

# The Bataan Memorial Death March

*By Captain Shea A. Asis*

Soldiers from the 728th Military Police “Warfighters” Battalion, 8th Military Police Brigade, recently competed against 5,000 others in the 21st Annual Bataan Memorial Death March held near Las Cruces, New Mexico.

The competition consisted of four categories—individual light, individual heavy, team military, and team civilian. Each of the individual categories was further divided by gender and age, and each of the team categories was further divided into male, female, and coed subcategories—each with light and heavy divisions. Participants in light categories and divisions could wear standard distance-running apparel, while participants in heavy categories and divisions were required to carry a rucksack weighing at least 35 pounds. Members of military teams were required to wear Army combat (or other Service-equivalent) uniforms. Five Soldiers from the 728th competed in the coed, heavy division, team military category; the command sergeant major of the 728th competed in the individual heavy category.

The coed team (Master Sergeant Robert Mattson, Sergeant Jesse Kurtz, Sergeant Ashley Ward, and Specialist Ryan White, 13th Military Police Detachment; and Sergeant Kyle Daun, 58th Military Police Company) was the first to cross the finish line in their division, with a time of 6 hours, 21 minutes. Command Sergeant Major Gerald Stegemeier completed the march in 6 hours, 13 minutes, finishing third overall in his category.

The original Bataan Death March acquired its gruesome title when Japanese forces transferred nearly 75,000 American and Filipino prisoners of war between prison camps located along a 60-mile route from Mariveles to Capas, Phillipines, in 1942. Traveling mostly by foot, many of the estimated 54,000 that actually arrived in Capas witnessed the horrific deaths of their comrades at the hands of their captors—or watched them fall victim to natural limitations and causes of death, including dehydration and starvation. A monument to the fallen men of the march has been erected in Las Cruces.

Nine survivors of the original march attended the start of the Bataan Memorial Death March, and their presence provided motivation for the competitors. Additional motivation was provided by wounded warriors and amputees.

The competitors from the 728th collectively agree that the memorial march left them with a better understanding of the actual Bataan Death March, and they resoundingly vow to participate again.

The 22d Annual Bataan Memorial Death March is scheduled for 27 March 2011. Registration details are available at <http://www.bataanmarch.com/r09/reg.htm>.

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