

AAPI Vets: A Rich History of Service

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It's an understatement to say that the United States benefits from its diverse citizenry. The very nature of our country is one where Americans of different races and ethnicities come together to contribute to the rich blend of American culture. Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are one of the many populations to contribute to the patchwork quilt of America—even though many of these contributions are not widely known. Even as AAPIs have been part of American history, we are also an important part of America's future as a global economic and innovation leader.

One hundred and fifty years ago, it was Asian laborers who literally moved mountains with their bare hands and bent backs, uniting the nation from East to West by laying the rail line of the first transcontinental railroads. During the Civil War, Chinese Americans fought in white units mostly in the North, while some united under the Confederate banner. Edward Day Cohota, a Chinese immigrant, served in the Union Army during the Civil War and remained in the United States Army for more than twenty years. Unlike other soldiers who were granted US citizenship under the 1862 Alien Veteran Citizenship act upon their honorable discharge, he was never granted citizenship because of the later 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act which made it illegal for Chinese to become U.S. citizens. And of course we are all familiar with the heroism of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the 100th battalion of Japanese Americans during World War II. Even while their families were herded into internment camps and stripped of their constitutional rights and liberties, these brave Americans fought with a ferocity seldom seen before or since.

What hasn't changed throughout American history has been the undivided love that AAPIs have for our nation. The story repeats itself throughout American history of AAPIs serving honorably. Today, our Pacific Islander Veterans, along with Native American Veterans, serve in the U.S. military at the highest per capita rates of any population in the nation. There are currently only two Asian Americans in the United States Senate, Senators Inouye and Akaka, and both are Veterans. There is no question of our AAPI service members' ability to excel in the military, something clearly demonstrated by the military service of people like Secretary Shinseki, Brigadier General [Coral Wong Pietsch](#) (1st female AAPI Army general officer) and the 32 Congressional Medal of Honor recipients from the first, [José B. Nísperos](#), to the 22 who were recognized decades after their service on the battlefield such as Senator Daniel Inouye and onto the most recently named Private First Class Anthony T. Kaho'ohanohano.

Today, as other nations develop and become more globally competitive, the United States must draw on the skills of all our citizens in order to win the technological, innovation and production race for the future. So as we celebrate the contributions of AAPIs to our nation's rich heritage, we should also look forward to where AAPI's varied contributions will add to the toolkit our nation will use to win the future.

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