

A March In Honor and Remembrance of American Soldiers - Prescott eNews

Written by Lynne LaMaster

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Pat and Marlin Kuykendall stand below the commemorative statue in Las Cruces.

Marlin Kuykendall is a candidate for Mayor in Prescott, Arizona. But this weekend, he'll be setting aside his campaign hat as he gives honor in a very special way to the soldiers that have kept America safe for all generations.

Marlin Kuykendall and his son, Pat, will leave Friday morning, and drive 500 miles to Las Cruces, New Mexico to participate in the [Bataan Memorial Death March](#) . This event is the 20th annual commemoration of the original Bataan Death March that took place in April, 1942, when American and Filipino troops were surrendered to the Japanese during WWII. It's the only time that American troops have ever been surrendered during a war. (Read the history of the actual [Bataan Death March](#) . Another excellent resource, which goes into more detail, is on the [Battle for Bataan](#) website.)

The Bataan Memorial Death March is a grueling 26.2 mile route, that starts at the White Sands Military Base main post and, "...crosses dusty and hilly desert terrain, circles a small mountain and returns to the main post through sandy desert trails and washes. The elevation ranges from about 4,100 to 5,300 feet," according to the 2007 Bataan Memorial registration book. For those

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who want to participate, but aren't quite up for the 26.2 mile route, there is a 15-mile honorary route.



Marlin looks at his memorabilia from past marches as wife Tana looks on.

This annual event attracts about 4000 participants each year - men and women, soldiers and civilians. It's the third year the Kuykendalls have participated. Pat will take part in the 26.5 mile route, Marlin will travel the 15 mile honorary route.

Marlin explained, "We're going because it's our way of saying thanks to those that were involved in WWII, and the sacrifices that they made so that we can live the way we do today."

"It's just, to be able to spend time with the soldiers, the current soldiers, and the soldiers of the past, the camaraderie, being able to visit with them and thank the current soldiers and also thank the past soldiers, makes it very honoring, very humbling experience," Pat added.

When asked why they are travelling over 500 miles to attend the Bataan Memorial Death March, Marlin looked thoughtful, and replied, "The event is certainly the most patriotic event I've ever attended in my life. And I spent time on active duty, and was commander of the Prescott Unit of the Arizona National Guard, you know, that's how I came to Prescott originally. And of course, Pat retired from the active and the National Guard after 23 years. So, we're just one of those families that believes in thanking people for our past."

Pat nodded, "It's the Bataan Memorial Death March. It's the memorial of the soldiers that died in

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Bataan, but they also remember the soldiers that died in current wars, all the way back. And anytime you can pay a memorial, and just be part of the effort in what everybody's doing... They're all there for a reason. They're doing it because they want to be there."

"There's approximately 4000 participants that they will accept each year," Marlin said. "And I suspect that 75% of that is current military. And they come from all over the United States and overseas to participate in this event. And a lot of young people, particularly ROTC units... this will never be forgotten because this event keeps the memory of Bataan fresh in the mind of young people who will perpetuate this forever. This event will never be forgotten. This is the 20th anniversary this year, and it'll be around as long as time, there's no question about it."



Marlin, left, and Pat, right, stand with one of the remaining survivors of the Bataan Death March.

Marlin spoke about how much the March means to him personally, "What it really means is that these men, 60 years ago, 67 years ago... that they endured things that the average human being would never endure in their life. The cruelty and the brutality and all of the things that went with the march at the surrender. And this is the only time in the history of the United States that an American military unit was surrendered. And the history of this unit, they're still bitter about being surrendered, because they said they'd rather have fought to the end. But it was in our best interests to surrender the unit and at least save the lives of some of them. But, these men are fantastic. They bring in the survivors, wherever they live in the United States. And many of them are in wheelchairs, but they're there at the whole event, the three day event - they're at the starting line and they're there waiting for you at the finish line. So, it's moving."

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Pat reflected on meeting the survivors, "These gentlemen don't understand why 4000 people would go in honor of them to do this. They're very humble, they don't care for the publicity, they're not arrogant, they're just in a state of awe that people would do the same thing in honor of them - very modest, but very appreciative. They love telling their stories, there's no hatred, they're not cussing the Phillipines or the Japanese, or even the Americans. It's very humbling, they're very modest, very sincere gentlemen."

So, do Marlin and Pat worry that younger generations forget to recognize the contributions and sacrifices made by the men and women in our military? Marlin nodded, "I think that's a given, that when things are going well, why we assume that it's always been that way. But, we can never do enough to justify the support that we should be giving our military, no question."

Pat agreed, suggesting, "It's just been overlooked, forgotten. A lot of people, there's so many things going on in the world today. And soldiers don't - all they do is ask for a thank you, or shake their hand, or just acknowledge - it doesn't cost any money to acknowledge a soldier, it doesn't have to be big parades, and fanfare, but just when you see a soldier, you walk up and tell them thank you, or a veteran. And even when you're out on the street and see these gentlemen with Vietnam Veteran hats, or the Navy has hats, or the Air Force has hats, just assume they were probably in the military and say thank you. That's the biggest compliment. That's a good thing."

Last year, three generations of Kuykendalls participated in the 19th annual Bataan Memorial Death March: Marlin, his three sons: Mike, Pat and Ren; and Marlin's grandson, (Mike's son) Drew, who is 14. "I was one of the oldest," Marlin admitted ruefully.

Marlin explained that Gheral Brownlow also planned to attend last year, but passed away before he could come. "We're going this year in memory of Gheral Brownlow," Marlin said. "When I came to Prescott in 1959 as the Commander of the Prescott Unit of the Arizona National Guard, Gheral was my First Sergeant. And, Gheral was planning to attend the Bataan Memorial Death March with us last year, but he died of cancer before he was able to come. So, this year, Pat and I, we're dedicating our march to Gheral."

Editor's Note: You might also be interested in Cathy Tibbetts' account of her participation in the Bataan Memorial Death March, published in the [Running Times](#) .

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From left to right: Ren, Pat, Mike, Drew and Marlin Kuykendall.