

A tribute to an American Hero – Juan 'Skip' Torres

FAIRFAX, Va., May 25, 2020 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – Dr. Juan Manuel Torres of Pine Island, Fla. – a decorated Korean and Vietnam veteran – passed away last week at the age of 86-years-old after a courageous battle with cancer and pneumonia, the Family of Juan Manuel Torres announced. With his passing, America lost a true patriot and American hero who was one of the last surviving members of Task Force Smith from the Battle of Osan – America's first entry into the Korean conflict.

Korea Hero, Discharged At 16, Can't Wait to Rejoin

By VINCENT D. AUSTIN

A Korean combat veteran, wounded, captured, beaten and released by the Reds then discharged as under-age, was today awaiting completion of the paper work that will bring him into the Army again—legally this time.

Juan Torres Jr., 17, of 1353 Intervale Av., The Bronx, expects to be in khaki in about 10 days, because, he says, "the Army's the life."

Torres entered the service at 15 years of age in March, 1949, with a "doctored" birth certificate. He was with the first American troops in Korea, hitting the beach on July 3. The boy G.I. foot-slogged with the 21st Infantry Reg. of the 24th Division until he was escorted out of the war zone by four burly M.P.'s in October of 1950.

Captured by Reds

During his period of combat, Torres was wounded by hand-grenade shrapnel. Then, late in August of last year—he couldn't remember the date—the Korean Reds overran his outfit's position while he was attempting to aid a wounded Negro G.I.

"I guess it was somewhere on the Eastern Front," he said. "I can't even remember the towns. But the Reds captured us and gave us a pretty rough time for three days."

Torres said the North Koreans at first refused to treat the wounded soldier, but finally they gave him some bandages for the injuries.

Continued on Page 14



JUAN TORRES JR.
Korean Vet With Trophies

PHOTO CAPTION: Found to be underage, Skip Torres was discharged after being wounded in combat and allowed to join the U.S. Air Force after recovery – New

York Post 1951.

Dr. Torres, who was born in Arecibo, P.R. and raised in the Bronx, N.Y., joined the U.S. Army in 1949 at the young age of fifteen by "revising" his birth certificate. He was immediately deployed to Korea where he was assigned to the 21st Regiment of the 24th Infantry Division and placed directly into combat against aggressing North Korean and Chinese troops. Outnumbered five to one, his unit suffered heavy casualties. In another battle in Korea, he was captured and beaten, but later escaped while being marched to a prisoner detention facility. After Dr. Torres' squad leader was killed, he was given a field promotion to Corporal.

While in a foxhole during one battle in Korea, his buddies affectionately called him "Skip," which is a name he kept for the rest of his life.

Skip was discharged and returned from Korea to New York after the Army discovered he was only 16-years-old. He was later allowed to enlist in the U.S. Air Force as an Air Policeman (now called USAF Security Forces) where he spent the next 20-plus years, including a one-year tour in Vietnam during the height of the conflict.

While in Vietnam, he was promoted to Technical Sergeant (TSgt) where he led the USAF Security Forces at Bien Hoa Air Base and protected U.S. jet fighters and bombers during the "Tet Offensive" when 100,000 Viet Cong attacked U.S. personnel and facilities, including the air base at Bien Hoa. TSgt Torres was injured during the battle while extracting U.S. troops from a burning Armored Personnel Carrier (APC), but declined any awards saying: "It was just my duty." Skip received the Purple Heart medal for injuries he sustained from gunshot and shrapnel wounds while in combat against the North Koreans and Chinese. He was also awarded numerous additional U.S. Army and Air Force distinctions, such as the Combat Infantryman's Badge (CIB) and the U.S. Air Force Commendation Medal.



JUAN MANUEL TORRES - VIETNAM

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After retiring from the U.S. armed forces, Skip was recruited by the U.S. Marshals Service as a Deputy U.S. Marshal and was later promoted to Chief Deputy U.S. Marshal where he led key task forces against drug cartels and mafias in the southeast and northeast regions of the United States. He was once again injured during a standoff between U.S. Marshals and armed mafia assailants.

After retiring from the U.S. Marshals Service, Skip earned a PhD in theology and became an ordained minister where he faithfully served his community for the remainder of his life. He personally delivered meals to feed the homeless on a weekly basis throughout central and south Florida and donated most of his U.S. military and government retirement pay to charitable organizations worldwide.