

NCO Stories

A selection of Valor



Sergeant Jose Calugas

Citation to award the Medal of Honor

The action for which the award was made took place near Culis, Bataan Province, Philippine Islands, on 16 January 1942. A battery gun position was bombed and shelled by the enemy until 1 gun was put out of commission and all the cannoneers were killed or wounded. Sgt. Calugas, a mess sergeant of another battery, voluntarily and without orders ran 1,000 yards across the shell-swept area to the gun position. There he organized a volunteer squad which placed the gun back in commission and fired effectively against the enemy, although the position remained under constant and heavy Japanese artillery fire.

His story

Jose Calugas was a member of the Philippine Scouts during World War II. He received the Medal of Honor for actions during the Battle of Bataan.

At the age of 23, Calugas joined the Philippine Scouts of the U.S. Army and completed training as an artilleryman serving with different artillery batteries of the Philippine Scouts until his unit was mobilized to fight in World War II. After noticing one of his unit's gun batteries had been destroyed and its crew killed, he gathered several members of his unit together, dug in

and attempted to defend the line. He was captured along with other members of his unit and forced to march to a distant enemy prison camp where he was held as a prisoner of war. After his release in 1943, he was secretly assigned to a guerilla unit the Philippines where he fought for the liberation of the Philippines from Japan.

After retiring from the Army he settled in Tacoma, Wash., and became a U.S. citizen.

Calugas was born in Barrio Tagsing, Leon, Iloilo, the Philip-



pines, Dec. 29, 1907. In 1930, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and received his basic training at Fort Sill, Okla. Upon completion, he received additional training as an artilleryman, and then was assigned to the 24th Artillery Regiment of the Philippine Scouts at Fort Stotsenburg, Pampanga. While stationed there, he married and began to raise a family. His next unit was the 88th Field Artillery Regiment of the Philippine Scouts. He was a sergeant with Battery B when the United States and the Philippine Commonwealth declared war with Japan in 1941. His unit was mobilized for duty and sent to Bataan in December 1941.

On Jan. 6, 1942, his unit was covering the withdrawal of a portion of the U.S. Army Forces Far East, with the 26th Cavalry Regiment of the Philippine Scouts and the U.S. 31st Infantry Regiment. Calugas was working as a mess sergeant in charge of a group of Soldiers who were preparing the day's meals when he noticed that one of his unit's guns had been silenced and its crew killed. Without orders, he ran the 1,000 yards across the shell-swept area to the inactive gun position. Once there, he organized a squad of volunteers who returned Japanese artillery fire. The position remained under constant and heavy fire for the rest of the afternoon.

While Calugas and his squad maintained a steady fire on the enemy positions, other Soldiers had time to dig in and defend the line. As the day ended and combat subsided, he returned to his kitchen duty. For his actions on that day, his superiors recommended Calugas for the U.S. military's highest decoration for valor, the Medal of Honor. Before he could receive it, however, all American forces on Bataan surrendered to Japanese forces.

Arguably, the Battle of Bataan represented the most intense phase of Japan's invasion of the Philippines during World War II. During the final stage of the Battle of Bataan, and after repeated assaults and artillery fire by Japanese forces, the communications and defenses of the Allied forces on Bataan peninsula had been almost completely destroyed. On the last two days, the entire Allied defense collapsed, clogging all roads with refugees and fleeing troops. By April 8, the senior U.S. commander on Bataan, Maj. Gen. Edward "Ned" P. King Jr., recognized the futility of further resistance, and explored proposals for capitulation. On April 9, 1942, approximately 76,000 Filipino and American troops surrendered to a Japanese army of 54,000 men under the command of Lt. General Masaharu Homma. In American history, this was the single largest surrender of one of its military forces.

After the surrender, Calugas and other prisoners marched from Mariveles to Camp O'Donnell, a prison camp in the province of Tarlac. The Japanese, having expected the fighting to continue, anticipated only about 25,000 prisoners of war and were inadequately prepared or unwilling to transport a group of prisoners three times the size. The majority of the prisoners of war were immediately relieved of their belongings and endured a 61-mile

march in deep dust over vehicle-broken roads, and crammed into rail cars for the portion of the journey from San Fernando to Capas. En route, more than 21,000 men and women died from disease, starvation, dehydration, heat prostration, untreated wounds, and wanton execution. The deaths of Filipinos compared to Americans was disproportionately high: approximately 5,000 to 10,000 Filipino and 600 to 650 American prisoners of war died on the so-called Bataan Death March. Calugas remained a prisoner at Camp O'Donnell until Jan. 1943, when he was released to work for the Japanese in the Philippines.

He was placed as a laborer in a Japanese rice mill, and while assigned there he secretly joined a guerrilla unit, #227 Old Bronco. As an officer of the unit, he participated in the attack on the Japanese garrison at Karangalan. His unit fought in the continued campaign against the Japanese, which eventually led to the liberation of the Philippines.

After liberation, he finally received the Medal of Honor for which he had been approved the beginning of the war. It was presented to him by General of the Army George Marshall. Calugas subsequently accepted a direct commission in the U.S. Army, and was later assigned to the 44th Infantry Regiment, which was assigned to the occupation of Okinawa. After the unit was disbanded in 1947, he was assigned to the Ryuku Command, on the Ryukyu Islands in the South China Sea, where he remained until 1953.

Although he had been born in a U.S. territory, and had fought in the U.S. Army, Calugas technically was not a citizen. Following the Spanish-American War in 1898, Philippine residents were classified as U.S. "nationals." The 1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act, or Philippine Independence Act, reclassified Filipinos as aliens, and set a limit of only 50 immigrants per year to the United States, with the exception of those who joined the U.S. Navy, but not the U.S.

Army. While serving in Okinawa, Calugas completed the process of becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen.

Calugas eventually retired from the Army with the rank of captain and in 1957 he moved to Tacoma, Wash., with his family. After retiring from the Army, he earned a degree in business administration from the University of Puget Sound in 1961 and worked for the Boeing Corp. In addition to furthering his education and starting a new career, he was involved in several veterans groups within the Seattle and Tacoma area. He died in Tacoma on Jan. 18, 1998, at age 90, and is buried at Mountain View Memorial Park in Tacoma.

Editor's note: The story incorporates material from the Wikipedia entry dedicated to his legacy.



Photo courtesy of the National Archives
Sgt. Jose Calugas proudly displays his Medal of Honor while rendering a salute during a ceremony.