

# Talon

THE CADET MAGAZINE OF THE U.S.A.F. ACADEMY DECEMBER 1971





## TALON SALUTES

# BILL CRAWFORD

BY  
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History doesn't always turn its gallant men into generals or presidents. Many men that have shown great valor now live peaceful, secluded lives that seem incongruous to the gallantry that they have previously shown. One such man is William J. Crawford, MSgt., USAF Retired and Medal of Honor winner who now works on the third floor of Vandenberg Hall.

Bill Crawford gave a colorful 27-year career to the Army before retiring to live in Colorado. Since his 1968 retirement, he has been working a small farm near the Academy and serving as custodian to keep himself busy. Though very happy in his present position, Bill says he would like to get back into administrative work, his job in the Air Force when he retired.

Bill's Army career started when he was drafted in 1942. After basic training, he was sent to North Africa where he saw limited action on small patrols. Bill had his first taste of real combat at Altavilla, Italy.

The 36th Infantry Division, of which he was a member, participated in an amphibious landing near Altavilla. Bill was in the first wave on the beach. From the beach, his division fought inward against unexpectedly strong resistance. Italy had just surrendered only days before and enemy resistance was expected to be small, but the German forces were prepared and gave a good stand.

Bill's unit trudgingly moved inland for five days until it came to Altavilla, a target objective for the group, on Sept. 13, 1943. Bill recalled the events of the day, "As scout for my patrol, I was to walk ahead of the fellows to look for enemy positions and draw their fire."





Draw fire is exactly what he did! Bill spotted a trench a few yards in front of him and decided to follow the trench around a hill, when a German machine gun opened fire on him. Bill says, "It felt as if the bullets were actually hitting me and I was waiting to die. Right then I decided to dive into this trench." Bill followed the trench to just a few feet from the machine gun nest, while under intense fire. He then threw a hand grenade into the nest killing the crew of three. This allowed his unit to proceed over the crest of the hill. However, his unit was once more confronted with fire from machine guns. Bill once again made his way to one of the machine gun nests while under direct fire. Using a hand grenade, he knocked out one of the nests and proceeded directly to the other machine gun, all the while under fire.

Again, Sgt. Crawford threw a hand

grenade into the machine gun nest and used his rifle to force the crew to retreat from its advantageous position. Bill then manned the machine gun and fired upon the fleeing enemy. It was now late afternoon of the thirteenth. Bill went to the aid of wounded comrades, when a division of Germans came up from their rear and captured him and the wounded he was helping. Bill, along with 300 other American and British prisoners, were taken on a forced march to Munich, where he was put into a temporary camp. From Munich, he was transferred to Stalag 2B and later to work farms in Germany.

Bill was a prisoner of war for 14 months, until he was liberated in the spring of 1945. He was presumed Killed in Action for seven months, until his parents finally received a censored letter which the Germans allowed him to send home. The

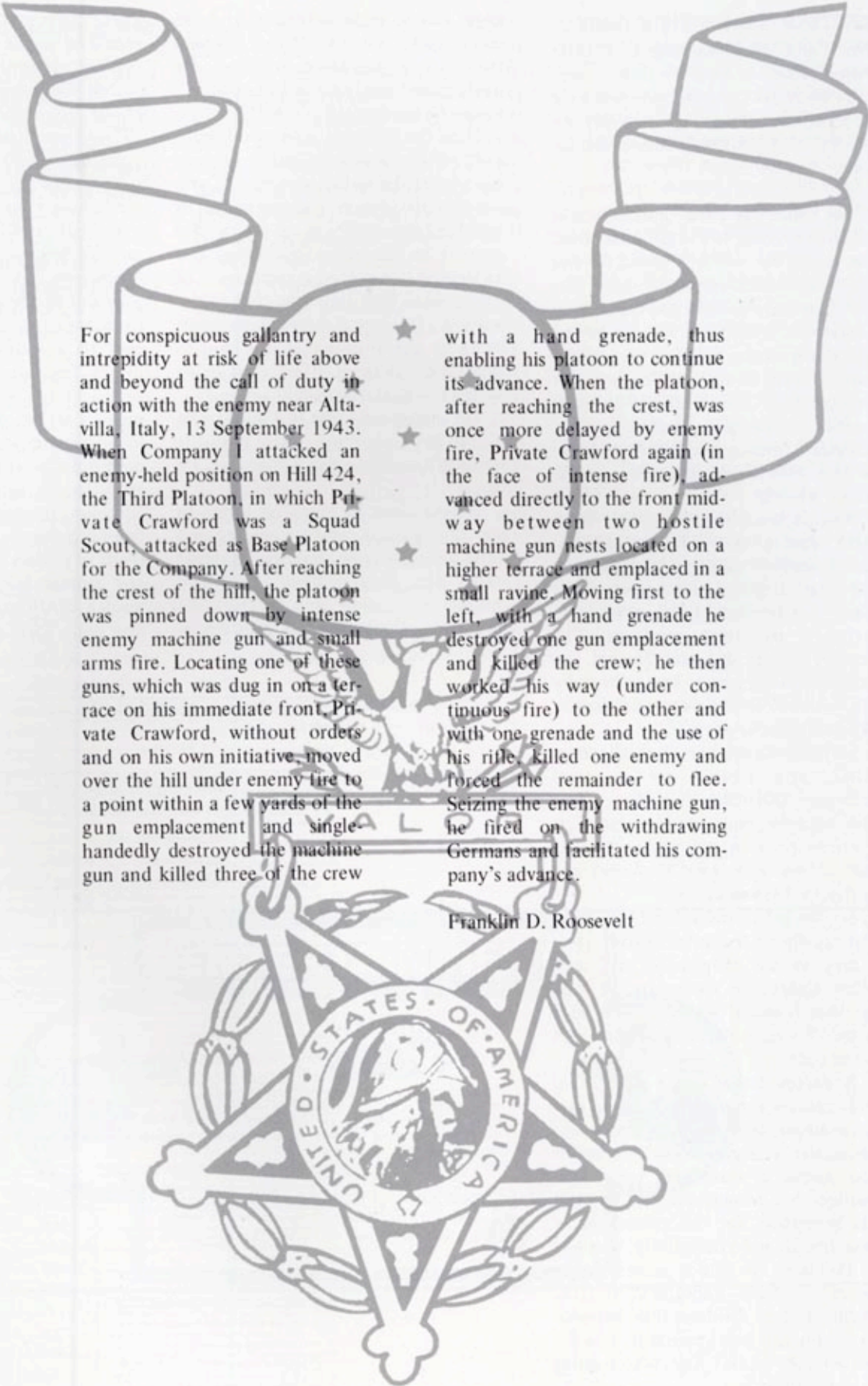
following citation was awarded posthumously to his father in the period which Sgt. Crawford was assumed to be killed in action.

In the confines of one institution which boasts displays of Medal of Honor winners, Doolittle's Raiders and famous aces, it is with pride, admiration and deep appreciation that we look to a man who selflessly put his life on the line for his country and its ideals, which we have sworn to uphold; a man, having already given an illustrious career to his country, seeks to serve again for his country and the Air Force; a man who gives his time to be with Cadets and expose us to the type of gallantry our heritage has given us. The Wing feels it truly "is a privilege" to have Bill working with us.

On behalf of the Cadet Wing, the *Talon* salutes you, Bill Crawford.







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 Third Platoon, in which Private 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 machine gun and small arms fire. Locating one of these guns, which was dug in on a terrace on his immediate front, Private 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 machine gun and killed three 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, Private Crawford again (in the face of intense fire), advanced directly to the front midway between two hostile machine gun 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.

Franklin D. Roosevelt