

NCO Stories

A selection of Valor



Cpl. Michael J. Crescenz

Citation to award the Medal of Honor

Cpl. Michael J. Crescenz distinguished himself by conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a rifleman with Company A, 4th Brigade, 31st Infantry, 196th Infantry Battalion in the Hiep Duc Valley area, Republic of Vietnam on Nov. 20, 1968.

That morning, his unit engaged a large well-entrenched force of the North Vietnamese army, whose initial burst of fire pinned down the lead squad and killed the two point men, halting the advance of Company A.

Immediately, Cpl. Crescenz left the relative safety of his own position, seized a nearby machine gun and, with complete disregard for his safety, charged 100 meters up a slope toward the enemy's bunkers. He effectively silenced the enemy, killing two occupants in each.

Undaunted by the withering machine gun fire around him, Cpl. Crescenz courageously moved toward a third bunker, which he also succeeded in silencing by killing two more of the enemy and momentarily clearing the route of advance for his comrades.

Suddenly, intense machine gun fire erupted from an unseen, camouflaged bunker. Realizing the danger his fellow Soldiers were in, Cpl. Crescenz disregarded the barrage of hostile fire directed at him and daringly advanced toward the position.

Fighting with his machine gun, Cpl. Crescenz was within five meters from the bunker when he was fatally wounded. As a result of his heroic actions, his company was able to maneuver freely with little danger and complete its mission, defeating the enemy.

Cpl. Crescenz's bravery and extraordinary heroism at the cost of his life are in the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.

A fallen Soldier's final rest

By Stephanie Sanchez

Two years ago, Cpl. Michael J. Crescenz joined his fellow Soldiers after nearly four decades. But this reunion was different.

Crescenz, who was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, joined his comrades at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. His body was exhumed from the Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Cheltenham Township, Pa., in 2008.

Crescenz's brother, Charles Crescenz, told the *Philadelphia Daily News* that his brother was buried at the cemetery after his death on Nov. 20, 1968. He said his family often visited the grave site, cleaning the stone, erecting flags and decorating during holidays.

"He was buried here because my parents ... when they were alive, didn't live far, and they wanted him close to home," he said. "My brother, Joe, started the ball rolling when he felt Mike should be in Arlington. ... It [was] a happy day because [we moved] him to where he belongs."

On the day he was killed, Michael Crescenz's unit had been on patrol in the Hiep Duc Valley area of South Vietnam when it was attacked by North Vietnamese soldiers hiding in machine-gun bunkers.

At the beginning of the attack, gunfire pinned down the lead squad and killed the two point men, halting the advance of the unit. Michael Crescenz immediately seized a nearby machine gun and charged 100 meters up a slope toward the enemy's bunkers. There, he silenced the enemy, killing two occupants.

Unmoved by the continuous gunfire, Michael Crescenz then moved toward a third bunker, where he also silenced the enemy by killing two more Vietnamese soldiers and clearing a route for his comrades.

Suddenly, another round of intense machine-gun fire erupted from an unseen camouflaged bunker. Crescenz, who redirected the bullets by advancing toward the position, was fatally wounded five meters from the bunker.

Bill Stafford, a member of Michael Crescenz's platoon, told the *Philadelphia Inquirer* that the corporal saved his life.

"He definitely stood up that day and broke the logjam we were in," said Stafford, who was a medic. "I was able to get to one wounded guy because of Michael. Things happen so quickly in war, and you wonder why certain things happen to some but not others. I figured out after many years that it just wasn't my time."

Michael Crescenz was described by his family as a "super guy" who was dedicated academically in high school. He was also a varsity football star at Cardinal Dougherty High School in Philadelphia where he graduated in 1966. He joined the Army soon after.

Two years after his death, Michael Crescenz's parents accepted the Medal of Honor on his behalf. President Richard Nixon presented the award.

After Michael Crescenz's parents died in the mid-1990s, his brothers discussed moving his body to Arlington. They said several people questioned why their brother, a hero, wasn't buried



Courtesy photo

Michael J. Crescenz's body was exhumed from the Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Cheltenham Town, Pa., in 2008, where he was buried after being killed during the Vietnam War. He now rests here at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

alongside other heroes.

But the move wasn't easy.

Officials at the Holy Sepulchre and Arlington National cemeteries were reluctant.

A woman at the Cheltenham Township cemetery said, "Why disturb the remains of your brother? He has been at rest all these years." At the Arlington cemetery, the brothers were told they would need help.

"I went to Congressman Joseph Pitts, and within 48 hours [I] had a reply that they would accept my brother, provided all the proper records were submitted," said Michael Crescenz's brother, Joe Crescenz.

On May 12, 2008, Michael Crescenz was honored with a burial at the Arlington National Cemetery.

"He would want to be there with his comrades," said another of the Soldier's brothers, Stephen Crescenz. "He's a hero, and at this time, we need our heroes to be together rather than apart." 🇺🇸