

Weekly Teaching

November 11, 2016

On September 23, 2005, Tibor Rubin entered the White House for a special ceremony with the President.

Tibor was born in Hungary in 1929.

When the Nazis invaded Hungary, he and his family were rounded up by the Nazis and taken to concentration camps.

He was just 13 years old.

Tibor was taken to Mauthausen Camp in Austria, where an SS officer told the prisoner, "None of you will ever make it out of here alive."

And many did not.

Before the war was over, both of his parents and one of his sisters were lost in the Holocaust.

Tibor survived the camp for 14 months, long enough to be liberated by U.S. Army troops on May 5, 1945.

The American GIs gave Tibor his first real taste of freedom.

Their compassion for the people in the camp made a deep impression on this teenage survivor; because of them, he made a promise to himself that if he ever made it to America, he would show his appreciation to this great land by enlisting in the United States Army.

Tibor did move to America after the war, and the young immigrant made good on his pledge.

Even though he was not yet a citizen, he volunteered to serve his new nation in uniform, and seven months after taking the oath of a U.S. soldier, he was sent to Korea.

The conditions were brutal, the fighting was intense, and the bitter cold was unrelenting.

And it was in these grueling circumstances that Corporal Rubin impressed his fellow soldiers in the 1st Cavalry Division.

Former Sergeant Randall J.J. Briere wrote in a letter to the President of the United States:

"Although his broken leg was not completely healed, Tibor went about his everyday chores, always helping others who needed a boost, never concerned for his own health or safety. I warned him to be more cautious since the enemy was out in front of us, but when a cry for help was heard, Tibor was the first one on the scene."

Those who served with Tibor speak of him as a soldier of great skill and courage.

One night near the Pusan Perimeter, Corporal Rubin had been assigned to hold a hill that was essential to the 3rd Battalion safe withdrawal.

For 24 hours, this lone rifleman defended the hill against an overwhelming number of North Korean forces.

He inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy, saved the lives of countless soldiers, and gave the unit time to withdraw.

Those who served with Tibor speak of him as a soldier who gladly risked his own life for others.

When Corporal Rubin's battalion found itself ambushed by thousands of Chinese troops, the Americans' firepower soon dwindled to a single machine gun.

The only effective weapon was in an exposed position and three soldiers had already died manning it.

That was when Corporal Rubin stepped forward.

He fought until his ammunition was gone and his heroism helped many of them escape.

He was badly wounded, captured and sent to a POW camp.

The Chinese forced the captured American soldiers, including the wounded and the sick, to march hard and a tedious distance to their prisoner of war camp.

Tibor carried stretchers and assisted others who could not walk.

He consoled the tired soldiers, urging them to continue the march.

The death rate in the prisoner of war camp was running between 30 and 40 men a day.

There were shortages of food, medical attention and medicine.

The soldiers were still wearing their summer clothes with temperatures between 30 and 40 degrees.

So many speak of Tibor's many acts of compassion which helped his fellow GIs survive.

When he was in the camps as a teenager, he had discovered ways to survive the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp, so he would sneak out during the night to steal food from the Chinese.

He would give this food to the other prisoners, especially the sick and dying.

Every time he went out for food, Tibor was risking his life.

Throughout this ordeal he nursed those who were sick back to health, and was known to say the Kaddish prayers for those he buried.

Much later, when his captives realized that Tibor was a Hungarian Citizen, they offered to release him to then Communist Hungary, with the guarantee of a good job and nice clothes and plenty of food. Corporal Rubin refused.

He said, "I was in the U.S. Army, and I wouldn't leave my American brothers because they need me here."

As a Jew and non-citizen serving in uniform, Tibor had experienced prejudice in the Army.

He knew that the America he fought for did not always live up to its highest ideals.

Tibor was a prisoner for two and a half years.

His fellow prisoners credit him with saving 35 to 40 lives with his daring, almost nightly ventures of stealing food for his comrades.

Tibor Rubin and the others were finally released and sent back to the American hospital in Freedom Village, Korea.

He was a stretcher case, suffering from his wounds without complaints.

Tibor Rubin's bravery during the Korean War is part of the great history of America's fighting heroes.

This is why on September 23, 2005, President George Bush presented Tibor with the Congressional medal of Honor, America's highest military honor.

The president noted that many heroes receive their awards and recognition through an action that could take minutes, hours, and even a few days.

Tibor's heroism and bravery was over a two and a half year period, never knowing when he would be caught and executed.

This Veterans' Day, we remember those who have served as Defenders of our Liberty.

In their honor, we pledge ourselves to perform acts of kindness.

We ask God to watch over our brothers and sisters serving in the Armed Forces who are in harm's way.

May they be protected under God's Divine Wings, and brought to God's shelter of Peace.

Amen.

Shabbat Shalom,

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