

## TYA Takes Part in Bataan Memorial Death March

WW II heroes honored with re-enactment

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Ten cadets from Thunderbird Youth Academy who just returned from taking part in the annual re-enactment of the Bataan Death March. The following cadets (TYA's top 10) are as follows: Samantha Barnes, 16, Bartlesville; Lisa Bingham, 17, Moore; Nicholas Chandlee, 17, Broken Arrow; Corbey Christian, 16, Broken Arrow; Kelcee Cooley, 17, Moore; Benjamin Flores, 17, Tahlequah; Kolton Harper, 16, Norman; Wesley Hartsfield, 17, Coweta; Joshua Hood, 18, Glenpool; and Alexander Nazar, 17, Blanchard.

PRYOR — Ten cadets and six TYA staff returned Tuesday from New Mexico to participate in the annual re-enactment of the Bataan Death March held at Whitesand Missile Range.

Each year thousands of people from around the nation and world meet for this event. The walk follows a 26.2 mile course starting at an elevation of 4100 feet and rising to a height of 5300 feet.

The march honors the special group of World War II heroes who defended the islands of Luzon, Corregidor and Philippine islands and the deadly march they endured to the prison camps of the Japanese.

During the trip TYA visited with the New Mexico Youth Challenge program in Roswell where they stayed and interacted with their cadets and staff.

From there they traveled together to compete with each other at the event. This makes the second time TYA has attended the event. While the event was physically challenging, it was also a fun learning event giving cadets opportunities to learn about other states, teamwork and history.

The Bataan Death March took place during World War II on the island of Bataan in the Philippines. The Japanese took over the island from Allied Forces, and on April 10, 1942, made approximately 75,000 American and Filipino prisoners walk 65 miles through jungles in extreme heat on their way to war camps.

Historically, thousands of soldiers were killed because anyone who fell behind was killed.

According to Heather Arndt, Director of the Oklahoma Military Department's Youth Programs Division, the TYA cadets have chosen to march specifically in remembrance of Elmer Parks, from Elgin, Oklahoma, and all Oklahoma veterans involved in the Bataan Death March.

"The heavy price these heroes paid for our country should be remembered," said Arndt. "Marching in their honor will be a great learning experience for our cadets. Training for and successfully completing a difficult task like this will do great things for their confidence and self worth, and this has already been a great opportunity for them to bond together and learn the value of teamwork."

As part of the Memorial March, initiated in 1989 by the Army ROTC Department at New Mexico State University, TYA cadets marched – in uniform – a distance of 26.2 miles, in teams of five, across the sandy terrain of the White Sands Missile Range with altitudes ranging from near 4,100 feet above sea level to 5,300 feet.

The Thunderbird Youth Academy is a voluntary 22-week program that provides 16 to 18-year-old (male and female) high school dropouts with an opportunity to gain control over their lives by instilling the values, skills, education and self-discipline needed to succeed as adults. The curriculum utilizes military-based training and supervised work experience with core program components including: citizenship, academic excellence, life-coping skills, community service, health and hygiene, job skills training, leadership and "followership," and physical training.

TYA is part of the National Guard Youth Challenge Program, a national effort to transform problem teens into positive and productive citizens. Among other states with similar programs, Oklahoma's Thunderbird Youth Academy is regarded as one of the most successful programs of its kind. Since its inception in 1993, TYA has graduated 2,267; of those, 72 percent have earned their GED, 29 percent have gone on to pursue higher education, and 59 percent have either enlisted in the military or secured jobs in their communities.