

## **H4W™ team member completes Bataan Memorial Death March**

*Army Major and the medic who saved his life cross the finish line together*

By Carole Turner

When Army Maj. A.J. Tong's convoy was struck by an IED in August 2007 in Baghdad, Army Medic Adam Schwartz was the first responder at the scene. It was touch and go for a while, says Schwartz. He wasn't sure Tong would make it, but he did. Today, thanks to the sponsorship of Hope for the Warriors™, the two men have another memory to share besides that day in Baghdad.

Now a single-leg amputee and member of Team Hope for the Warriors™, Tong completed the 26.2 mile Bataan Memorial Death March at the White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico, on March 29, 2009. And he completed it with Schwartz again at his side.

"It was important to me to do this with him. I wouldn't be here today without him," says Tong of Schwartz. According to Tong, Schwartz is the hero that saved his life and still walks by his side, encouraging and motivating him.

Schwartz says the real hero is Tong, now training for marathons and acting as an advocate and role model for other injured service members. "He has come a long way. It was satisfying to see him complete this march," says Schwartz.

It took them 12 hours and 37 minutes—half a day of plodding through heavy sand and up steep inclines. By mile 12 it was just the two of them and the landscape. Tong, who completed last year's Marine Corp Marathon on a hand-cycle, said that a marathon is a "cakewalk" compared to this event.

The Bataan Memorial Death March began in 1989 as a tribute to the soldiers and Marines who crossed the Bataan peninsula during World War II. Today more than 5,000 military and civilians take on the challenge, hiking through sand and rough terrain at elevations up to 5,300 ft. Categories include civilian, military and military heavy—a special category for active duty military in full combat gear and carrying 35lb packs.

This was Tong's second attempt at the Bataan March in the military light category. In 2008, just four months after receiving his prosthetic, Tong entered only to be pulled out by race officials at mile 24. "My stump was really bothering me. I couldn't wear my prosthetic for a week and a half after the race," says Tong.

Tong was especially moved by the other heroes at the event—the survivors of the real Bataan Death March across the Phillipines during World War II. The day begins with a ceremony and roll call in their honor. "It was an honor to meet the survivors," says Tong. "There is a brotherhood across generations of wounded warriors. They want to make sure we don't go through what they did. It's a big help and a big motivator to see them."

Hope for the Warriors™ sponsored both Tong and Schwartz, paying for all of their travel and entry expenses. “I wouldn’t be as active as I am without Hope for the Warriors™,” says Tong. “They do a great job of making it happen for us.”

Another Hope for the Warriors™ team member, Matthew Bradford, also attended the March, completing 10 of the 15 miles of the shorter, “Honorary” event. Bradford, who lost his vision and both legs, hopes to return next year to complete the full 15 miles.

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*Hope For The Warriors™ is a national, non-profit group actively seeking to ensure that the sacrifices of wounded and fallen warriors and their families are never forgotten nor their needs unmet, particularly with regard to the short and long-term care of the severely injured. For more information, visit their website at [www.hopeforthewarriors.org](http://www.hopeforthewarriors.org).*