DAYS OF REMEMBRANCE

Determination, Hope, and Honor

24 Apr – 1 May 2022
Each year, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum leads the nation in commemorating Days of Remembrance.

Established by the U.S. Congress, the week of remembrance is set aside to honor and remember the victims of the Holocaust and their liberators.

Days of Remembrance also raises awareness that the institutions and values of democracy are not sustained passively. They must be actively appreciated, nurtured, and protected.
The Nazis, who came to power in Germany in January 1933, believed that Germans were racially superior and that the Jewish people, deemed inferior, were an alien threat to the German racial community.

Hitler’s “final solution”—now known as the Holocaust—was systematic genocide.

Approximately 6 million Jews and some 5 million others, targeted for racial, political, ideological, and behavioral reasons, died in the Holocaust. More than one million children were killed.
This presentation commemorates the life of Corporal Tibor “Teddy” Rubin, maybe one of the most unlikely Medal of Honor recipients.

A Holocaust survivor, Rubin was an ordinary soldier with an extraordinary sense of duty, responsibility, and dedication to his fellow human beings.
Rubin was born June 18, 1929, in Pásztó, Hungary. In addition to his mother and father, Rubin had three sisters, Irene, Edith and Ilonka, an older brother, Emery, and a half-brother, Miklos. Like other Jewish families, the Rubins faced increasing danger as fascism rose in Europe.

In 1944, with news spreading that German Gestapo were arresting Hungarian Jews, Tibor’s parents decided to send him, then 13 years old, to Switzerland via Italy.
Accompanied by Polish men, who were on the run from the Nazis, Rubin began the trek to Switzerland. During their two week journey, the entire Jewish community was removed from Pásztó.

Rubin’s group was captured near the border of Italy and Switzerland.

Rubin was deported to Mauthausen concentration camp, and, though his brother Emery was also there, it was months before the brothers were reunited.
Early in 1945, the prisoners heard bombers overhead, and rumors spread that Allied troops were advancing. In May, the U.S. Army’s 11th Armored Division, commanded by General George S. Patton, arrived at Mauthausen.

15-year-old Rubin was skeletally thin and barely conscious when American troops liberated the camp. He credited Army medics for saving his life and the lives of other survivors.

It is estimated between 119,000 and 195,000 people died in Mauthausen and its associated camps.
Rubin spent three years in a displaced persons camp in Pocking, Germany. Desperate to go to America, he was initially turned down by the U.S. consulate due to the low immigration quota for Hungarians. Finally, in 1948, he was admitted as a refugee.

His first job was in a slaughterhouse in New York City. But, he had another career in mind: he wanted to become a “GI Joe.”

“You aren’t a citizen. You can’t read English. You hardly speak it,” said a friend. Rubin replied, “Ever since the Army saved me from the Nazis, I promised myself to pay them back.”
Rubin twice failed the U.S. Army entrance examination because of the language barrier. In 1949, he tried again. With “help” from fellow test takers, he passed the exam and enlisted in the Army.

He went through basic training in the United States and advanced infantry training in Japan. There he met Master Sergeant Arthur Peyton. Peyton would forever change his life.

“The day he introduced himself, Peyton made it known that he had no use for minorities, and Jews in particular,” recalled Rubin.
By July 1950, Rubin was fighting in South Korea with I Company, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division.

According to extensive affidavits submitted by men who served with him in Korea, Peyton continually ‘volunteered’ Rubin for the most dangerous patrols.

Daniel Cohen, author of Single-Handed, wrote, “The master sergeant repeatedly called on Tibor to scout the enemy, check the rear line for infiltrators, patrol forward lines, and stand guard over the company vehicles. Tibor soon grew accustomed to the sound of Peyton hollering, ‘Get me that f-ing Jew!’”
According to fellow soldiers, Rubin secured a route of retreat for his company by single-handedly defending a hill for 24 hours against waves of North Korean soldiers.

He was recommended for the Medal of Honor by his commanding officers. The officers were killed in action shortly afterwards, but not before ordering Peyton to begin the paperwork recommending Rubin for the Medal of Honor.

“I really believe, in my heart, that [the sergeant] would have jeopardized his own safety rather than assist in any way whatsoever in the awarding of the Medal of Honor to a person of Jewish descent,” wrote Corporal Harold Speakman in his notarized affidavit.
CAPTURE

On November 2, 1950, a wounded Rubin was captured by the Chinese.

He refused his captors’ offers for repatriation to Hungary, which was by then, behind the Iron Curtain. Instead, he chose to remain in the prison camp with his fellow soldiers.

Almost immediately, he began sneaking out of the camp at night in search of food. The fear of torture or death did not prevent him from breaking into enemy food storehouses and gardens. Additionally, he used the skills he learned at Mauthausen to save a man from gangrene by using maggots to clean the wound, showed men how to combat lice, and rallied their spirits.
In 1953, after 30 months of imprisonment, Rubin and his fellow prisoners were freed. At 24-years-old, Rubin had spent nearly four years of his life surviving in inhumane camp conditions in Germany and Korea.

He is credited with keeping more than 40 American POW’s alive.
In 1993, the Army investigated cases where discrimination may have negatively impacted various military decorations. In 2001, Congress directed further investigations. On September 23, 2005, President George W. Bush presented the Medal of Honor to Rubin in a ceremony at the White House.

President Bush said, “He saved the lives of hundreds of his fellow soldiers. In the heat of battle, he inspired his comrades with his fearlessness. And amid the inhumanity of a Chinese prisoner of war camp, he gave them hope. Some of those soldiers are here today, and they have never forgotten what they owe this man... the United States acknowledges a debt that time has not diminished.”
Rubin later said, after his ceremony, “Yesterday I was just a schmuck. Today they call me ‘Sir.’ I wasn’t born here, I wasn’t a citizen, I just was a little Jew coming back from the most terrible place and to get the Medal of Honor, that’s a big thing. I never knew that I was gonna be a super Jew.”
During his life, Rubin volunteered over 20,000 hours at the Veterans Affairs hospital in Long Beach, California.

In 2015, at the age of 86, he passed away.

Congressman Alan Lowenthal introduced legislation to rename the Long Beach V.A. Medical Center after Rubin. President Barack Obama signed it into law in December 2016.

Lowenthal said during the ceremony, “He was a hero in every aspect. He was brave. He was selfless. He was intimately concerned about the wellbeing of those around.”
“I always wanted to become a citizen of the United States, and when I became a citizen it was one of the happiest days in my life. I think about the United States and I am a lucky person to live here. When I came to America, it was the first time I was free…”

Tibor Rubin lived through unbelievable hardship, overcoming racial persecution and discrimination to personify some of the greatest American virtues: Determination, Hope, and Honor.

“When you save a life, you save maybe a nation. Who knows who he become?”
End

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