



**Dear**

Please add your support to **H.R. 906 and S. 743** seeking to award the **Congressional Gold Medal to WW II Merrill's Marauders**, an "expendable," top-secret, commando unit of presidential volunteers, for their heroism, sacrifice and success in the "forgotten" theater of WW II, the China Burma India Theater. "Magnificent" is how some writers have described them.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill decided at the August 1943 Quebec Conference to form a secret American volunteer long-range penetration unit of three battalions assigned to the British to fight behind enemy lines in Burma. The volunteers would not be told their objective or destination. Gen. George C. Marshall, then Army chief of staff, later said the mission against "large numbers of the enemy with few resources was unmatched in any theater."

Almost 3,000 men rallied to the President's call and volunteered from the jungles of Panama and Trinidad, Guadalcanal, New Guinea, New Georgia, Vella Lavella and the United States. They hailed from every state plus the Territory of Hawaii. There were 15 ethnic groups and a Native American code talker. The oldest was a WW I veteran of the Canadian Black Watch Highlanders. One of the youngest was 14 when he enlisted. Another escaped the Bataan Death March and sailed 3,200 miles across the Pacific Ocean in a stolen boat to Australia before volunteering for the mission expecting no survivors. One of the 14 Japanese American interpreters, or Nisei, in the unit helped capture the United States' first POW December 8, 1941, the day after Pearl Harbor. The Office of Strategic Services was represented. Several were survivors, sworn to secrecy, from the HMT Rohna sinking.

Code-named Galahad, the unit didn't even have a name when arriving Oct. 29, 1943, in Bombay, India. Under command of Britain's Lord Louis Mountbatten, the men trained with Maj. Gen. Orde Wingate's Chindits before assignment to American Lt. Gen. Joseph Stilwell. On Jan. 1, 1944, they became the 5307<sup>th</sup> Composite Unit Provisional, later called Merrill's Marauders after Brig. Gen. Frank D. Merrill, their commander. Carrying only what they could pack on their backs or mules, they defeated the much larger and better equipped elite Japanese 18<sup>th</sup> Division in five major battles and 30 minor engagements. They were the first American troops to fight the Japanese on land in Asia, and the first Americans to fight there since the 1900 Boxer Rebellion. Denied an American flag and set of colors to carry into battle, they adopted the tiny P-38 can opener that came with C rations as their insignia. Supply drops from C-47 airplanes kept them alive. Small stripped down Piper Cubs evacuated the wounded from jungle clearings. There were no mechanized vehicles. They made military history by walking farther - almost 1,000 miles - than any other WW II fighting unit.

Malaria, mite typhus, dysentery, monsoons, isolation and other jungle maladies plagued them. After men and mules climbed the 6,100-foot Naura Hkyat pass in Burma's Kumon mountains, only several hundred skeletal-looking and disease-ridden men from the remaining Merrill's Marauders were fit enough to seize their objective, north Burma's critical Myitkyina airstrip. Supplies and men could then be flown in to connect the Burma and Ledo roads so a crucial land route could be forged into China. Slightly more than 100 out of the almost 3,000 original volunteers remained in Burma when the unit dissolved Aug. 10, 1944, without even a formation.

No other WW II American combat force except the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division which took and held Guadalcanal for four months had as much uninterrupted jungle fighting as Merrill's Marauders. Their legacy continues to be honored by members of the 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regiment who wear the unauthorized Merrill's Marauder patch as their crest. Camp Frank D. Merrill, where the mountain phase of Ranger training is conducted, is named in honor of their commander. Today, 99.99 percent of Americans probably don't even know the China Burma India Theater existed and are unaware of the brave Merrill's Marauders who fought there. Please help honor Merrill's Marauders for their courage and resilience. The hardiness of these heroic "expendable" volunteers has resulted in one Merrill's Marauder living to 102 years old, two reaching 101 and two more living to 100.

**THANK YOU** – your name & address