

CHINESE AMERICAN HEROES

chineseamericanheroes.org

Significant Dates in Asian/Chinese American History - 4

By Chinese American Heroes

Chinese American Heroes presents this series of significant dates in Asian American and Chinese American history. This is by no means a comprehensive list of events due to our limited time and resources for research. For the same reasons we concentrated on the major Asian American population groups in this country in numbers, the Chinese, Japanese, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Filipino Americans.

In Installment 4 we go from 1941 to 1945. World War II marks a major turning point as it sees Asian Americans serving in the US military and in war industries in unprecedented numbers. Job opportunities suddenly open up in many areas where Asian Americans had been blocked because of racism. The American alliance with China and the need to keep China in the war also leads to the formal end of the Chinese Exclusion Act, although immigration remains extremely limited.

After the war, the GI Bill pays for the college education of Asian American veterans. These men and women then begin the climb up the ladder of American society towards the middle class and start leaving ethnic enclaves like Chinatown to move into formerly whites only suburbs.

DATE	EVENT
1941	Formation of the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) in November 1941. Language specialists are recruited to be attached to military units to provide translation and interrogation services. Many Japanese Americans are recruited or drafted directly from internment camps (see Executive Order 9066.) They are credited with shortening the war in the Pacific by at least a year with their services. In 2010, the Congressional Gold Medal was awarded to all of the 6,000 Japanese Americans that served in the MIS.
1942	President Roosevelt drafts Executive Order 9066. This leads to the imprisonment of over 125,000 mostly West Coast Japanese Americans ranging from babies to the elderly in remote internment camps. Many were born and educated as American citizens. The US Supreme Court upheld the internment in <i>Korematsu v. United States</i> in 1944 based upon government pleas of military necessity. In 1982, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC), ordered originally by President Carter in 1980, determined

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	<p>that the decision to incarcerate was based on "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership." In 1983, a federal district court overturns Fred Korematsu's conviction for resisting the internment and found that the US Government lied to the Supreme Court about the military necessity for the internment in 1944. Not a single shred of evidence could be found in FBI and government records to justify the wholesale violation of constitutional rights although plenty of evidence of racial prejudice was found. The Civil Liberties Act of 1988, based upon the CWRIC recommendations, was signed into law by President Reagan. In 1989, President George H.W. Bush signed an appropriation bill authorizing individual redress payments and a letter of apology to the wartime internees.</p>
<p>1942</p>	<p>Formation of the 100th Infantry Battalion in Oakland, California. Primarily made up of soldiers of Japanese American ancestry who'd served in the Hawaii National Guard, the unit was highly motivated to prove their loyalty to the United States after Pearl Harbor. They were nearly annihilated in 1943 in the brutal mountain fighting in Italy, losing nearly 2/3 of their members as casualties. Replacements from Hawaii and from internment camps in the US mainland join them. In 1944, the unit becomes part of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. In high demand for their determination and courage the 442nd/100th becomes a "fire brigade" unit rushed in to fill gaps in the lines and undertake dangerous and challenging missions. They are split and transferred repeatedly between the fronts in Italy and Northern Europe due to competing requests from army commanders. Based upon official casualty figures over 90% of the members of the unit are wounded or killed while becoming the most decorated unit for their size in American history. Twenty one Medals of Honor were won by the 442nd/100th but only one of these medals was granted during the war to Sadao Munemori in 1945 (see 1944 Francis B. Wai.) In 2010, a Congressional Gold Medal is granted to veterans of the unit.</p>
<p>1942</p>	<p>Brigadier General Albert Lyman of Hawaii becomes the first general officer of the United States Army of Asian American and Chinese descent (his mother was Chinese, Cherokee, and Hawaiian.)</p>
<p>1942</p>	<p>Formation of the 1st Filipino Infantry Regiment at Camp San Luis Obispo, California. Made up of Filipino Americans and Philippines Army soldiers who'd escaped the Japanese occupation, the regiment provided cadre for special forces units operating as guerillas behind Japanese lines in the Philippines. So many soldiers are detached for these special duties that the unit is later merged with its equally under-strength sister unit, the 2nd Filipino Infantry Regiment, which is disbanded. The 1st sees combat in New Guinea in 1944 before taking part in the fighting to liberate the Philippines. Filipino soldiers fighting in the US Army are granted naturalization rights in 1943. However, promises of future pensions and treatment as US military veterans aren't fulfilled after the war.</p>

DATE	EVENT
1943	<p>Madame Chiang Kai-shek spoke in Congress affirming the strong commitment of Nationalist China to the Allied cause against Japan during World War II. The vast bulk of the Imperial Japanese Army (four million out of five million men) remained fighting in China throughout World War II rather than facing the Western Allies. Japanese propaganda highlighting the Chinese Exclusion Act and other discriminatory legislation against Asians greatly embarrassed the United States and led to fears that China would seek a separate peace thus freeing all those Japanese troops to fight in the Pacific. Twenty thousand Chinese Americans had also enlisted in the American armed forces out of a total Chinese American population of nearly eighty thousand in the entire United States, a far higher percentage (25%) than any other American ethnic community (most were the children of the 1906 generation of Chinese immigrants who'd reached enlistment age by this time.) Chinese American women had also turned out in force to work in vital war industries and in the armed forces. Faced with these facts Congress passed the Magnuson Act formally repealing the Chinese Exclusion Act. However, Chinese immigration was limited by the law to 105 persons of Chinese descent per year from anywhere in the world and maintained the legality of state bans on ownership of land and businesses by Chinese Americans.</p>
1944	<p>Mitsuye Endo, a Japanese American woman from Sacramento, California, was interned along with other Japanese Americans as a result of Executive Order 9066. She brought a lawsuit against the US Government demanding release and lost in the federal courts despite the fact that, "It is conceded by the Department of Justice and by the War Relocation Authority that appellant is a loyal and law-abiding citizen." In <i>Ex parte Endo</i>, the US Supreme Court ruled unanimously in her favor. This set the ground for the release of most Japanese Americans from the internment camps. However, the majority of the Supreme Court refused to address the constitutional issues raised by the internment and on American civil liberties. Justice Frank Murphy in his concurring opinion wrote openly that, "...I am of the view that detention in Relocation Centers of persons of Japanese ancestry regardless of loyalty is not only unauthorized by Congress or the Executive but is another example of the unconstitutional resort to racism inherent in the entire evacuation program."</p>
1944	<p>Captain Francis B. Wai, a Chinese Hawaiian American serving in the US Army, won the Distinguished Service Cross posthumously, the second highest combat medal of the United States. His actions at the Leyte landings in the Philippines saved the lives of hundreds of men and helped the landings succeed but cost him his life. He is the only Chinese American to have been awarded the Medal of Honor. A review of military records ordered in 1996 determined that several awards to minority service members had been unfairly downgraded from the Medal of Honor, due to racial prejudice. As a result of the study Medals of Honor were awarded in 2000 to Captain Wai, 21 Japanese Americans, and to Staff Sergeant Rudolph B. Davila, a Hispanic Filipino American born in Texas for his combat heroism in Italy.</p>

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1944	<p>Commander Gordon Chung-Hoon, the first American citizen of Asian descent (Hawaiian, Chinese, and English) to graduate from the US Naval Academy (1934) becomes the first Asian American to assume command of a US Navy ship in combat in 1944, the destroyer USS Sigsbee. In April 1945, the Sigsbee is off the Japanese island of Okinawa when a kamikaze plane crashes into it. With the deck awash, no steering control, and one engine damaged, the ship continues to fight off more kamikaze attacks while the ship is saved. Commander Chung-Hoon is awarded the Navy's second highest combat medal, the Navy Cross. He retires in 1959 as a rear admiral, the first Asian American to reach flag rank in the US Navy. The USS Chung Hoon, a guided missile destroyer, is named in his honor and commissioned in 2004, the first such honor for an Asian American.</p>
1945	<p>The War Brides Act allowed American GI's to bring their foreign wives back to the United States. Many Japanese, Filipino, Korean, and Chinese women join women from all around the world in the United States. The Chinese War Brides Act of 1946 removed Chinese women from the legal annual quota of 105 Chinese allowed into the United States by the Magnuson Act. An estimated 6000 Chinese women eventually enter under this law.</p>