

VETERAN NEWS & NOTES

A Look At The Vibrancy Of The Human Spirit

(NAPSA)—As a special tribute to the people involved in a 75-year-old atrocity, modern American veterans and others participate in the annual Bataan Memorial Death March challenge.

What Happened Then

It commemorates the forced march of Filipino and American civilian and service members captured in 1942. Approximately 10,000 individuals died along the roughly 62-mile route to the Japanese camps.

What Happens Now

Today's 26.2-mile trek tests participants' humility, endurance and perseverance. It originates on high desert trails that consist of sand, gravel, and paved roads within the Organ Mountains in southwestern New Mexico. The Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument, located 10 miles east of the city of Las Cruces, was created in May 2014. The elevation of Las Cruces, 3,908 feet above sea level, adds an extra challenge for participants who hail from lower altitudes.

This year, the challenge included the first five-person blinded veteran team: Operation Peer Support's Nate Gorham, Steve Baskis, Lonnie Bedwell, Dan Standage and Tim Hornik. They all trekked the entire route with support from Blind Endeavors' Victor Henderson and Kevin Baskis, the Southwestern Blind Rehabilitation Center's Nancy Standage and Terry Kebbel, and friends and family.



Blind veterans Nate Gorham, Steve Baskis, Lonnie Bedwell, Dan Standage and Tim Hornik walk the 26.2-mile Bataan Memorial Death March challenge.

Operation Peer Support is one of the many programs through which the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) helps veterans with vision problems and their families. Through its programs, regional groups, resources, and advocacy before the legislative and executive branches of government, BVA makes life better for blinded veterans regardless of how their blindness was acquired or whether they belong to the organization.

How They Did It

The blind marchers used a combination of trekking poles, white canes, iTunes music and other vocal commands. The formation possessed a center point consisting of Kevin and Steve Baskis walking in single file connected with a cane. Steve carried a Bluetooth speaker that pumped out a series of play

lists from iTunes music on his iPhone 7, which allowed everyone else to orient themselves with the audio cues and help from sighted guides.

How They Felt About It

As Dan Standage put it, "The greatest thing about the march to me was the chance to be surrounded by my fellow veterans. This provided the opportunity for each of us to share where we are in our lives, share questions and offer advice."

Added Lonnie Bedwell, "One of the toughest aspects of being blind is making time and developing strategies to engage in physical activities. We have great opportunities like VAs Move program and networks like www.UnitedInStride.com, which pairs blind individuals with sighted guides. Blindness should not cause your life to stop but provide you with the chance to solve problem situations."

One Inspiration

They were all heartened by meeting and walking with actual veterans of the Bataan Death March. One, Colonel Ben Skardon, was 24 years old when captured by the Japanese. This year marked the tenth time the now 99-year-old walked 8.5 miles of the route.

Learn More

For further information on the trek, go to bataanmarch.com. For facts on Operation Peer Support and other Blinded Veterans Association programs, go to bva.org.