

Team VFW Walks in a ‘Humbling’ Tribute

For the seventh consecutive year, VFW sponsored the Bataan Memorial Death March in New Mexico

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It was a walk in the desert for more than 6,300 people. The 14.2- or 26.2-mile trek — depending on the route chosen — through the scrub brush and mountains of the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico on March 19 commemorated the 75th anniversary of WWII’s Bataan Death March. While 7,200 registered for the 28th annual Bataan Memorial Death March, only 3,673 finished the marathon.

For the seventh year, VFW was a presenting sponsor. Additionally, the organization was well-represented by Team VFW. VFW Commander-in-Chief Brian Duffy, his son, Andrew; Director of VFW Programs Lynn Rolf; Assistant Quartermaster General John Muckelbauer, his daughter Emily; and Paul Turner and Nate Anderson, of Post 5579 in Gibbstown, N.J., made up the team.

“Our participation in the memorial march was such a humbling way to pay tribute to those who survived in the harshest of conditions and under such brutality, as well as to all those who perished,” Duffy said. “One of the founding tenets of the VFW is our promise to never forget America’s heroes or the price they pay for our freedom. This event gave us that opportunity.”

VFW was represented elsewhere along the route as Team VFW came to realize. Two ROTC units were sponsored by Post 7591 in Madison, Wis., while Post 10789 also had a team. Scott Rowson represented Post 12124 in Meridian, Miss. The Department of New Mexico recruited 105 members into VFW’s ranks during the event.

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This year's marathon saw more than 27,500 pounds of food donated by participants. The food was delivered to area food banks.

April 9 marked the anniversary of the Bataan Death March, when the Japanese army forced some 80,000 American and Filipino troops to march in brutal conditions 65 miles up the Bataan Peninsula. Some 650 Americans died during the march, while nearly 10,000 Filipinos died.

While less than 60 survivors of the 1942 march are still alive, seven attended the memorial march. Among them, 99-year-old Ben Skardon who completed an 8.5-mile portion of the race. This was the 10th year in a row Skardon and his supporters, known as "Ben's Brigade," participated.

"It was the most challenging and, by far, the greatest run I have ever participated in," Muckelbauer said. "The opportunity to meet survivors of the Death March, coupled with all of the amazing volunteers, was really humbling."

New Mexico is the site of the memorial march because it contributed more troops to the Bataan defense effort —more than 1,800 — than any other state. Only 900 men returned home to New Mexico after the war's end.

By [Janie Dyhouse](#), associate editor, *VFW* magazine

Pictured above: Andrew Duffy, Director of VFW Programs Lynn Rolf, VFW Post 5579 member Nate Anderson, VFW Commander-in-Chief Brian Duffy, VFW Post 5579 member Paul Turner, VFW Assistant Quartermaster General John Muckelbauer and his daughter, Emily. Photo by Kim Muckelbauer