



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/JOHN JAQUES

Filmmaker Brad Padula has made a movie for PBS about the Medal of Honor.

Puebloan's movie honors men of medal

**By PETER ROPER
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The Medal of Honor is only a small metal star attached to a broad blue ribbon, but what it represents - "conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life, above and beyond the call of duty" - has a life-changing power that transforms the men who receive it and those who come to know them.

By his own admission, Pueblo video producer Brad Padula knew little about the Medal of Honor four years ago, when his company, Capture It Productions, was hired to make a documentary of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society convention in Pueblo in the summer of 2000.

Padula, 35, had started his business right after graduating from East High School and it had largely consisted of local high school sports videos and then commercials. Sure, he knew that several Pueblo men had been awarded the Medal of Honor over the years, but for what and why? He didn't know the details.

"What I've learned from them and about them has changed my life for the better," Padula said earnestly in an interview. "I've been so fortunate to be around these men. It's not even a lesson about war or the military to me. It's about having the courage to do your best - to do the right thing - when the obstacles are the toughest, when it might even cost you your life."

That lesson and others are clearly captured in Padula's new two-hour video "Beyond the Medal of

Honor" which will be broadcast nationally on PBS stations in November. There will be a special premier showing here in Pueblo on Oct. 1 as part of a special gathering of the Family and Friends of the Medal of Honor.

The video tells the story of William Crawford, Raymond "Jerry" Murphy, Carl Sitter and Drew Dix - the four Pueblo men who received the medal for their bravery in World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam. While those men are well-known locally, their stories had never been captured as a single film and that idea didn't emerge until Padula began work preparing to film the Medal of Honor convention back in 2000.

"Part of our work at the time was to film the sculpting of the four statues (Crawford, Murphy, Sitter and Dix) that stand outside the Pueblo Convention Center," Padula said. "And it was in meeting those men and seeing the sculptures that I first began to realize how great their stories really were and what humble men they are."

Bill Crawford was an Army private on Sept. 13, 1943, when his unit came under heavy fire from German machine guns near Altavilla, Italy. A scout, Crawford moved forward and single-handedly attacked the first machine gun emplacement, killing the enemy with a grenade. Then he moved upslope and eliminated two other machine gun positions, using grenades and his M1 rifle. He was captured before the action was over, however, and was a POW when he learned he'd been given the Medal of Honor. In his later years, Crawford worked as a janitor at the Air Force Academy, where President Reagan presented him with the medal in 1984.

Carl Sitter had already become a decorated Marine officer in World War II before he was sent to the Korean War in 1950. On the night of Nov. 29, in the snowy hills near Hagaru-ri, Korea, Capt. Sitter led his company in clearing Chinese soldiers off a nearby hill. Ordered to hold the position against fierce counter-attacks all night, Sitter moved from foxhole to foxhole during the fighting, providing ammunition, medical care and encouragement to his men, despite being wounded. When Sitter pulled his company off the hill several days later, only 60 men out of Sitter's company of 221 Marines were not wounded or killed.

Jerry Murphy was a Marine platoon leader in February 1953, as the Korean War slogged through a brutal stalemate. On Feb. 3, Murphy was leading the final "evacuation platoon" during an attack on a fortified Chinese hill when all of the other officers were either killed or wounded. Taking charge, Murphy directed the attack until ordered to withdraw. Although wounded himself, he made repeated trips up the hill under fire to recover dead or wounded Marines. Several times during the battle, he provided cover fire for his men to withdraw, killing several attacking enemy soldiers at close quarters. Murphy refused medical care until all his men were off the hill. Drew Dix was an Army Green Beret team leader in Vietnam on Jan. 31, 1968, when Viet Cong units attacked and swept through the provincial capital of Chau Phu. Sgt. Dix learned that an American nurse and other civilians were trapped in the city, so he lead a counterattack with members of his own Special Forces team, plus several Navy SEALs. Fighting from house to house, Dix rescued the officials, killed between 14 and 30

enemy soldiers and captured a VC general. The following day, Dix led a counterattack that recaptured the city.

Padula is quick to credit another medal recipient, Pete Lemon, of Colorado Springs, with first raising the idea of making a film about the Pueblo men. "It sounded like a great idea, but I didn't have any real concept of what it might involve," Padula explained.

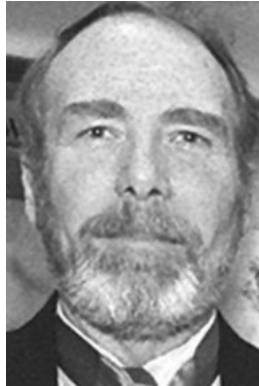
Still the idea was there. And then time forced the matter. On March 15, 2000 - months before the summer convention - Bill Crawford died at 81.



Carl Sitter



Pete Lemon



Drew Dix



Jerry Murphy



**William
Crawford**

"Pete Lemon called me and said we needed to video Bill's funeral if we ever hoped to do a film, so when the funeral took place at the Air Force Academy, we were there with two cameras rolling," Padula said.

And then Carl Sitter died a few weeks later. Padula said it seemed as if the fates were plotting to deny him the chance to make a film, but in fact, Sitter's funeral in Arlington National Cemetery became the catalyst for the project.

"To be there at Arlington, watching the Marines bury Carl was the most incredible thing I had ever seen," Padula said. The unflinching spit-and-polish of the Marine honor guard slowly walking in the drizzling rain, the caisson carrying Sitter's flag-draped casket past the rows and rows of marble headstones, finally coming to a halt at the new grave next to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. This was just one moment in a riveting drama of bravery, Padula knew.

While in the Washington, D.C., area, Padula and cameraman John Schymos interviewed Marine Lt. Gen. Stephen Olmstead, who'd been a private in Sitter's company in Korea. "When a three-star general tells you that serving under Carl Sitter was one of the proudest times of his military life, you know you are onto a great story," Padula said.

Yet, Padula still didn't have a firm concept of a film, but he knew enough to interview on camera anyone

he could find who was part of the Pueblo men's stories. So he talked to Sitter family members, and interviewed Dix at the Vietnam Memorial. And he interviewed the Crawford family and friends. The same with Jerry Murphy and several of his men.

"It came together for me that summer at the Medal of Honor convention when a number of people who were part of Drew Dix's story came to Pueblo to take part in the unveiling of the statues," Padula said. "I had all the pieces right there and then Drew sat down for an extended interview of four hours. It was an incredible tale to hear and I knew then that I was going to tell each man's story."

But tell it to whom? And how? Padula had experience making sports videos and commercials, but a documentary film?

"It was going to be a big step but Pete Lemon was always there, encouraging the project, and my father, Rudy Padula, and my business partner, Dan DeRose - so in the end, I always had the support to keep moving forward," he said. Along with those three men, Padula credited Frank Provenza and Doug Sterner with providing vital help for the project.

Like other filmmakers, Padula wrote out a description of the film and put together a "teaser" of what it would include and began contacting The History Channel and other networks that use documentaries. That process went on for more than a year while Padula continued to do interviews and collect archival film footage of Korea.

Months passed with no buyers. Meanwhile, Padula kept working on a four-hour version of the project, with each man's story taking an hour. "Every now and then, I'd hear from someone like Ruth Sitter (Sitter's widow) or someone else who cared about the project," Padula said. "And over time, I decided I was going to make the film, whether it ever sold or not, because I wasn't letting these wonderful people down."

And he didn't.

The big breaks for the film came when Lemon succeeded in getting the Perot Foundation to underwrite the cost of the film and reproducing it, and Rocky Mountain PBS said they liked the concept of a four-hour series, with an hour for each of the men. And executives at the Denver PBS went to work lobbying for a national distribution to all PBS stations.

"But PBS said they wanted a two-hour version," Padula said, making it clear that he was delighted at having a national audience for his film, but afraid of what might be lost in cutting the length of each's man's story.

"We did it it second-by-second, shot-by-shot, shortening the fadeouts and the transitions, and we finally got it down to two hours," Padula said. "And PBS said they wanted it."

Not only did PBS want the two-hour version, but the Perot Foundation - the philanthropic arm of billionaire Ross Perot - said it would pay to have the four-hour version put in every high school in the nation.

"It's been an incredible process for me, to see this idea take shape and become a passion without ever knowing whether we would succeed in the end," Padula said with a definite sense of wonder. "And now our film is going to broadcast nationally and be in every high school in the nation. It's proof of how powerful these men's stories are."