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UCSB Surfrider Battalion honors US and Filipino POWs with competitive finish at Bataan Memorial Death March

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Besting more than 30 teams from across the country, UC Santa Barbara's Army ROTC Surfrider Battalion finished in fifth place at this year's Bataan Memorial Death March, a marathon-length race honoring tens of thousands of U.S. and Filipino soldiers captured by the Japanese at the Battle of Bataan during World War II.

Marching in boots and carrying 35-pound rucksacks, a Surfrider Battalion team of five finished the 26.2-mile race in six hours and nine minutes, 55 minutes behind the winning team from Norwich University.

"We trained since the fall to prepare, rain or shine," said UCSB third-year history major Francisco Romero, who credited the team's competitive finish to their "grit and determination." Romero's teammates were Karsen Flom, Alec Garcia, Mark Marino and Daniel Park.

Held at White Sands Missile Range, a U.S. Army military testing site in New Mexico, the annual event commemorates casualties and survivors of the brutal 65-mile forced march of U.S. and Filipino captives as they were moved to prison camps starting on April 9, 1942.

On the same day as the White Sands race, Surfrider Battalion also dispatched a 10-student virtual Bataan team (Jordan Juceam, Will King, Yevgeny Beams, Nicholas Gandolfo, Min Kim, Mark Cullen, Lia Kubitscheck, Johnathan Saenz, James Zhen and Amgad Hawari) to march Refugio Road, which begins at sea level roughly 15 miles east of the UCSB campus. That team climbed 13 miles, covering more than 4,000 feet in elevation before reaching their turnaround point; their march was supported by fellow cadets positioned at snack and water checkpoints along the route.

“By competing in these marches at White Sands and Refugio, we aim to honor those soldiers who came before and those who serve today,” Romero said.

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