



HEROISM, HUMILITY AND LEADERSHIP

"Honor, justice, and humanity, forbid us tamely to surrender that freedom which we received from our gallant ancestors, and which our innocent posterity have a right to receive from us. We cannot endure the infamy and guilt of resigning succeeding generations to that wretchedness which inevitably awaits them if we basely entail hereditary bondage on them." --Thomas Jefferson (1775)

This week, I have received numerous "Memorial Day Sale" promotions by post and email from vendors who should know better than dishonor a day of reverence with advertising.

I've responded to each vendor with the following message:



To ... VP of Marketing,
I know that it is now common to commercialize national holidays [celebrating faith](#) or [honoring military service](#), but I ask that you not use Memorial Day for marketing. It is completely inappropriate to promote this day of reverence for anything other than honoring fallen veterans. How fitting it would have been for your company, if you had sent an email promoting the

proper observance of Memorial Day, rather than using it as fodder for profiteering. Memorial Day is NOT on sale -- millions of Patriots have [already paid the full price](#).

Needless to say, I have never received a response.

We set aside one day each year in deference to [American Patriots](#) who pledged and delivered their lives to [Support and Defend](#) Liberty, as defined in our [Declaration of Independence](#), and the [Rule of Law](#) enshrined in our Constitution.

Since our nation's founding, more than one million American Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen have paid [the ultimate price](#) in defense of our nation, and it is their final sacrifice that we honor with solemn reverence.

As Memorial Day honors so many [American Patriots](#), it may suffer some dilution for those who have no direct connection to a fallen veteran, or to those who served with them.

Thus, I wanted to focus this essay on just one individual veteran -- William Crawford -- who survived his combat trials, but whose service and life exemplified the character of so many in his generation who did not return. His story is their story.

With many friends who have served our nation in the air from World War II to the present, and as the proud parent of an Air Force Academy cadet, I invite you to take a moment and read the story of Bill Crawford, a man who went from sweeping combat fields in search of the enemy, to mopping halls and picking up trash for his fellow Americans. He was known only as a squadron floor janitor at the Air Force Academy until his heroic acts were rediscovered by an AFA '77 cadet

and then properly acknowledged by [President Ronald Reagan](#) in 1984.



From the Wharton School of Business Leadership Digest come these timeless "[Lessons in Leadership from a Janitor](#)", as recounted by Col. James Moschgat, (Ret):

"William 'Bill' Crawford certainly was an unimpressive figure, one you could easily overlook during a hectic day at the

U.S. Air Force Academy. Mr. Crawford, as most of us referred to him back in the late 1970s, was our squadron janitor.

"While we cadets busied ourselves preparing for academic exams, athletic events, Saturday morning parades and room inspections, or never-ending leadership classes, Bill quietly moved about the squadron mopping and buffing floors, emptying trash cans, cleaning toilets, or just tidying up the mess 100 college-age kids can leave in a dormitory. Sadly, and for many years, few of us gave him much notice, rendering little more than a passing nod or throwing a curt, 'G'morning!' in his direction as we hurried off to our daily duties.

"Why? Perhaps it was because of the way he did his job -- he always kept the squadron area spotlessly clean, even the toilets and showers gleamed. Frankly, he did his job so well, none of us had to notice or get involved. After all, cleaning toilets was his job, not ours. Maybe it was his physical appearance that made him disappear into the background. Bill didn't move very quickly and, in fact, you could say he even shuffled a bit, as if he suffered from some sort of injury. His gray hair and wrinkled face made him appear ancient to a group of young cadets. And his crooked smile, well, it looked a little funny. Face it; Bill was an old man working in a young person's

world. What did he have to offer us on a personal level?

"Finally, maybe it was Mr. Crawford's personality that rendered him almost invisible to the young people around him. Bill was shy, almost painfully so. He seldom spoke to a cadet unless they addressed him first, and that didn't happen very often. Our janitor always buried himself in his work, moving about with stooped shoulders, a quiet gait, and an averted gaze. If he noticed the hustle and bustle of cadet life around him, it was hard to tell. So, for whatever reason, Bill blended into the woodwork and became just another fixture around the squadron. The Academy, one of our nation's premier leadership laboratories, kept us busy from dawn till dusk. And Mr. Crawford ... well, he was just a janitor.

"That changed one fall Saturday afternoon in 1976. I was reading a book about World War II and the tough Allied ground campaign in Italy, when I stumbled across an incredible story. On September 13, 1943, a Private William Crawford from Colorado, assigned to the 36th Infantry Division, had been involved in some bloody fighting on Hill 424 near Altavilla, Italy. The words on the page leapt out at me: 'in the face of intense and overwhelming hostile fire ... with no regard for personal safety ... on his own initiative, Private Crawford single-handedly attacked fortified enemy positions.' It continued, 'for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty, the President of the United States...'

"Holy cow,' I said to my roommate, 'you're not going to believe this, but I think our janitor is a Medal of Honor winner.' We all knew Mr. Crawford was a WWII Army vet, but that didn't keep my friend from looking at me as if I was some sort of alien being. Nonetheless, we couldn't wait to ask Bill about the story on Monday.

"We met Mr. Crawford bright and early Monday and showed him the page in question from the book, anticipation and doubt in our faces. He stared at it for a few silent moments and then quietly uttered

something like, 'Yep, that's me.' Mouths agape, my roommate and I looked at one another, then at the book, and quickly back at our janitor. Almost at once we both stuttered, 'Why didn't you ever tell us about it?' He slowly replied after some thought, 'That was one day in my life and it happened a long time ago.'

"I guess we were all at a loss for words after that. We had to hurry off to class and Bill, well; he had chores to attend to. However, after that brief exchange, things were never again the same around our squadron. Word spread like wildfire among the cadets that we had a hero in our midst -- Mr. Crawford, our janitor, had won the Medal! Cadets who had once passed by Bill with hardly a glance, now greeted him with a smile and a respectful, 'Good morning, Mr. Crawford.'

"Those who had before left a mess for the 'janitor' to clean up started taking it upon themselves to put things in order. Most cadets routinely stopped to talk to Bill throughout the day and we began inviting him to our formal squadron functions. He'd show up dressed in a conservative dark suit and quietly talk to those who approached him, the only sign of his heroics being a simple blue, star-spangled lapel pin.

"Almost overnight, Bill went from being a simple fixture in our squadron to one of our teammates. Mr. Crawford changed too, but you had to look closely to notice the difference. After that fall day in 1976, he seemed to move with more purpose, his shoulders didn't seem to be as stooped, he met our greetings with a direct gaze and a stronger 'good morning' in return, and he flashed his crooked smile more often. The squadron gleamed as always, but everyone now seemed to notice it more. Bill even got to know most of us by our first names, something that didn't happen often at the Academy. While no one ever formally acknowledged the change, I think we became Bill's cadets and his squadron.

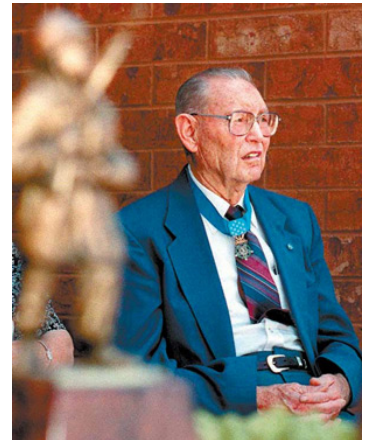
"As often happens in life, events sweep us away from those in our past. The last time I saw Bill was on graduation day in June 1977. As I walked out of the squadron for the last time, he shook my hand and simply said, 'Good luck, young man.' With that, I

embarked on a career that has been truly lucky and blessed. Mr. Crawford continued to work at the Academy and eventually retired in his native Colorado [town of Pueblo, one of four other Medal of Honor recipients from that small town].

"A wise person once said, 'It's not life that's important, but those you meet along the way that make the difference.' Bill was one who made a difference for me. While I haven't seen Mr. Crawford in over twenty years, he'd probably be surprised to know I think of him often. Bill Crawford, our janitor, taught me many valuable, unforgettable leadership lessons."

And the rest of the story...

Mr. Crawford never had an official recognition event for his Medal of Honor award, because at the time the award was delivered to his family, he was listed as killed in action. But that was rectified in 1984, when



[President Ronald Reagan](#) William J. Crawford addressed the AFA graduating class. In a special ceremony before the cadets, their families and dignitaries, President Reagan formally presented the Medal of Honor to Master Sergeant Crawford.

In his remarks, President Reagan cited some of the leadership lessons that all of us should take away from this humble janitor. Col. Moschgat adapted those lessons in his article:

"Be Cautious of Labels. Labels you place on people may define your relationship to them and bound 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.'

"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.

"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.

"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 and we never knew it. Who are the heroes that walk in your midst?

"Anyone Can Be a Hero. Mr. Crawford certainly didn't fit anyone's standard definition of a hero. Moreover, he was just a private on the day he won his Medal. 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.

"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.

"Life Won't Always Hand You What You Think You Deserve. We in the military work hard and, dang it, we deserve recognition, right? However, sometimes you just have to persevere, even when accolades don't come your way. Perhaps you weren't nominated for

junior officer or airman of the quarter as you thought you should -- don't let that stop you.

"Don't Pursue Glory; Pursue Excellence. Private Bill Crawford didn't pursue glory; he did his duty and then swept floors for a living. 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. No matter what task life hands you, do it well.

"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 everyday will teach you enduring lessons if you just take time to stop, look and listen. I 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."

Col. Moschgat concluded, "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."

Mr. Crawford joined the Army in 1942 and retired in 1967 with the rank of Master Sergeant. He died in March of 2000 at age 81, but his legacy is, as with all his Patriot brethren, eternal. He is buried at the United States Air Force Academy Cemetery -- the only U.S. Army enlisted man buried there.



[Crawford, William J.](#), Medal of Honor Citation:

"For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at 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 3d Platoon, in which Pvt. Crawford was a squad scout, attacked as base platoon for the company. After reaching the crest of the hill, the platoon was pinned down by intense enemy machinegun and small-arms fire. Locating 1 of these guns, which was dug in on a terrace on his immediate front, Pvt. Crawford, without orders and on his own 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 2 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 1 gun emplacement and killed the crew; he then worked his way, under continuous fire, to the other and with 1 grenade and the use of his rifle, killed 1 enemy and forced the remainder to flee. Seizing the enemy machinegun, he fired on the withdrawing Germans and facilitated his company's advance."

There were 16 million Patriots who served in World War II but fewer than 500 of them were awarded the Medal of Honor, our nation's highest military decoration for those who distinguish themselves "conspicuously by gallantry at the risk of [their] life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in action against an enemy of the United States." Most of those awards were made posthumously.

But every MoH recipient I have met or read about over the years, as was the case with Bill Crawford, has been strikingly humble and quick to credit all those with whom they served.

Our Founders clearly understood that the burden of sustaining [Essential Liberty](#) would be calculated in human sacrifice. As John Adams noted, "I am well aware of the toil and blood and treasure that it will cost to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States."

So, on this last Monday in May, please join millions of American Patriots as we honor the service and the ultimate sacrifice of those uniformed Patriots by participating in respectful commemorations across the nation.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to all those generations who have passed the Torch of Liberty to succeeding generations. And we owe a debt to the fallen that can never be repaid.

To prepare hearts and minds for Memorial Day, take a moment and read about the [Tomb of the Unknown Soldier](#). You might also join with other Patriots across the nation who will be placing flags at headstones in your local military cemetery (generally the Saturday prior to Memorial Day).



I invite you to view these tributes to our [Armed Forces](#) and to [God and Country](#) at the [Patriot Post YouTube Channel](#).

In honor of American Patriots who have died in defense of our great nation, lower your flag to half-staff from sunrise to 1200 on Monday. (Read about [proper flag etiquette and protocol](#).) Join us by observing a time of silence at 1500 (your local time), for remembrance and prayer. Offer a personal word of gratitude and comfort to any surviving family members you know who are grieving for a beloved warrior fallen in battle.

On this and every day, please pray for our Patriot Armed Forces now standing in harm's way around the world in defense of our liberty, and for the families awaiting their safe return.

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." --John 15:12-14