

Gone but not forgotten WWII Tanker finally awarded Bronze Star

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HARRODSBURG — John Sadler was part of the famed 192nd Tank Battalion, Company D, of the Kentucky National Guard from Harrodsburg that was overrun by Japanese soldiers on the Bataan peninsula of the Philippines not long after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, but he didn't actually endure the infamously brutal Bataan Death March.

While other Tankers surrendered on Bataan, Sadler escaped to the nearby island of Corregidor, where he was eventually captured. He spent three and a half years as a prisoner of war. He survived malaria, beriberi and near starvation. A guard chopped his finger off. He was shot through both legs. He was freed not long after

"The morning we dropped the atomic bomb, we were in the mess hall. It sounded like an earthquake. We saw an awful toadstool across the bay, towering up 400 or 500 feet. An old Jap told me that the Americans had a new weapon and it wouldn't be long before we were going home.

The bomb area was off limits, but some of us wanted to see what the bomb had done. We walked out in our Japanese clothes with our faces browned. Nobody stopped us. We saw rail cars laying five or six blocks from the tracks. You could pick up iron pipes and break them in two. Rocks would crumble into powder in your hands. Where people had been sitting, without falling over, there were just carcasses with all the meat gone from the bones."

— Staff Sgt. John E. Sadler, quoted in a 1961 Courier-Journal Magazine article about survivors of the Bataan Death March.

witnessing the bomb drop on Nagasaki. He received 100 percent disability compensation.

Sadler died in 1968 at age 54 of complications from emphysema and other conditions re-

sulting from his time as a POW.

For his service, Sadler received a Purple Heart and a handful of lesser medals,



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Jimbo Sadler of Harrodsburg will soon have to make room for a Bronze Star and two more Purple Hearts in his collection of his father's medals.

See SADLER, on A8

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SADLER, from A1

which his son, Jimbo Sadler, proudly keeps in a frame in his Harrodsburg home along with other memorabilia and documentation from his father's military career.

That collection is not yet complete, however. Sometime in the near future John Sadler will be further decorated with a Bronze Star and two additional Purple Hearts.

It was on Oct. 15 of this year — 70 years after his father's military career ended and 47 years after his death — that Jimbo Sadler received official certification from the Secretary of the Army that his father would be awarded those most distinguished medals in an official ceremony at a date yet to be determined.

"My dad is my hero," Sadler said last week. "I love him heart and soul."

Securing those posthumous medals for his father was no small task. Sadler began working on the project in 2008, after watching the debut of a film on the Tankers'

story, "A Time for Courage; A Time for Heroes," at Centre College's Norton Center for the Arts. His dad's name was in the program, but it was there that he learned John Sadler was never awarded a Bronze Star like his fellow Harrodsburg tankers.

Sadler began collecting artifacts of his father's time in the military. He paid \$30 for a copy of a 1942 issue of Life magazine that contained a picture of John Sadler asleep on a train that had departed Fort Knox at the beginning of his journey to the Philippines. He gathered more of his father's history but could never penetrate the bureaucracy of the U.S. Army to find out why his father never received a Bronze star.

A year ago, a frustrated Sadler contacted Carroll Boatwright at American Legion Post 46 in Danville. Boatwright, a Vietnam veteran who serves as the post's adjutant and financial officer, knew a bit about navigating the Army's red tape.

"When I saw what he

had, I thought there was a good chance of this working out," Boatwright said.

Boatwright discovered the Army had made a rare decision to award Bronze Stars to all of the Tankers.

"The Bronze Star is a big deal," Boatwright said. "It was unusual for it to be given to an entire unit."

The survivors or surviving family members were contacted, and a big-time military medal ceremony was held in their honor in Harrodsburg in 1984. But John Sadler's survivors never got word.

"He was dead and all of his family had dispersed," Boatwright said.

Though Boatwright was armed with sufficient documentation of John Sadler's heroic service record, it was still difficult to convince powers that be in the Army that he had a Bronze Star and additional Purple Hearts coming to him.

Boatwright eventually made contact with Heather French Henry,

the state Commissioner of Military Affairs, and the Secretary of the Army, John McHugh, and finally got John Sadler the official recognition he deserved. It took a full year.

"It's tough," he explained. "There's a lot of people out there who try to falsely claim medals they didn't earn."

Sadler said his father never would have been fully honored for his service had it not been for Boatwright's hard work and perseverance.

Sadler found himself at a loss for words in trying to explain how much the medals mean to him now, even though they were earned by his father 70 years ago. Boatwright helped him out.

"World War II is called the greatest generation, and your dad was part of it. You should be proud. He deserves this."

Sadler replied, "It just means something to me I can't explain. My youngest son Christopher said that when I die he wants all this stuff, so it must mean something to him, too."



Staff Sgt. John E. Sadler was captured by the Japanese while serving with Company D, 192nd Tank Battalion, of the Kentucky National Guard and survived three and half years as a prisoner of war.

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