

# Frank's unforgettable valor

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I have read many accounts of the atrocities that were inflicted upon prisoners of war during the weeklong Bataan Death March of World War II, which took place in the densest jungles in the Philippines. Death by Japanese sword and bayonet, random beatings, intentional starvation, and dehydration were common along the march.

Those who fell from exhaustion were executed, as were those who offered their captors any sign of resistance or protest. The horrors these brave men experienced are unimaginable. I expected any man who experienced such horrible things to be emotionally hardened and unfeeling at best. But then again, I had not yet met Sgt. Frank Dunlap.

When I finally met "Mr. Frank," as all his buddies call him, he had just received the Bronze Star Medal for his actions during the war. He was dressed in an original U.S. Army "Ike" uniform, and was smiling from ear to ear.

He was not at all cold or unfeeling, as I had assumed. In fact, he was jovial; more like Santa Claus in a military uniform than the grumpy old man I had envisioned. I asked myself, "How could a man who had lived through such horrors be so happy?"

"I got a second chance at life and I haven't wasted it. I survived on the hope that I would one day come back home," Frank said.

Frank told me that when things were at their worst, he focused on a poster he had seen during the march that proclaimed, "Help is on the way!"

"I knew that MacArthur was coming back, but I just wish it hadn't taken him so damn long!" Frank said with a hardy laugh.

But, it did take time. And unfortunately, that was time Frank had to spend in what he called "a living hell."

## *A Living Hell*

On Dec. 8, 1941, Japanese aircraft crippled several U.S. airfields in the Philippines. Within three days, the Allied Forces lost two-thirds of their aircraft. After the Japanese invaded Luzon, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, commander of U.S. Army Forces Far East, ordered a withdrawal of all Allied Forces to the stronghold of the Bataan Peninsula. With only a handful of aircraft left and little or no supplies, many mechanics, administrative personnel and even fighter pilots were forced to fight as infantrymen. Frank was one of them.

Frank was a U.S. Army Air Corps ordnance man. His job was to arm aircraft with bombs and ammunition.

"We had no planes," Frank explained. "The Japanese had blown them all up! We had no supplies, no fuel, nothing. The Japanese had severed our supply lines. We were completely cut off from everything. We were forced to fight as infantry."

Left with no supplies or means of retreat, Maj. Gen. Edward King Jr., the senior U.S. commander on Bataan, and his 75,000 malnourished and battle-weary troops surrendered to the Japanese on April 9, 1941. As they prepared to surrender, King told his troops, "You men remember this. ... You did not surrender. You had no alternative but to obey my order."

Once Allied troops were in Japanese hands, they were stripped of most of their belongings. Thus, began the brutal 60-mile march known as the Bataan Death March.

Somehow, Frank survived both the march and more than three years of torture by the Japanese.

"I was very lucky to make it out alive. Somehow I managed to hold on to my canteen and a small bottle of iodine. I used it to collect water whenever I had the chance," he said, adding that the Japanese guards would not allow POWs to stop for water or food. "If you stopped or fell, they would beat you or just kill you."

Frank recalled watching as Japanese guards murdered POWs because they attempted to get water from a nearby well.

"Some of them just ran when they saw the well. The guards would run them down and beat them to the ground. Some

were bayoneted. Others were beheaded right then. Others were dragged away and then shot," he said. "I watched as many of my friends were killed."

After the march, Frank was sent to Sendai Camp No. 8, a POW camp in Taiwan. He remained there until he was taken to Japan aboard a "hell ship" in early 1945.

Hell ships were Japanese transports used to move POWs to Japan. Frank was crammed into one of these ships. The ship was so overcrowded that Frank and his comrades were forced to lie on top of one another to make room. Some of these ships were sunk by Allied Forces who had no way of knowing that Allied POWs were on board.

"I remember being on the hell ship and seeing a torpedo pass within a few feet from the hull," Frank said. "Somehow we made it."

Frank and the other POWs were taken to Osaki where they



Photo by Capt. Tim W. Irvin

**Sgt. Frank Dunlap, an Army Air Corps veteran of World War II, looks at his Bronze Star Medal for the first time Aug. 15. For his service during World War II, Dunlap was presented the medal by Capt. David Baxley, administrative officer, 4th Battalion, 118th Infantry Regiment, South Carolina, Army National Guard, during a ceremony at Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 10804 in Little River, S.C.**



Dunlap and Robert Fedortion, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 10804 commander, shake hands after Dunlap was presented with a Bronze Star Medal Aug. 15, in Little River, S.C. He was presented the medal for his service during World War II when he became a prisoner of war for more than three years. "This a huge honor, but I want people to understand I'm not accepting this for me. I'm accepting it on behalf of all the men and women who have served and are currently serving. I want it to be bestowed on all military members and veterans from every service, male and female," Dunlap said.

Photo by Capt. Tim W. Irvin

were forced to work on the construction of an airstrip for more than a year and a half until the Japanese surrendered Sept. 11, 1945. This ended Frank's time as a POW; a short time later, he was on his way back to the United States.

### *"Mr. Frank"*

Being a POW and a survivor of the Bataan Death March has made Frank a local celebrity. A few years ago, Frank had to go to court for a traffic ticket. When he appeared, the judge recognized his name. The judge asked if he was the same "Mr. Frank" that was a POW in World War II.

"Yes, your honor. I was a POW," replied Frank.

The judge excitedly said, "Back then, I was in the Navy. I was on one of the ships that came to rescue you."

Without hesitation, Frank looked up at the judge and replied, "Well, what took you so damn long?"

Immediately, the whole courtroom, including the judge, broke out in laughter. Once the judge composed himself, he said, "Case dismissed!"

### *Final Thank You*

Nearly 68 years after surviving the Bataan Death March and the POW camps, Frank was presented the Bronze Star Medal for his service. His friends from the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 10804 in Little River, S.C., hosted the ceremony on Aug. 15.

C.B. Anderson of Rolling Thunder Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to POW and veteran issues, was behind the effort to get Frank the Bronze Star and his World War II "Ike" uniform.

Frank lost his original uniforms some years ago. He wanted to be buried in one, so his friends went to Anderson because they knew he had worked with veterans.

"In February, I sent an e-mail to all the veterans and organizations I knew. Then, they all sent the e-mail to everyone they knew," said Anderson. "In about three days, my inbox was full. Answering all the e-mails became a full-time job."

Anderson got e-mails from people from about 20 states, from

Maine to New Mexico, offering help.

Phil Steward, owner of American Flags Plus, a company that specializes in flags of all types, managed to get a full uniform complete with all patches and insignia.

On June 3, Frank was given the authentic World War II uniform and a specially made 48-star American flag during the Salute to Veterans ceremony in North Myrtle Beach, S.C. Anderson presented Frank with the uniform, which carried all the medals he received during his time in the service.

But the honors didn't end there.

Anderson wanted to make Frank an honorary member of Rolling Thunder. In order to do this, Anderson needed documentation of Frank's service. Unfortunately, Frank's military records were destroyed along with about 18 million other military personnel files in a disastrous fire at the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Mo., in 1973.

But Anderson didn't let that stop him. He went to South Carolina Congressman Henry Brown for help. Brown worked through the red tape and had Frank's records recreated. With them, Anderson was able to order all of Frank's medals and make him an honorary member of Rolling Thunder.

Frank's records indicated he had been awarded a Bronze Star Medal in 1962. Anderson asked Frank if he was aware of having received the medal, and Frank told him he was never presented with the award.

When Frank was finally given the medal, he told those at the ceremony that he was thankful for everything the public did for him.

"No words in the dictionary, English or any other language for that matter, could express how grateful I am for all of this," Frank said. "All of this is a huge honor, but I want people to understand I'm not accepting this for me. I accept it for those whom I served with that didn't make it back, for all the men and women who have served and for those that are currently serving. I want it to be bestowed on all military members and veterans from every service, male and female."