

NCO Stories

A selection of Valor



Cpl. Tibor Rubin

Citation to award the Medal of Honor

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty: Corporal Tibor Rubin distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism during the period from July 23, 1950, to April 20, 1953, while serving as a rifleman with Company I, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division in the Republic of Korea.

While his unit was retreating to the Pusan Perimeter, Corporal Rubin was assigned to stay behind to keep open the vital Taegu-Pusan Road link used by his withdrawing unit. During the ensuing battle, overwhelming numbers of North Korean troops assaulted a hill defended solely by Corporal Rubin. He inflicted a staggering number of casualties on the attacking force during his personal 24-hour battle, single-handedly slowing the enemy advance and allowing the 8th Cavalry Regiment to complete its withdrawal successfully.

Following the breakout from the Pusan Perimeter, the 8th Cavalry Regiment proceeded northward and advanced into North Korea. During the advance, he helped capture several hundred North Korean soldiers. On October 30, 1950, Chinese forces attacked his unit at Unsan, North Korea, during a massive nighttime assault. That night and throughout the next day, he manned

a .30 caliber machine gun at the south end of the unit's line after three previous gunners became casualties. He continued to man his machine gun until his ammunition was exhausted. His determined stand slowed the pace of the enemy advance in his sector, permitting the remnants of his unit to retreat southward. As the battle raged, Corporal Rubin was severely wounded and captured by the Chinese.

Choosing to remain in the prison camp despite offers from the Chinese to return him to his native Hungary, Corporal Rubin disregarded his own personal safety and immediately began sneaking out of the camp at night in search of food for his comrades. Breaking into enemy food storehouses and gardens, he risked certain torture or death if caught. Corporal Rubin provided not only food to the starving Soldiers, but also desperately needed medical care and moral support for the sick and wounded of the POW camp.

His brave, selfless efforts were directly attributed to saving the lives of as many as forty of his fellow prisoners. Corporal Rubin's gallant actions in close contact with the enemy and unyielding courage and bravery while a prisoner of war are in the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Army.

A hero in the face of horror

By Spc. Samuel J. Phillips

Forced into a concentration camp by Nazis and later imprisoned in a North Korean prisoner of war camp, one young man would survive, becoming one of America's greatest heroes.

Tibor "Ted" Rubin was born in Paszto, Hungary, in 1929. During Germany's effort to wipe out Hungary's Jews in 1943, Rubin's family was transported to the infamous Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. Rubin recalled in an interview with James S. Robbins for a *National Review* article, that on his first day in the camp an SS captain told the captives, "None of you will get out of here alive." For 14 months, Rubin survived despite watching his mother, father and two sisters perish from the brutality of their Nazi captors.

On May 5, 1945, Rubin was liberated when the U.S. 11th Armored Division defeated the Nazis at Mauthausen. Feeling nothing was left for him in Hungary, Rubin vowed that he would show his appreciation to the country that saved his life and gave him his freedom. He emigrated to the United States.

To fulfill his promise, Rubin joined the U.S. Army in February 1950, and soon found himself in Korea with the 3rd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, one of the first units sent to help repel North Korean invasion forces. His unit became involved in the withdrawal to the Pusan perimeter, and in one particular engagement Rubin volunteered to stay behind to confuse the enemy as his company redeployed from one hill to another.

"The North Koreans, thinking the hill was still occupied by a whole company, made an all-out offensive with all their available troops," said Leonard Hamm, who served with Rubin in Korea. "Rubin had stocked each foxhole with grenades, and during the attack the following morning made his way running from foxhole to foxhole, lobbing grenades, one after another, down upon the enemy; he became almost hysterical in his actions. But he held the hill."

Rubin's immediate superiors recommended him for the Medal of Honor for his defense of the hill and other actions. However, these officers died before the paperwork could be processed. Then, after the Inchon invasion, the 8th Cavalry Regiment moved north toward the Chinese border, where they would find a new adversary as the Chinese Army entered the conflict. Rubin would be forced into yet another situation where he would prove his dedication to his adopted country and his brothers in arms.

Early in November 1950, Chinese forces swarmed south from the Yalu River, destroying Rubin's battalion at the Battle

of Unsan, and captured hundreds of Americans, including Rubin. These men would find themselves in the Pukchin POW camp, also known as "Death Valley," and later at Pyoktong along with Turkish and other U.N. Soldiers. At these camps, first run by North Koreans and later by the Chinese, prisoners faced a living nightmare of hunger, cold and disease. "It was hardest on the Americans who were not used to this," Rubin said. "But I had a heck of a basic training with the Germans."

Rubin used what he had learned in the Nazi concentration camps of the Holocaust to help keep himself and other prisoners alive. "I did it because I was an American," Rubin said, "and because it was a *mitzvah*. Regardless of color or nationality, they were my brothers." One of the ways Rubin played a role in the survival of his fellow POWs was by stealing rations from their captors.

Carl McClendon, one of Rubin's fellow POWs, said, "Every day when it got dark and we went to sleep, Rubin was on his way, crawling on his stomach, jumping over fences, breaking into supply houses, while the guns were looking down on him. He tied the bottom of his fatigue pants and filled them up with anything he could get a hold of. Then, he crawled back and distributed the food that he had



U.S. Army Photo

Tibor "Ted" Rubin addresses the crowd after receiving the Medal of Honor from President George W. Bush during a White House ceremony Sept. 23, 2005.

stolen and risked his life for."

After some time in the POW camp, the Chinese learned that Rubin was originally from Hungary and offered to let him return to his home country, which at the time was behind the Iron Curtain. Turning down offers of a job, good clothes and all the food he could ever want, he refused to leave his comrades and be a pawn for Chinese propaganda. "I stood by my oath," he said. Rubin remained in the POW camp until he was released at the end of the war and was credited by the Army for saving more than 40 lives during his 2 1/2 years of imprisonment.

After returning to the United States, Rubin finally became a U.S. citizen. "I was the happiest man in the world," he said. He then left the Army and worked at his brother Emery's store. Rubin married his wife, Yvonne, a Dutch Holocaust survivor, and raised their two children, Frank and Rosalyn, in Garden Grove, Calif. Living a quiet life, Rubin surprised many at a 1980 Korean War veterans' reunion simply by showing up, because many of the men in his original unit believed he was dead.

Rubin would finally receive his long-deserved Medal of Honor from President George W. Bush during a White House ceremony Sept. 23, 2005. "It's a dream come true," Rubin said. "It is the highest honor of the best country in the world." 