

Tibor Rubín: An Evening of Remembrance

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Tibor Rubín, left, speaks about his story with Sanford Cohen. Veterans and local dignitaries, Jews and non-Jews, men and women, young and old - all who came to the Yavapai College Performance Hall last night left with a new perspective on life and blessings after hearing Tibor Rubín speak.

Tibor Rubín is the only Holocaust survivor to ever receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. But his journey to the White House Medal of Honor ceremony began many, many years ago, when at the age of 14, he was captured and placed in a Nazi concentration camp during WWII. As a youth, he watched the world of his family turn upside down, simply because they were Jewish. Upon arrival at Auschwitz, Rubín's mother chose to go with his 10-year-old sister to the death house because she did not want to leave her daughter to go alone. Rubín ended up in Mauthausen in Austria. He was greeted by a Nazi officer who said, "You Jews are all going to die here."

Rubín spoke of how the other prisoners became just sacks of bones as the war raged on. But, when the camp was liberated by soldiers from the American Army, Rubín was struck by their kindness and compassion. These battle-hardened soldiers who showed deep sympathy and concern to the teen-aged boy became his example, and he determined to repay them by moving to the United States, joining the Army and becoming a "G.I. Joe".

Once in New York, he tried to enlist in the Army, but his lack of English proficiency kept him from passing the test. A second test didn't have any better results. Finally, after moving west to Oakland, California, he tried to enlist again. He told his story to two other men while waiting in line to take the test. They were so moved by his story that they offered to let him surreptitiously look at their answers. Imagine his surprise when he was congratulated for having the best score in the group.

Rubín described himself as "not a too bad soldier" who started out in the 1st Cavalry division. As the conflict in Korea began, he distinguished himself first in the withdrawal to Pusan. He was left behind to perform a rear guard action, while other soldiers were ordered to withdraw. Moving from foxhole to foxhole and firing different weapons to give the North Koreans the impression that unit was still there, he fought on, killing a staggering number of enemy soldiers. Through his bravery, the eighth cavalry regiment was able to withdraw safely to the infamous Pusan perimeter.

After the breakout following the United Nations landings at Inchon the North Koreans were called on by General MacArthur to lay down their arms. When out on a lone patrol he stumbled on three North Korean officers. Thinking fast, he told them he had been sent out to accept their surrender. Several hundred North Korean Army Soldiers followed.

When the Chinese Army were ordered to drive the Americans out of Korea, Rubin jumped in to man a machine gun position whose three man crew had been killed. He fought on until he was injured and captured.

Tibor was again locked up in a camp, but this time, with fellow soldiers who counted on him for their strength. Rubin said that whenever they would ask him for help they would say, "You're a Jew, and you Jews know everything." He helped keep his fellow soldiers alive by stealing vegetables from the Chinese guards' garden. At one point, Rubin stole goat manure, and told a dying soldier that the pellets were medicine and not to give up hope. Remarkably, the soldier's health improved. When the Koreans discovered he was from Hungary (another Communist country), they offered to send him there to get medical care, if he would renounce the United States. He refused, insisting on staying with his U.S. Army 'brothers'.

Recommended by two of his commanding officers for the Medal of Honor three times in addition to many other awards, the paperwork was not sent in by his anti-Semitic First Sergeant. All three of them were later killed in action.

When Rubin went to the White House, he explained that when he walked up the platform to receive the Medal of Honor he followed behind the President, but when he came down the President followed him.

Rubin listed the men who had tried to kill him, Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Kim Il-sung, and then said with a little smile, "But I am still here."

Rubin closed the evening as he said, "One thing I want to leave with you. I was in the Armed Service and I did my best. And I am a very lucky man, because I live in the United States and I know it. So all of us here, even if sometimes there is a problem, it is still the best country."

Editor's Note: Tibor Rubin was here as part of the Days of Remembrance Event, sponsored by Helken and Horn Advertising Agency , KPPV , KDDL, KQNA , Yavapai College and Foundation , Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Prescott , Temple B'rith Shalom, Jewish Student Association of Embry Riddle Aeronautical University , Jewish Community of Sedona & The Verde Valley .