

World War II POW Veteran Sgt. Vincent Rowles Has Big Day As Grand Marshal Of Race Event

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(Photos by Michael Allio and J.R. Compton)

MADISON - On Sunday, World War II POW veteran Sgt. Vincent Rowles served as grand marshal for the NHRA Camping World Drag Racing Series Midwest Nationals at World Wide Technology Raceway in Madison and is a day he will not ever forget.

Sgt. Rolves on stage during pre-race ceremonies and when 16-time NHRA Funny Car world champion John Force takes time to speak with Sgt. Rolves during pre-race ceremonies.



Wilbert Vincent “Vince” Rolves was born in Albers, Illinois, in 1924. The 98-year-old resident of Carlyle, Illinois is one of the last living WW II prisoners of war in Southern Illinois. Rolves was drafted into military service in 1942. After 13 weeks of basic training, he was assigned to the U.S. Army’s 45th Infantry Division and shipped overseas to the North African region of the European Theater.

In December of 1943, Rolves was shot and wounded during a battle in L’Aquila, a mountainous region in central Italy. He and his fellow soldiers were captured by German troops and endured a 45-day march to a prison camp. They survived the march on rations of only three potatoes per day and a slice of what is referred to as “black bread,” a concoction of most unappetizing ingredients.

At Stalag 13 in Hammelburg, Germany, the American POWs were forced into hard labor under unimaginable conditions. For the next 18 months, Rolves and his men toiled under the threat of death while subjected to a bitter, icy environment and extreme malnutrition. Rolves, who also tended the camp’s farm animals and milked the cows, lost 83 lbs. during his imprisonment.

Near the end of the war (June 1945), invading Russian forces liberated the prison camp.

His decorated military career is marked by a passionate perseverance through dire circumstances. He was honored for his sacrifices with a Silver Star, a Bronze Star, a Purple Heart, and a Prisoner of War Medal.

“There was plenty of times I didn’t think I’d make it back to the good old USA,” said the decorated WW II veteran. “But thank God, I made it.”

Rolves returned to Illinois after the war and eventually settled in Carlyle. He married his wife, the former Loretta Hilda Thouvenin, in 1946. He opened a trucking business, and later transitioned to a position that he held for 30 years as a government employee within Scott Air Force Base.