

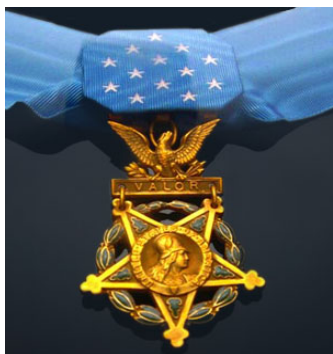
# Asian American and Pacific Islander Veterans Fact Sheet



## Asian American and Pacific Islander Military and Veteran History

Asian American and Pacific Islanders have been serving honorably in the United States Military, since the War of 1812. The first Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) to reach general officer rank was Brigadier General. Albert Lyman, who was Chinese and Hawaiian American, was the commanding general of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Army Division that fought in the Leyte campaigns in the Philippines in World War II. The highest ranked AAPI in the military was Eric Shinseki, who was a four – star general and the Army Chief of Staff.

### Medal of Honor



The first Congressional Medal of Honor recipient was to US Army Private Jose Nisperos, from the Philippine Scouts Unit for this action on September 24, 1911. The one and only Medal of Honor awarded during peacetime on January 21, 1915 was to Second Class Telesforo Trinidad. Twenty-one of the twenty-four Medal of Honor recipients during WWII were Japanese-Americans serving with the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team or the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion. They are Barney Hajiro, Mikio Hasemoto, Joe Hayashi, Shizuya Hayashi, Daniel Inouye, Yeiki Kobashigawa, Robert Kuroda, Kaoru Moto, Sadao Munemori, Kiyoshi Muranaga, Masato Nakae, Shinyei Nakamine, William Nakamura, Joe Nishimoto, Allan Ohata, James Okubo, Yukio Okutsu, Frank Ono, Kazuo Otani, George Sakato, and Ted

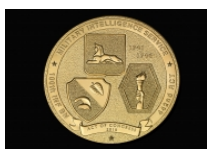
Tanouye. Also in WWII, Captain Francis Wai is the only Chinese American to receive the Medal of Honor. In the Korean War, the first Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders, Private First Class Anthony T. Kaho'ohanohano, Sergeant Leroy A. Mendonca, and Private First Class Herbert K. Piliilau were awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions on Sept. 1, 1951, July 4, 1951, and September 17, 1951 respectively along with Corporal Hiroshi H. Miyamura for his actions in April 24-25, 1951. Three Asian Americans were awarded in Vietnam War Corporal Terry Kawamura, Staff Sergeant Elmelindo Smith, and Sergeant First Class Rodney Yano. A total of 31 Asian American and Pacific Islanders have received this prestigious honor for their actions during war and in peacetime.

<http://www.history.army.mil/html/topics/apam/ap-moh2.html> and <http://www.army.mil/article/55395/>

### US Asian American and Pacific Islander Military Units

**442nd Infantry Regimental Combat Team** was the most decorated unit for its size and length of service, in the entire history of the U.S. Military. The 4,000 men who initially came in April 1943 had to be replaced nearly 3.5 times. In total, about 14,000 men served, ultimately earning 9,486 Purple Hearts, 21 Medals of Honor and an unprecedented eight Presidential Unit Citations.

[http://www.goforbroke.org/history/history\\_historical\\_veterans\\_442nd.asp](http://www.goforbroke.org/history/history_historical_veterans_442nd.asp)



**100th Infantry Battalion** was activated on 12 June 1942, composed of more than 1,400 American-born Japanese called "Nisei", or second generation from Hawaii.

<http://www.history.army.mil/html/topics/apam/100bn.html>

**Military Intelligence Service** (initially known as the Fourth Army Intelligence School) began operation in November 1941. The Military Intelligence Service was a World War II U.S. military unit consisting of two branches, the Japanese American Unit described here.

[http://www.mnhs.org/library/tips/history\\_topics/120language\\_school.html](http://www.mnhs.org/library/tips/history_topics/120language_school.html)

**407th Air Service Squadron** and **987th Signal Company** were Chinese Americans drafted into World War II and ended up serving in the a all-Chinese American unit supporting the 14th Air Force's famed Flying Tigers. The fighter squadrons, flying the shark-faced P-40s, defended China against Japanese forces. <http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/WWII-all-Chinese-American-unit-reminisces-3215751.php#photo-2358434>

**Philippine Scouts** were the first and last of what some might call American colonial troops. But they were not colonials. The first Scout organizations were created in 1901 during the early days of the American occupation of the Philippine Islands by the induction of Filipinos into the service of the U. S. Armed Forces. Their mission was to help restore order and peace to a troubled area. In the ensuing two decades, the Philippine Scouts took part in subduing the fierce and warlike Moro tribes on the island of Mindanao and in the Jolo Archipelago and in establishing tranquility throughout the islands. <http://www.philippine-scouts.org/history/history-of-the-scouts.html>



**1<sup>st</sup> Filipino Battalion** was formed on March 4, 1942 and activated in April 1 at Camp San Luis Obispo, California. By the end of May 1942, the strength of the 1st Battalion had reached over 2,000 men. The unit was ordered to Salinas, California where it became the 1st Filipino Infantry Regiment on July 13, 1942. So many Filipino volunteers came from all over the United States that the 2nd Filipino Infantry Regiment was formed at Fort Ord, California on November 22, 1942. <http://www.militarymuseum.org/Filipino.htm>



**United States Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE)** was a military formation of the United States Army active from 1941 to 1946. The new command's headquarters was created on July 26, 1941, at No. 1, Calle Victoria, Manila, Luzon, the Philippines with General Douglas MacArthur as commander. The Chief of Staff was Brigadier General Richard K. Sutherland and the Deputy Chief of Staff was Lieutenant Colonel Richard J. Marshall. The core of this command (including MacArthur, Marshall, and Sutherland) was drawn from the Office of the Military Advisor to the Commonwealth Government.

## Women in the Military

Maggie Gee and Hazel Ying Lee were one of the first two Chinese Americans in the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). <http://thepublichistorian.net/2013/02/04/gone-west-former-wasp-maggie-gee/>

The Women's Army Corps was officially converted from an auxiliary group (the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps) to a military organization with full Army status on July 1, 1943. Although recruitment of Japanese American women began in March of 1943, they were not inducted until September 1943 when the exclusionary policy against them was lifted. [http://www.javadc.org/AJA%20women\\_in\\_wwII.htm](http://www.javadc.org/AJA%20women_in_wwII.htm)

In November 1947, Florence (Ebersole) Smith Finch received the U.S. Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian medal awarded to American citizens living abroad who aided in the war effort. <http://www.defense.gov/specials/asianpacific2002/apa-uscg01.html>

Captain Suni Williams was an American astronaut and a US Navy officer with Southern Indian descent. She had two spaceflights, December 9 2006 and April 2007. Captain Suni Williams holds several records, the longest spaceflight of 195 days by a woman, total space walks, and most spacewalk time for a woman. <http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/Bios/htmlbios/williams-s.html>

Rear Admiral Eleanor Mariano, MC, USN became the first military woman in appointed White House Physician. In 1994, was named Director of the White House Medical Unit and served as President William Clinton's person physician. In 2000 she became the first female Filipino American Navy Admiral. <http://www.whitehousedoctor.com/bio.html>

Tammy Duckworth is the first Asian-American woman elected to Congress in Illinois, the first disabled woman to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, and the first member of Congress born in Thailand. <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2013/3/prweb10582364.htm>

Tulsi Gabbard is the first American Samoan, the first Hindu member, and, one of the first female combat veterans in the United States Congress. <http://gabbard.house.gov/about/full-biography>

## Military and Veteran History

In 1815, General Andrew Jackson notes that Filipinos fought alongside his forces during the famed Battle of New Orleans near the end of the War of 1812. [http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/veterans/pdf/teacher\\_guide\\_struggles.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/veterans/pdf/teacher_guide_struggles.pdf)

Chinese American John Tomney joins New York Infantry, later dies of wounds at Battle of Gettysburg in 1863.

Feb 10, 1923: Justice Sutherland rules "Hindus" are "aliens ineligible to citizenship" in United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind (261 US 204). Bhagat Singh Thind joined the U.S. Army during World War I.

[http://www.pbs.org/rootsinthesand/i\\_bhagat1.html](http://www.pbs.org/rootsinthesand/i_bhagat1.html)

Samuel Amalu, Hawaii's renowned dean of lighthouse keepers, was the keeper of the Kilauea Light Station. Kilauea Light, the northernmost lighthouse in Hawaii, was built in 1913. <http://www.uscg.mil/history/AsianPacificAmericans.asp>

Shigeo Uchino, a native Hawaiian, began a 30-year career with the Military Intelligence Service in 1945. Uchino was assigned to Korea for one year beginning in October 1950. In addition to earning the Purple Heart, he was awarded the Bronze Star for Valor and the Combat Infantry Badge. <http://www.nj.gov/military/korea/factsheets/asian.html>

Chew-Een Lee, the son of Chinese immigrants, first enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1944 and was commissioned a second lieutenant in 1946. Before hostilities broke out in Korea, First Lieutenant Lee served with the 1st battalion, 7th Marines. As a platoon commander in that unit, Lee received America's second highest combat award, the Navy Cross. On Nov. 2-3, 1950, Lee's platoon came under heavy attack. Despite being outnumbered, Lee exposed himself to fire as he personally reconnoitered the area to better re-deploy his machine gun posts within the defensive perimeter. He reorganized his unit and moved up the enemy-held slope. Despite serious wounds, he pressed forward ultimately driving the hostile forces from the area. <http://www.defense.gov/specials/asianpacific03/marinecorps.html>

Private Ichiro Miyasaki, a Nisei from Rexburg, Idaho, posthumously was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for extraordinary valor in the Korean War. <http://www.defense.gov/specials/asianpacific03/army2.html>

Young Oak Kim, a second-generation Korean-American, fought as a young officer with the 442d RCT in Europe during World War II. The Army asked Kim to return to active duty after the Korean War began because of his fluency with the Korean language. Kim agreed, but he wanted assignment with a combat unit rather than as a linguist. Major Kim commanded the 1st Battalion, 31st Infantry Regiment, and 7th Infantry Division and was in Korea for a year. He remained in the Army after the Korean War and retired as a colonel in 1972.

Juan T. Salas was the first Chamorro (Asian Pacific Islander from Guam) to graduate from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and from any military service academy (Class of 1968). <http://www.uscg.mil/history/AsianPacificAmericans.asp>

Korean American Army Lt. Col. Herbert Choy becomes first Asian American named to federal court (U.S. Ninth Circuit Court, 1971). <http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2004/Mar/12/In/In25a.html>

Captain Hung M. Nguyen was the first Vietnamese-born Coast Guard Academy graduate. He was a member of the Class of 1986. <http://www.uscg.mil/HISTORY/ASIANPACIFICAMERICANS.ASP>

Lt. Gen. Allen K. Ono was the Army's first three- star Japanese American. <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=43031>

Thomas Tang, a Chinese-American, entered the Army in 1942 through the ROTC enlisted reserves. He served in World War II and was recalled into action with the outbreak of hostilities on the Korean Peninsula. Tang was stationed in Tokyo as a military intelligence officer, but also served in Korea interrogating prisoners in Pusan. As judge in civilian life, Tang was appointed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit by President Jimmy Carter in October 1977. <http://www.defense.gov/specials/asianpacific03/army2.html>

Vicente Tomas Blaz was first Chamorro promoted to Brigadier General. He served US Congress from 1985-1993. <http://www.bisitaquam.com/bio/>

Rear Admiral Peter Gumataotao, the first Guam native to achieve flag rank. <http://www.history.navy.mil/special%20Highlights/asian/API-12Apr11.pdf>

Retired U.S. Army General Eric K. Shinseki was nominated by President Barack Obama on December 7, 2008 to serve as Secretary of Veterans Affairs. His nomination was confirmed by the Senate on January 20, 2009, and he was sworn in as the seventh Secretary of Veterans Affairs on January 21, 2009. [http://www.va.gov/opa/bios/bio\\_shinseki.asp](http://www.va.gov/opa/bios/bio_shinseki.asp)

## Notables

Currently, the highest ranking Asian Americans in the military are General John F. Campbell and Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr. while the highest Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander is Upper Rear Admiral Peter A. Gumataotao. The highest ranking female Asian American is Air Force Maj. Gen. Sharon K. G. Dunbar.

Serving in Congress today, Eni Faleomavaega from American Samoa, Tammy Duckworth from Illinois and Tulsi Gabbard from Hawaii both are all combat veterans.

## Historical Tidbits

1900 U.S. flag raised over Samoa for the first time.

1943 Military Order No. 45 exempts Korean Americans from enemy alien status.

1943 U.S. Senate passes resolution granting Philippines independence as soon as conditions return to normal after World War II.

1943 President Roosevelt signs repeal for Chinese Exclusion Act; soon thereafter 14,000 Chinese Americans drafted into armed forces.

1944 U.S. War Department ends internment of Japanese Americans.

1992 Vietnamese American astronaut Eugene Huu-Chau Trinh make space shuttle flight.

1959 Hawaii becomes 50th state.

1980 The Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Wall) was designed by an undergraduate at Yale University, Maya Ying Lin, born in Athens, Ohio in 1959.

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=43031>

## Military and Veterans Statistics

### WWII

Substantial numbers of Asian Americans served in America's armed forces during World War II, but the total number is unknown. Some 25,000 Japanese Americans had proved their loyalty in uniform. More than 6,000 Nisei (first-generation, American-born Japanese) trained as interpreters and translators at the Army's Military Intelligence Service (MIS) Language School in Minnesota and 3,700 MIS linguists served in combat. The U.S. Army's 442d Regimental Combat Team (RCT), comprised of about 4,500 Japanese Americans, fought heroically in Italy and Central Europe. The unit received more than 18,000 individual decorations and seven Presidential Unit Citations. More than 20,000 Chinese Americans served in the armed forces, many as integrated members of Army units. Smaller numbers of Filipino Americans and Korean Americans formed small units for the nation's war effort.

<http://www.nj.gov/military/korea/factsheets/asian.html>

### Active Duty members by race

Members who report themselves as White make up the highest percentage of Active Duty members (69.8%), while members who report themselves as Black or African American make up 16.9 percent. Asian (53,457), American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (8,957) members make up 3.8 percent, 1.6 percent, and 0.6 percent, respectively. Over two percent (2.5%) of Active Duty members report themselves as multi-racial. \* The Army does not report "Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander" or "Multi-racial." Note: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding. [DMDC Active Duty Military Personnel Master File \(September 2011\)](#)

### Active Duty officers' race

Members who report themselves as White make up the highest percentage of Active Duty officers (77.0%), while members who report themselves as Black or African American make up 9.5 percent. Asian (9,456), American Indian or

Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (539) officers make up 4.0 percent, 0.6 percent, and 0.2 percent, respectively. Only 1.0 percent of Active Duty officers report themselves as multi-racial. Note: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding. [DMDC Active Duty Military Personnel Master File \(September 2011\)](#)

### Active Duty enlisted members' race

Members who report themselves as White make up the highest percentage of Active Duty enlisted members (68.3%), while members who report themselves as Black or African American make up 18.4 percent. Asian (44,001), American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (539) enlisted members make up 3.8 percent, 1.8 percent, and 0.7 percent, respectively. Nearly three percent (2.8%) of Active Duty enlisted members report themselves as multi-racial.

Note: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding. [DMDC Active Duty Military Personnel Master File \(September 2011\)](#)

### Veterans Population for AAPI

| Date      | Asian alone, not Hispanic or Latino | Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, not Hispanic or Latino |
|-----------|-------------------------------------|--|
| 9/30/2013 | 272,623                             | 34,038   |
| 9/30/2014 | 271,312                             | 34,307   |
| 9/30/2015 | 270,473                             | 34,605   |
| 9/30/2016 | 270,194                             | 34,995   |
| 9/30/2017 | 269,215                             | 35,283   |
| 9/30/2018 | 268,316                             | 35,587   |
| 9/30/2019 | 267,282                             | 35,807   |
| 9/30/2020 | 266,365                             | 35,978   |

[http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran\\_Population.asp](http://www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran_Population.asp)

Note:

These facts have been collected from various websites. Should you have any corrections or additional history information, please submit to our Asian American and Pacific Islander Veteran history. Thank you

[CenterforMinorityVeterans@va.gov](mailto:CenterforMinorityVeterans@va.gov)