

Veterans at Fresno VA hospital receive POW medals

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This is the medal presented to four ex-POWs during a ceremony honoring them at the Fresno VA hospital on Feb. 2, 2015.

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- Monday's Prisoner of War Medal honorees
 - **Sgt. Jennings Brown**, gunner and cameraman in Army Air Corps. Imprisoned for nine months in Germany.
 - **Staff Sgt. Thomas W. Richardson**, tail gunner in Army Air Corps. Imprisoned for nine months in Germany.
 - **Senior Master Sgt. Wild Bill Begley**, served in the Air Force. Imprisoned for 3 1/2 years in the Philippines and Manchuria.
 - **Sgt. George Dillard**, ball turret gunner in Army Air Corps. Imprisoned for 2 1/2 years in Poland and Bavaria.

September Prisoner of War Medal honorees

- **Master Sgt. Vern Schmidt**, served with Army unit that liberated his brother from Stalag 9-B on April 21, 1945.
- **Sgt. Earl Miles**, infantryman captured by Germans in October 1944. Liberated April 25, 1944, by Russians.
- **Navigator Frank Hokr**, served in the Army Air Corps, shot down December 1944 over the Czech Republic. Liberated May 1, 1945, by Ukrainian Army.
- **Staff Sgt. Rudy Giannoni**, gunner in Army Air Corps, shot down June 1944 over Germany. Liberated by British after a forced march of 600 miles.
- **Staff Sgt. Toby Dillard**, gunner in Army Air Corps, shot down in December 1942. Liberated April 1945.
- **Capt. Gerry Eckenrod**, Army infantry officer, captured in Europe December 1944. Liberated by British on May 12, 1945.
- **Capt. Ed Daves**, Army Air Corps pilot shot down September 1944. Liberated May 1, 1945.



- **Joe Ochinero**, Army infantryman captured by Germans July 1944. Liberated by 104th Infantry Division, April 13, 1945.
- **Charles McMullen**, Army infantryman captured December 1944 during Battle of the Bulge. Liberated by Russians May 1, 1945.
- **Frank J. Creede, Jr.**, Army infantryman captured December 1944 during Battle of the Bulge. Liberated by American forces April 2, 1945.
- **Pfc. Pasqual Reyes**, Army infantryman, captured by Germans September 1944. Liberated May 2, 1945.
- **Jack Schwartz**, U.S. Navy, captured December 1941 in South Pacific. Liberated Aug. 29, 1945.
- **Cpl. Samuel Banuelos**, Army infantryman, captured in Korea by Chinese forces, winter 1950. Set free August 1953.
- **Sgt. Maj. Joel Hinojosa**, Marine Corps, captured Thanksgiving day 1950 in Korea. Set free August 1953.
- **Cpl. Kenneth Eaton**, Army infantryman, captured October 1950 in Korea. Set free August 1953
- **Chief Master Sgt. Jim Gough**, Air Force gunner, shot down December 1972 over North Vietnam. Released to U.S. forces March 1973.

Wild Bill Begley has seen and endured things no one should.

Begley, who served as a senior master sergeant in the Air Force from 1941 to 1961, was a prisoner of war during World War II after his plane was shot down. He is also a survivor of the 60-mile Bataan Death March in the Philippines, where thousands of Filipino and American soldiers were forced to march to Japanese prison camps.

Many were denied food and water along the way. Those who collapsed were killed.

Begley, 93, saw soldiers beheaded. He was tortured, beaten unconscious and used for slave labor. He survived on watery soup, snakes, lizards and monkeys.

“It was a horrible planet at that time,” said Begley’s wife, Lenora.

Now, 70 years after Begley was liberated, he and three other veterans who live at the [Veterans Affairs Medical Center Fresno](#) were finally recognized for their time as prisoners of war.

The [Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3225](#) in Clovis and the hospital organized a short ceremony Monday morning to present Prisoner of War medals to the four men.

The other honorees were: Sgt. Jennings Brown, Sgt. George Dillard and Staff Sgt. Thomas W. Richardson.

“It’s past due,” Lenora Begley said. “He deserves it.”

The VFW held a similar ceremony at the [Clovis Veterans Memorial District](#) in September honoring more than a handful of veterans who were prisoners. When members learned that four more men were living at the hospital, the group organized a way to honor them, said post commander August Flach III.

“It’s a special privilege for us to honor them,” Flach said. “I can’t even imagine what they endured.”

Brown, 92, was imprisoned for nine months in the Stalag Luft IV and Stalag Luft I camps in Germany, where he was beaten and tortured.

Brown was a gunner and cameraman on bombers in the Army Air Corps. He was shot down in 1944 over the Black

Forest in southwestern Germany and parachuted out with his crew. Brown avoided capture for 26 days, living on water from streams and raw vegetables and fruit.

“We’re very honored,” said his daughter, Lin Brown, to have him “recognized for his sacrifice.”

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