



**American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor
Memorial Society**

3156 Myers Lane - Makanda, Illinois 62958 - JanThompson@gmail.com

June 6, 2019

Honorable Jack O'Malley, Chair
House Transportation Committee
S 1385 Anderson House Office Building
Lansing, Michigan 48933

Dear Chairman O'Malley,

I am writing in support of the proposal (HB-4570) to designate a portion of State Hwy I-69 the "Bataan and Corregidor Veterans Memorial Highway".

On April 9, 1942 10,000 Americans became POWs with the surrender of the Bataan Peninsular in the Philippines. And in early May 1942, 11,500 Americans were surrendered on Corregidor, a fortress island in Manila harbor, and in the Southern Philippine islands. The surrender of American and Filipino forces on the Philippines Islands was the largest surrender in United States military history. Over 26,000 Americans were ultimately held as POWs of Imperial Japan. Nearly 11,000 died in squalid POW camps, aboard fetid "hell ships", or as slave laborers. Tragically, only 15,000 returned home to their families. Michigan had 634 who were POWs of Imperial Japan.

The ordeal of the American POWs of Japan is not just another facet of war history. It is a history of resilience, survival, and the human spirit. The sacrifices these veterans made should always be remembered and honored. A highway designated as a Memorial would be that ultimate honor.

Sincerely,

Ms. Jan Thompson
President

A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF DESIGNATING A PORTION OF INTERSTATE 69 WITHIN THE CITY OF BURTON AS THE BATAAN AND CORREGIDOR VETERANS MEMORIAL HIGHWAY

WHEREAS, One of the more notorious incidents in the Pacific Theatre during World War II, a conflict that involved more than 100 million people and no fewer than 30 countries, occurred in the Philippine Islands a few months after the surprise attack by the Empire of Japan on the United States naval forces stationed at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941; and,

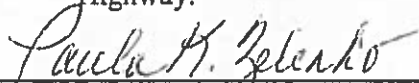
WHEREAS, The ensuing Battles of Bataan and Corregidor in early 1942 resulted in the deaths of an estimated 750,000 military combatants and civilian non-combatants, as well as the capture by the Japanese of approximately 75,000 Americans and Filipinos; and,

WHEREAS, After three months of brutal fighting between the Imperial Japanese Forces and the United States and its allies, the American forces under General Douglas MacArthur surrendered and the Japanese Army forcibly marched no fewer than 75,000 starving, sick and debilitated military prisoners-of-war and equally weakened civilian prisoners on a deadly 65-mile trek that would become known as the Bataan Death March; and,

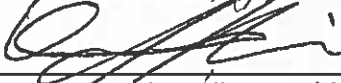
WHEREAS, The Bataan Death March resulted in the death of approximately 9,000 Filipinos and more than 1,000 Americans, and the torture and brutal treatment of tens of thousands of prisoners at the hands of their Japanese captors; and,

WHEREAS, It is fitting and proper that the City of Burton, recognizing the many veterans and their families who have served in the military, and in some cases made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation, support legislation in the Michigan Legislature to designate the portion of I-69 between Center Road and Belsay Road in the City of Burton as the "Bataan and Corregidor Veterans Memorial Highway; now,

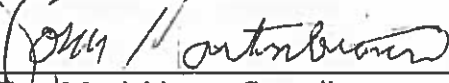
THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Mayor and Council of the City of Burton hereby endorse and encourage passage of legislation to designate the portion of I-69 between Center Road and Belsay Road in the City of Burton as the "Bataan and Corregidor Veterans Memorial Highway.



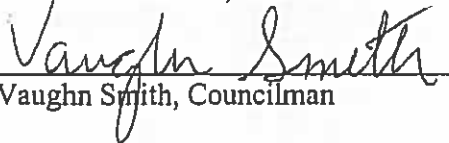
Paula K. Zelenko, Mayor



Duane Haskins, Vice President



Tom Martinbianco, Councilman



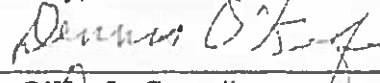
Vaughn Smith, Councilman



Steven Heffner, President



Tina Conley, Councilwoman



Dennis O'Keefe, Councilman



Danny Wells, Councilwoman

A BRIEF HISTORY: OUR BEGINNING

The Imperial Japanese military bombed Pearl Harbor and the Philippine Islands simultaneously in December 1941. The effort that followed to thwart and delay the advance of the Japanese in the Philippine turned into a bloody, five-month battle.

The Fil-American troops were hindered by lack of food, medicine, guns, ammunition and fresh troops. When the end came for Bataan in April, and the remainder of the Philippines in May 1942 the already malnourished and diseased troops became POWs of the Japanese. They endured unspeakable cruelty. As a result, thousands died and those that survived were sent home physically and mentally depleted.

After months of hospitalization the former POWs were pronounced in general good health and reasonably recuperated from their ordeal as POWs. In 1947 they formed the original American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor.

The organization thrived until the advanced age and frailty of its members made it impossible to continue. The ADBC asked the fledgling Descendants Group (DG) to take over. In 2010 the DG took full responsibility and became the ADBC-Memorial Society striving to provide Americans an authentic history of the POW WWII experience.

THE ADBC-MS TODAY

Today, the ADBC-MS is the point of contact for all official U.S. Governmental activities concerning American POWs of Japan. These include the Japan/POW Friendship Program, Veterans' Day Breakfast with the

President, the Freedom Foundation, and the Senate and House Veterans' Committees.

ADBC-MS offers scholarships to POW descendants, provides grants for educational projects, sponsors Bataan Memorial Marches, and works with historians and scholars to write curriculums for schools. We are also involved in educational organizations internationally such as the Japan/POW Research Network and US-Japan Dialogue on POWs.

Programs at ADBC-MS annual conventions support our members through seminars, personal reflections of POWs and families, documentary film screenings, panel and town hall discussions, presentations by grant recipients, prominent keynote speakers, and opportunities for young people to participate.

PLEASE JOIN OUR MISSION

ADBC-MS Membership dues of \$40 annually will allow support our growing organization and its legacy of more than 70 years. As a voting member you will have a voice in the direction of the group. Membership also gives you access to the Google Group, a subscription to *The Qian* Group, a subscription to *The Qian* newsletter and reduced convention registration fees. Membership is valid for one calendar year - January through December. All who are interested in this history are welcome.

To become a member, please complete the form on the opposite side and pay via PayPal and/or send it with a check made payable to "ADBC-Memorial Society" to our Treasurer, Judy Pruitt at:

Judy Pruitt
23 Elwell Road
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130



The American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society:

- ▶ Is dedicated to preserving the history of and promoting the education of the POW experience in the Pacific during WWII.
- ▶ Holds an annual convention of educational and historical seminars.
- ▶ Offers scholarships to POW descendants.
- ▶ Provides grants for projects and activities that perpetuates and defines the history.
- ▶ Works with historians and scholars to write curriculums for educational institutions.
- ▶ Sponsors Bataan Memorial Marches.
- ▶ Works diligently to place meaningful monuments that honor the American POWs of Imperial Japan.

Most recently and after much effort the ADBCMS received approval from the Department of Veteran's Affairs to include the words "Hellship" and "human cargo" on a memorial stone that will honor those POWs lost on the Enoura Maru hellship.

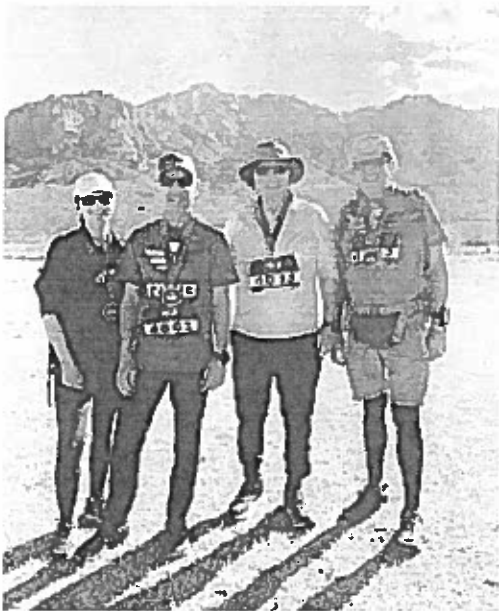
▶ And much more.

Details of the work and activities of the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society are available on our website: www.adbcmemorialsociety.org

Memorial March honors WWII veterans

APRIL 04, 2019

BY JALENE JAMESON
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(Group shot) from left to right, Burton residents Debbie Newton, Tony Newton, Vaughn Smith and Steve Welch wear they received for marching in the Bataan Memorial Death March and Honor March at White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico. Photos provided

BURTON — On April 9, 1942, tens of thousands of American and Filipino prisoners of war were forced to begin a grueling 65-mile march from Bataan, Philippines, to Camp O'Donnell.

With little food or water and subjected to unspeakable atrocities at the hands of their Japanese captors, 9,000 Filipino and 1,000 American POWs perished in what became known as the Bataan Death March, one of the most iconic events of World War II.

Seventy-seven years later, on March 17, four Burton residents joined

thousands of marchers and runners in honoring the memories of those who lost their lives during and those who, against all odds, survived the deadly trek by marching in the Bataan Memorial Death March at White Sands Missile Range in southern New Mexico.

For the past 30 years, the memorial march has taken place at WSMR, the largest military installation in the United States. Used as a U.S. Army testing area, it covers 3,200 square miles in parts of five counties and is characterized by high desert terrain. The memorial march stretches over a 26.2-mile course, while an honor march spans 14.2 miles.

This year, Steve Welch, Vaughn Smith and Tony and Debbie Newton made the commitment to honor the father-in-law of Welch's friend, Bill Cokley, who was a survivor of the 1942 death march. The four had known about the march for a few years, and Welch and Tony Newton are U.S. Navy veterans. When Welch met Cokley's wife, Thet, the mission became personal.



Vaughn Smith wears a bib with the name of Bataan Death March survivor Germino B. Fabro. He, Welch and the Newtons wore the bibs during the Bataan Memorial Death Watch to honor Fabro.

“The marchers wear bibs with the names of survivors on them,” Welch said. “We asked Thet if we could have the honor of wearing her father’s name.”

Germino B. Fabro, a native Filipino, served as a private in the U.S. Army. Cokley said his father-in-law was always reluctant to talk about his experiences on the death march. He said Fabro was caught in the Battle of Bataan, was shot and was a prisoner of war for two years.

“They tortured him and hung him upside down with barbed wire tying both hands behind his back,” Cokley said. “They kept chopping at his

hands and wrists. His one hand was deformed, and the other one was barely useable.”

In 1978, Fabro emigrated permanently to the U.S. and settled in Saginaw. Cokley said he met his wife, Fabro’s daughter, while serving in the U.S. Navy during a port of call in the Philippines. It was serendipitous that Cokley was from Flint, and Fabro was living in Saginaw. Fabro passed away in 1997 at the age of 81. He is buried in Fort Custer National Cemetery in Augusta, Mich.

The opportunity to honor servicemen like Fabro drew a record 8,600 marchers from all 50 states and 12 countries to the event this year. The four Burton residents described the camaraderie of the crowd and the excitement of meeting and talking with people who support the military and are committed to ensuring the men of the Bataan Death March are not forgotten.

“It was amazing seeing these men and women honoring them” said Smith, 64. “People remember Pearl Harbor, the Battle of the Bulge, Normandy. But people don’t remember this part of the war. It’s their mission to make sure they’re not forgotten.”

Smith said the Army does a roll call each year of the Bataan survivors in attendance. This year, there were only three.

Smith and the Newtons are competitive runners, and Welch is a competitive race walker, but they all said they had never experienced anything like the march through dirt, sand, rocks and gravel that went 4 miles around a mountain and to an elevation of 5,400 feet and back down. When they started the march at 7 a.m., it was 35 degrees, and the temperature climbed to about 65 during the day. The day before, it had snowed.

“I trained for this for months,” said Welch, 69. “I had a training plan from the Bataan Memorial Death March Training Group, and I followed it to a T. I didn’t want to get out there and not be able to finish. If I hadn’t retired last year, I never would’ve been able to make that kind of commitment.”

He said the one mistake he made was to take a 25-pound backpack filled with items like a first-aid kit, electrolyte pills, water, Payday candy bars for sugar, beef jerky for protein and more so he would be prepared. His friends carried only a fanny pack, which he also had.

“I used my fanny pack and never touched that backpack,” Welch said. “I wouldn’t lug that around again.”

“He cussed that backpack out,” Smith said with a laugh.

Welch wasn’t the only one with a heavy backpack. Marchers participated in light and heavy categories. Those in the heavy category carried 35-pound backpacks, while those in the light category did not carry backpacks. Individuals participating in the heavy categories were asked to use beans, rice, nonperishable items, cans, macaroni, pasta, cat/dog food to use as weight in their backpacks, which were donated after the march to the Roadrunner Food Bank.

“There were a lot of women there with big backpacks, and there were really some fit women there,” Tony Newton, 61, said. “I felt like I was struggling, and I wasn’t in the heavy division. I was never unsure I would finish, but I just thought if the people carrying 35 pounds could do it, so could I.”

Newton was being modest. On Feb. 26, he started the 350-mile self-supported Iditarod Trail Invitational in Alaska but had to drop out on

the second day after getting frostbite. Two weeks later he was marching through the desert.

Debbie Newton, 59, echoed her husband's sentiment. She had been recovering from knee surgery for a torn meniscus and decided to do the 14.2-mile honor march.

"I ran across a 90-year-old man, and he walked hunched over, and he'd take 10 steps and had to stop, and he'd been doing it for 20 years," she said.

Along the route, there were 12 water points, several first aid stations and 180 portable toilets. Posted signs warned of rattlesnakes and scorpions. Members of the U.S. Border Patrol patrolled the area on horseback, while Blackhawk helicopters hovered on the lookout for marchers in distress.

The four were especially impressed with the Wounded Warriors and ROTC members they met on the march.

"I passed a Wounded Warrior at mile 23 who had both legs amputated," Welch said "When I went by him, I tapped him on the shoulder and said 'Thank you for your service.' "

"When you see all these young people, you feel better about who we're leaving our country to," Smith said. "There's good young people coming up out there. You know there's going to be good leadership."

The three men stayed together for most of the march but toward the end split up to gain individual times. Tony Newton finished in eight hours, six minutes; Welch, 8:29; and Smith, 8:35.

Some participants ran the course for time, and Tony Newton said he considered running the last couple of miles.

“We wanted to try to stay together, and after all the runners were gone, we stayed with the marchers,” he said. “It didn’t feel like it was appropriate to run. It felt disrespectful to be running in this march.”

With the Bataan Memorial Death March accomplished, the four Burton residents have a new mission. They are working with Jan Thompson, president of American Defenders of Bataan & Corregidor, to have a section of Interstate 69 designated Bataan Memorial Highway in honor of those who died and those who survived.

Details: Visit bataanmarch.com/.