

# VFW Backs Udall's Bataan Gold Medal Bill

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**WASHINGTON** — The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW), an organization 2.3 million members strong, has endorsed legislation authored by U.S. Representative Tom Udall, D-N.M., to bestow Bataan Death March veterans with the Congressional Gold Medal.

“The coalescing support around this long-overdue tribute to the veterans who endured unimaginable hardships in Bataan is very heartening,” said Udall. “I hope the VFW’s endorsement of my legislation to finally honor these soldiers will translate into more Congressional support for the measure.”

In a letter to Udall, Michael H. Wysong, Director of National Security and Foreign Affairs for the VFW, said, “...The United States is forever indebted to these brave men for their courage and perseverance in the face of extraordinary circumstances while maintaining dignity, honor, patriotism and loyalty. This resolution will go a long way in recognizing the special sacrifices made by these courageous men and will serve as a solemn reminder of the cost, in human terms, made by our military to preserve our freedom and liberty.”

[Click here to read VFW's letter to Udall.](#)

On April 9, 1942, 12,500 American soldiers, suffering from a lack of supplies, malnutrition, malaria and starvation, fought bravely to provide US commanders with the breathing room needed to prepare for the full Pacific war. With no resources left to continue, and no reinforcements able to arrive, the troops were surrendered to the Japanese forces in the Philippines.

Immediately following their capture, the troops were forced to endure a torturous 65-mile, five-day march in tropical heat without food or water. Thousands perished along the way, and those who survived were held as prisoners of war in squalid encampments for almost three years.

In captivity, the soldiers were made to do hard manual labor, were given inadequate medical treatment and nutritional rations, and were often threatened and beaten. Those who

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survived suffered for the rest of their lives with physical and mental reminders of what they had endured. Of the approximately 900 soldiers who returned home to New Mexico, nearly a third died within a year after leaving captivity, most often due to complications from health issues directly attributed to their time in the POW camps.

Under Udall's bill, a collective medal would be awarded to the American soldiers who served at Bataan during World War II. It would be housed at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington and upon request made available for ceremonies and events commemorating the march.

Udall's bill is also backed by the New Mexican Hispanic Cultural Preservation League, New Mexico Generals Leo Marquez, Edward Baca, Melvyn Montano, Gene Chavez and Kenny Montoya, and Secretary John M. Garcia of the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services.

Udall served as a member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee for 8 years. He is also a member of the Congressional Hispanic Task Force.