

RECORD EAGLE POST

TRAVERSE CITY — Nicholas Crow knows the importance of reminders better than most.

A machine gun burst claimed the life of Crow's father Col. Demas T. Crow during a 1942 mission in French North Africa. Nicholas was only 5 years old then and, understandably, only holds "slight" memories of his father — a lifelong soldier who hailed from Long Lake Township.

But he still carried the knowledge over his life that Demas Crow lived up to the nation's highest standard and posthumously received the Medal of Honor. It's a recognition that all but faded into memory in Grand Traverse County, until a grass-roots effort to revive Crow's legacy led to a renamed veterans clinic and a soon-to-be-unveiled plaque in his honor.

"I think it's not only appropriate but also heartwarming," Nicholas Crow said. "Memories tend to fade over a long period of time. I think it's important from time to time to have reminders."

A ceremony Saturday at 1:30 p.m. will be held in Cherry Capital Airport. The event will recognize the newly-named Demas T. Crow VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic and unveil and dedicate a bronze plaque honoring his life and service.

It represents the culmination of a community effort.

"This project has taken two years and literally hundreds of people to make it happen," said Grand Traverse County Commissioner Dan Lathrop.

Lathrop, a podiatrist, learned about Craw's story through veterans who visited his office. He said they were "chagrined" Craw went unremembered in his home community, especially since he was a World War II Medal of Honor recipient.

Craw on Nov. 8, 1942, traveled in Morocco with Major Pierpont M. Hamilton — a descendant of Founding Father Alexander Hamilton — with a plan to find the commander leading local French forces and negotiate the defenders' surrender as Allied forces invaded.

But their approach to French headquarters was punctuated by machine-gun fire, which struck and killed Craw. Hamilton, who was captured, ultimately negotiated a French surrender. They both received the Medal of Honor for their actions.

The forgotten story attracted the attention of Grand Traverse Area Veterans Coalition members, Lathrop and other volunteers. They trekked through winter streets to gather 3,000 signatures and contacted congressional representatives. The effort paid off when former President Barack Obama signed a bill to rename Traverse City's Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic in Craw's honor.

"It took 14 months to get it passed as an act of Congress, which we think is pretty quick," Lathrop said.

Craw's custodians didn't stop with the clinic. They successfully pushed to install a plaque in Cherry Capital Airport that honors Craw, Hamilton and Pvt. Orris W. Corey, who accompanied them on the Morocco mission.

Airport Director Kevin Klein said the bronze plaque will be displayed prominently near a security checkpoint. He felt it fitting that Craw, who served in the Army Air Corps, would be honored in the airport.

"Really, they're making sure they're honoring him as an aviator," Klein said.

Klein said attendees to the ceremony should park at the airport's lot and take their tickets inside to be validated.

Nicholas Craw will speak at the ceremony during what will be his first visit to his father's home area since he was a young child. He said he learned about the local effort to honor his father through people in the community who felt there had been a significant oversight. They asked if he supported their effort.

"I said 'absolutely,'" he said.