him in the hallway and always stopped to talk to him. But they didn't just change the way they thought of William Crawford. They also changed their actions.

As the cadets saw a different side to their janitor, they began to think through their actions. Rather than throwing their trash on the floor or running mud into the floor, they started to clean up their mess to save Mr. Crawford the hassle. Crawford himself noticed a drastic change in the mood in the Academy. Instead of being regarded as a lowly janitor, he was now part of the family.

The cadets weren't the only people to change. As more and more people noticed him and spent time with him to hear his stories, Crawford changed, too. He soon realized that people were appreciative of his actions and that he meant a lot to them and their history. He moved up and down the corridors with confidence and smiled every single day instead of hunching around and keeping himself to himself. He was a new man.

Bill Crawford was a janitor. However, he was also a teacher, friend, role model, and one great American hero. Thanks, Mr. Crawford, for some valuable leadership lessons.

On his deathbed, Crawford remained humble and modest, remarking that he was just glad that he could do his part for his country. For him, it was just another day on the job, and it just so happened that he found himself in the right place at the right time. When Moschgat heard of Crawford's death, he was deeply saddened and called him a man who put the whole world above himself.

William Crawford passed away in 2000, at 81 years old, at his home.

*He is the only enlisted person from the U.S. Army to be buried, with full honors, at the U.S. Air Force Academy Cemetery in Colorado.*

His honors came late, but honors aren't what William Crawford was about. He was a patriot, a man who served his country tirelessly, bravely, and for a long time in anonymity.



But the students in Colorado changed that once they recognized the hero in their midst. And when the time came, they gave him the final resting place of a hero, too.



*M/SGT William Crawford & His Wife's graves at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado*

THE CITATION ACCOMPANYING THE MEDAL OF HONOR

THE HIGHEST HONOR OUR COUNTRY CAN BESTOW ON A MEMBER OF THE ARMED FORCES



For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty in action with the enemy near Altavilla, Italy, 13 September 1943. When Company I attacked an enemy-held position on Hill 424, the 3rd Platoon, in which Pvt. Crawford was a squad scout, attacked as a base platoon for the Company.

After reaching the crest of the hill, the Platoon was pinned down by intense enemy machine guns and small-arms fire. He was locating 1 of these guns, which was dug in on a terrace on his immediate front, Pvt. Crawford, without orders and on his initiative, moved over the hill under enemy fire to a point within a few yards of the gun emplacement and single-handedly destroyed the machinegun and killed 3 of the crew with a hand grenade, thus enabling his Platoon to continue its advance.

When the Platoon, after reaching the crest, was once more delayed by enemy fire, Pvt. Crawford, again, in the face of intense fire, advanced directly to the front midway between 3 hostile machinegun nests located on a higher terrace and emplaced in a small ravine.

Moving first to the left, with a hand grenade, he destroyed one gun emplacement and killed the crew; he then worked his way, under continuous fire, to the other and, with one grenade and the use of his rifle, killed one enemy and forced the remainder to flee. Seizing the enemy machine gun, he fired on the withdrawing Germans and facilitated his Company's advance.



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FROM WEBSITES & OTHER SOURCES THAT APPEAR TO BE AUTHENTIC, I CAN NOT ENSURE THAT ALL THE  
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