

## Episode 8 – Boys of the Cave

[Radio scanning stations, crackles into doowop rendition of the hymn “Rock of Ages,” and continues to play in the background.]

INTRO: Hello, everyone! Welcome to this episode of Rock of Ages. Rock of Ages will take on a different form as we all adapt to the challenges of this year. This project has been made possible by the diligent work, research, time, and vocal talents of the interpretive staff at Carlsbad Caverns National Park. On this episode, we tackle a story of sacrifice. We are honored to tell the story of these individuals and their connection to Carlsbad Cavern. Stay with us as we engage with our park’s history.

[Music fades to silence.]

NARRATOR: August 12, 1941. Fourteen hundred and twenty officers and men of the 200th Coast Artillery visit Carlsbad Caverns National Park, days before being shipped to the Pacific theater of World War II. Seven of those young men—boys, really—have strong ties to the park. Some are the sons of employees and early explorers, while some served as National Park Service Rangers prior to enlistment. Each youth is fresh-faced, ready for adventure and to take on the world!

Dwayne and Eugene Davis are proud members of this small group of seven known as “The Cavern Boys.” They are the sons of famous photographer Ray V. Davis, who took the first photos of Carlsbad Cavern. Ray used funds from his own pockets to introduce the cavern’s grandeur to the world. The boys spent a lot of time in this underground world exploring and assisting their father in capturing the awe-inspiring images. The Davis Brothers have parted company from the other five members of the Cavern Boys to experience the cavern one last time as just brothers, delighted in reliving their youthful escapades.

[Water drips in the background. Voices echo in the cavern chamber.]

DWAYNE: Gosh, Gene. I’m so glad they included the cave on our farewell tour. We have seen a lot of great sites in our state, but we are lucky that home is our last stop.

EUGENE: It sure is swell to see the cavern one last time, Dwayne. Our last stop before shipping out! We get to spend our final days seeing home, and share it with the other Cavern Boys, too! Never thought I’d say it, but I’m gonna miss this place.

DWAYNE: Lots of memories down here. . . . [Breathes a heavy sigh.]

EUGENE: I remember Dad dragging us out here and making us lug around his bulky camera equipment.

DWAYNE: [Animated.] The great photographer Ray V. Davis trudging down into the unknown with hundreds of pounds of camera equipment on his back, just to bring back the first photos of Carlsbad Cavern.

EUGENE: [Soft chuckle.] Yeah, hundreds of pounds of equipment and two rambunctious boys! We must have been more of a handful than a help.

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DWAYNE: Remember when we tried to get through that crack in the wall and you got stuck? Dad had to pull you out by your belt?

[Both laugh.]

EUGENE: Hmph. “We?” I remember you telling me to go first and assuring me I could fit, no problem! [Mockingly.] “It opens up on the other side!”

DWAYNE: Oh, come now, Eugene. What are brothers for? It’s not worse than the time you told me to go down into that pit and you pulled the rope up behind me, then you ran off. You left me yelling down there for hours!

EUGENE: [Laughs] Oh, Dad was fuming mad! But it served you right for all the other shenanigans you started. Besides, you should know better than to listen to your older brother.

DWAYNE: [Little more sober] We’ll have to listen to each other to get out of this war and back home safe. [Pauses, a little nervous.] We’ll look out for each other, right?

EUGENE: Yes, brother, I’ll always have your back. We will take care of each other. Dwayne and Eugene, the Davis Brothers, together forever. [Hands slap against each other in a secret handshake, fingers snap.] Don’t worry, little brother. Where we’re going, we’re not likely to see a lot of action.

DWAYNE: Well, I suppose our caving exploits are over for now, but we will get to make tracks out of here and have an adventure in new places, see the world!

EUGENE: On to far off exotic countries! To make the world a better place. And to come home with new stories to tell.

DWAYNE: With the 200th Coast Artillery boys with us, it will sure be a hoopla of an adventure.

EUGENE: That’s for sure! We’ve been training and working hard together. These past few months have really felt like having a whole troop of long-lost brothers. We’re now a well-oiled machine, anticipating each other’s needs.

DWAYNE: Number one coast artillery unit in the country!

EUGENE: Now to show the rest of the world what we can do.

DWAYNE: Sure hope we’ll see these caves again. It’s been such an important part of our lives here in Carlsbad. We spent so many hours in this cave growing up. I’m going to miss this these rocks.

EUGENE: I’ll sure miss the cavern’s cool temperature. I heard it’s H-O-T [emphasizes each word] hot and humid where we’re going. [Pause to imagine.] The Pacific theater. . . .

DWAYNE: We can handle it if we can handle a summer running around outdoors in Carlsbad. Not to mention all the training we did at Fort Bliss. Talk about hot!

EUGENE: Hey! You think they have caves on those islands?

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DWAYNE: I don't think we'll have much leisure time to explore them if they do have caves. We must concentrate on our mission. We'll be back down here in Carlsbad Caverns before you know it!

EUGENE: I'm sure Dad will drag us down here as soon as we get back home. He can't stay away from the cave.

DWAYNE: Come on, brother. Let's catch up with the rest of the boys!

EUGENE: You think Jimmie can convince Colonel Boles to let us go into some of the non-tourist parts of the cave? Maybe Jimmie can sneak us into non-tourist areas? I mean, he is . . . was . . . his best ranger.

DWAYNE: Great idea! I'm sure Jimmie, Malcolm, Russ, John, and Jack would love to have one last excursion here together.

EUGENE: Yeah. Carlsbad Cavern is their home away from home, too. Let's go find them.

TOGETHER: "Cavern Boys!"

[Someone shushes them in the distance, as two sets of footsteps run into the distance.]

NARRATOR: Most of the men of the 200th Coast Artillery see their voyage to the Pacific as another adventure, expecting to be gone only one year. It is not until the ships sail past Hawaii that the men learn that they are going to the Philippines—a place they have to look up on the map. Little do they know that their tropical vacation will soon turn into a four-year nightmare.

They are the best anti-aircraft regiment of the U.S. forces stationed in the Pacific. When the Japanese attack Clark Air Field shortly after bombing Pearl Harbor, the troops do their utmost to ward off the enemy fighters, to no avail. The troops are the first to fire and the last to lay down their arms. They surrender only when there is no option left.

Dwayne, Eugene, and the other soldiers are marched by force to San Fernando, 60 miles north of Clark Airfield, as Prisoners of War. The "Bataan Death March" quickly becomes one of the most harrowing events of World War II. No food, no water, short periods of rest under the full blaze of a scorching noonday sun. Prisoners who speak to each other, or who stop for any reason, are executed on sight. Dwayne and Eugene, knowing the danger, speak in hushed tones.

[Sporadic gunfire sounds in the distance. Leaves rustle as soldiers march through thick brush, a stream quietly babbles nearby. Dwayne and Eugene speak softly to avoid attracting attention.]

DWAYNE: Where are they taking us, Gene? We've been marching for days!

EUGENE: Straight to San Fernando. We've done plenty of hiking in difficult terrain before, but 60 miles without food and water? No breaks?

DWAYNE: My mouth is so dry my spit is coming out as sand.

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EUGENE: Try not to think about it, Dwayne. Remember what happened to Harris when he tried to drink from that stream over there? Dispatched nearly as soon as he looked at it. He may not have been a Cavern Boy, but the Carlsbad community will be devastated. Such a bright star.

DWAYNE: [Pauses.] Wish they would at least let us sit in the shade. This sun is brutal.

EUGENE: [Trying to be optimistic.] Oh, this isn't nearly as bad as that time we hiked all over the backcountry of Carlsbad Caverns looking for that one cave. [Imitates his father's voice.] "Just head north of the main cavern a ways, then left once you make it to the bottom of the wash," Dad said. "It's easy! Just stay in the dry riverbed. Impossible to get lost!" he said.

DWAYNE: [Also imitates his father.] "It'll be a quick excursion." [Laughs] We only had one small canteen of water to share between us. Nothing but each other for shade.

EUGENE: We wandered around for hours, merely to end up right where we started. The only cave we managed to find was Carlsbad Cavern itself!

DWAYNE: And only then because we saw the elevator tower.

EUGENE: When Mr. White took us out there, all he had to do to find it was spit from the entrance of the main cavern.

DWAYNE: [Disparagingly.] Wish I could spit right now. . . .

EUGENE: [Ignores Dwayne's comment.] We should have been warned when he refused to enter the cave with us, though.

DWAYNE: At least he waited for us to come out after that monsoon. I've never seen a cave fill with water so fast! It's a miracle we were able to make it out.

EUGENE: "Kissing the ceiling" for each breath to get out of that cave was far more of a miracle than us surviving this death march.

DWAYNE: I'd give anything to be kissing Sally right now.

EUGENE: [Encouragingly.] We can survive anything, if we stick together. Just gotta keep putting one foot in front of the other, brother. You'll be holding her again soon. We've been luckier than most to have made it this far.

DWAYNE: Yes. We've made it this far without serious illness, despite starvation and dehydration. We have our lives. We have our dignity. And most important, we still have each other.

[Sporadic gunfire continues in the distance. Sounds of marching suddenly stops.]

DWAYNE: We've stopped, Eugene! I think we've made it!

EUGENE: See, little brother? Carlsbad Caverns has trained us well. Bataan has nothing on the Davis Boys!

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NARRATOR: Dwayne and Eugene Davis survived the Death March. They sent a postcard to their parents to let them know they were well as soon as they could. Their father was so overjoyed that he composed the poem “We Heard from the Boys Today” and published it in the Carlsbad Current-Argus to celebrate their return.

RAY DAVIS:

Well, we heard from the boys today.

The sun was brighter; how dull it had been lately.

There was a moon last night, how beautiful and romantic it was;

Strange; there has not been a moon for so long.

Yes, we heard from the boys today.

I cried; but this time I felt better, I had always felt worse before.

To our friends; so many times we had said, no word. But today OH BOY—

My back is sore and my hand is numb

from the good wishes of those good friends

Yes, we heard from the boys today.

I wanted to celebrate; I wanted the whole town to celebrate;

Yet, I cannot celebrate until my boys’ comrades had been heard from also.

The cash register had a bright cheerful ring today;

So long it had been a dull sickening thud.

Yes, we heard from the boys today.

I smiled at my wife and gosh, she’s still beautiful, and suddenly I recall

How she has enabled me to keep my chin up, and now I am looking forward

To the greatest day of my life—when the boys come marching home;

And once more we can see Old Glory, the symbol that has cost us so much,

And yet which means so much.

And here I am “Fiddlin’ while Rome Burns.”

Yes, we heard from the boys today.

(Ray V. Davis—dedicated to my two sons, Lieutenant Dwayne and Sergeant Gene, taken prisoner on Bataan.)

NARRATOR: A little over a year later, the Davis Brothers left the Prisoner of War Camp and boarded the Arisan Maru, one of the many transport units known as “Hell Ships,” because of the horrifying conditions. The Japanese did not mark these vessels as transporting Prisoners of War, in full defiance of the Geneva Convention. U.S. forces fired upon the Arisan Maru, not knowing the precious lives it contained. Both Dwayne and Eugene were lost at sea on October 24, 1944. The brothers, along with Russ Haney, were the only casualties to the Cavern Boys.

[Piano slowly plays “Taps” in the background.]

Ray Davis was never reunited with his brave boys, but he welcomed home the other Cavern Boys as his own. Malcolm Bull and John Moseley returned to work for the National Park Service. Jack Rupe became an Eddy County Sheriff, and later, a U.S. Marshal. Jimmie Harrison, always a favorite of Superintendent Thomas Boles, never returned to his dream of living the ranger life. Ray Davis hosted reunions for all the local Bataan Veterans as a way to honor Dwayne and Eugene, but he always held a special place in his heart for the Cavern Boys of Carlsbad Caverns National Park, the

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men who fought valiantly beside his sons, and whose legacies live on in the daily activities of park employees, volunteers, and families.

[Music slowly fades to silence.]

OUTRO: Thank you for listening to this episode of Rock of Ages. This episode featured the voices of rangers David Tise as Dwayne Davis, Anthony Mazzucco as Eugene Davis, Daniel Pawlak as Ray V. Davis, and Aubrey Brown as the Narrator. This episode was researched and written by David Tise, Kialeay Day, and Aubrey Brown. Recording production was done by James Gunn and Anthony Mazzucco, music and audio engineering by Gabe Montemayor, with Abby Burlingame and Aubrey Brown at the creative helm. Join us for our next episode, coming soon! Thanks for listening. . . . See ya next time . . . and happy trails!