

CASS COUNTY, MICHIGAN PROFILES  
PRESERVING LOCAL HISTORY  
WITH PEOPLE, EVENTS & PLACES  
By Jeannie Watson

## LLOYD CORTEZ HAWKS CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR

Lloyd C. Hawks was a native son of Berrien County, Michigan. Like many local Cass, Berrien and Van Buren County, Michigan young men, he served his country in World War II. During that campaign, Loyd was horribly injured, but continued, in agonizing pain, to fulfill his duties. He performed a feat so outstanding, that he earned the admiration of a president, and the gratitude of his country.

Watervliet Township, was an undeveloped area, when Loyd's ancestors first stepped foot in the region, migrating from New York. Great grandparents Simeon Hawks (9/18/1790-6/27/18884) and wife Patty Beaman (2/6/1798-1/11/1863) were the first of their branch of the family to settle the Watervliet area. By 1860, Simeon owned part of Section 13 and 24 in Watervliet Township and land in Section 22 of Calvin Township, Cass County, Michigan. Grandparents Cortez Hawks (6/26/1832-6/24/1902) and Lucy Ann Crossman (3/3/1837-3/11/1894) continued the farming tradition. All four are buried in the Watervliet Cemetery.

Lloyd's parents Leroy Hawks (1868-1914) and Rachael Hickman (1875-1938), had moved temporarily from the region and, were living in Green Valley Township, Becker County, Minnesota. There, Lloyd was born on January 13, 1911. The family moved back to Watervliet and Lloyd's childhood and formative years were spent on the Watervliet family farm, and in the Watervliet School System. In 1930, Lloyd, with the nickname "Goldie," graduated from Watervliet High School. Although, the family's homestead history, and traditions, were based in Southwestern Michigan, Lloyd moved back to Minnesota as an adult.

In March of 1933, Lloyd was twenty-two years old. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945) was elected the thirty-second the United States. When World War II (1939-1945) first broke out, Lloyd was a mere 28 years old. He joined the Army, and entered the service of his country, in Park Rapids, Minnesota.

After Army boot camp, Lloyd was assigned to the Army's Third Division, Twentieth Infantry in "the European Theatre." He was in Japan "at the time of its occupation." He faced combat and front line danger "near Carano, Italy with the Third Infantry Division, Thirtieth Infantry." He was serving in the U.S. Army's Medical Detachment, as a Private First Class, when his unit came under heavy fire in Italy.

Fighting was fierce "on January 30, 1944, at 3:00 pm, near Carono, Italy." On that fateful day, Lloyd Cortez faced the greatest challenge of his life. An enemy counterattack had been launched against his unit, and serious casualties were occurring. Two wounded men from his division had been shot, "were unable to move," and "lay within thirty yards of the enemy." "As heavy machine gun fire was exchanged over the injured reclining bodies, two company riflemen tried to rescue the wounded" men. From their trench, crawling on their bellies, they sought to reach the bleeding men, but were driven back by rapid bursts of assault fire. The critical nature of the situation meant only one thing, if the wounded were not rescued from their open position, their lives would be forfeited. A third man, an aid, was likewise wounded in a rescue attempt, and stranded in the open clearing between the enemy's trenches and the Army's position. With these men's deaths only moments away, something had to be done.

Pfc. Lloyd Cortez Hawks, medical aid, showed the courage of his Southwestern Michigan ancestors and

Watervliet upbringing, when he started crawling the fifty feet, on his stomach to the injured men, as machine gun fire increased over his head. Ducking flying mortar fragments and "a veritable hail of machine gun bullets," Lloyd crawled to the ditch where "his wounded fellow aid man had sought cover, and gave first aid."

As Lloyd attempted to crawl toward the two seriously injured men "fifty yards distant," a German assault machine gun, "fired a barrage of rapid fire, piercing his helmet, momentarily stunning him, and knocking it from his head." The helmet "lay on the ground six inches from his body," and was hit with thirteen bullets, "which passed directly through" the protective gear.

Now inching on his elbows, Lloyd reached the "more seriously wounded man," and dragged him to a covered position some twenty-five yards distant." With shells now exploding around him, Pfc. Hawks returned to aid the last stranded man. "A burst of rapid machine gun fire" shattered Lloyd's hip, and "splintered the bones of his left forearm." "Despite severe pain," a fractured hip, and a "dangling left arm," Lloyd bandaged the bleeding soldier and "dragged him to the same depression to which he had brought the first man." Then he crawled seventy-five feet away, because the hole was too small to shield three men. Under enemy fire, in great pain and severely wounded, Lloyd reached his company in a fortified ditch.

"For gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life, and above and beyond the call of duty," Lloyd Cortez Hawks was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This local war hero was, also, given the Purple Heart, Italian Valor Cross, Silver Star, and Bronze Star. He was honored in a reception "at the White House in Washington, D.C."

Lloyd did survive World War II, but he would suffer, for the rest of his life, with the damage inflicted upon him by the enemy. He married sweetheart Cora Torkelson (born 9/27/1917), and they produced three children, Leroy, Daniel and Charlotte. He died October 26, 1953 at 42 years of age.

In conclusion, Berrien County, Michigan, and Becker County, Minnesota, resident Pfc. Lloyd Cortez Hawks served his country, as an U.S. Army Medical Detachment Aid during World War II. His valor and courage under fire, earned him the Congressional Medal of Honor, and other prestigious awards. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, personally, bestowed upon Lloyd his grateful country's thanks in a White House ceremony. This war hero would live with the disabilities of a shattered hip, and splintered forearm for the rest of his life. Lloyd earned his place in local Southwestern Michigan history.

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## RESEARCH

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