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L579 Asian Pacific Islander's (NCOs in the American Army, 1945-Present)

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## **Military History of Asian - Pacific Islander's and the Philippine Scouts en-compassing their Heroic Actions**

In accordance with historical records, Asian-American military service dates back to the 19th century. On July 23, 1863, Chinese-American William Ah Hang became one of the first Asian-American to enlist in the U.S. Navy during the American Civil War. In 1901 the Philippine Scouts was created during the early days of the American occupation of the Philippine Islands by the induction of Filipinos into the services of the U. S. Armed Forces. The Scouts were the first and last of what some might call American colonial troops. But they were not colonials 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 in establishing tranquility throughout the islands.

Following WW I, Congress approved induction of the Philippine Scouts into the U.S. Regular Army. A total strength of 6000 was authorized and tactical units were created with designations of the regular military establishment, but with the suffix (PS) indicating "Philippine Scout". The Philippine Division was activated with two infantry regiments, the 45th (PS) and the 57th (PS) subordinate to the 23rd Infantry Brigade of the Philippine Scouts. The supporting Filipino enlisted men commanded by Americans and a few Filipinos. For the defense of Manila Bay, two Philippine Scouts artillery regiments, the 91st and the 92nd were created.

There were three members of the Philippine Scouts that earned the Congressional Medal of Honor during the defense of the Philippine Islands. Mess Sergeant Jose Calugas although the

Philippine artillery units are not in the headlines, they have their own share of gallant history. On 16 Jan 1942, near Culis, Bataan Province, Mess Sergeant Jose Calugas of the Philippine Scouts, 88th field artillery manned an artillery gun after their crews were disabled by enemy fire. Leading his fellow "cooks", they manned a howitzer and pounded the advancing Japanese stopping them in their tracks making a heroic act in the defense of the Philippines. His presence of mind and able leadership during that act earned him the United States Congressional Medal of Honor, personally pinned by General Douglas MacArthur. The only Filipino Soldier ever to receive such an honor during the Bataan Campaign and one of the two Filipinos during World War II. Calugas Circle at the Watkins Terrace housing area on Fort Sam Houston was named in his honor in 1997.

During World War II, a substantial number of Asian-Americans served in America's armed forces. Approximately 25,000 Japanese-Americans proved their courage on the battlefield. More than 6,000 Nisei (first-generation, American-born Japanese) trained as interpreters and translators in the U.S. Army's Intelligence Service Language School and 3,700 Linguists served in combat. More than 20,000 Chinese-Americans served in the armed forces, and Filipino-Americans and Korean-Americans formed small units for the nation's war effort.

When the war began, there was not an all Japanese American combat unit. There were Nisei and some Kibei who were linguists in the Military Intelligence Language School. Some of these Nisei became the initial group who served in the Pacific Theater as translators with the Military Intelligence Service (MIS). There were about 3,500 Japanese Americans in the military in 1941, but many were discharged. Asian Americans were classified as 4-F (unfit physically, mentally or morally) or 4-C (unfit due to nationality or ancestry) by the Selective Service.

When World War II (WWII) broke out, the Philippines Islands were a U.S. territory with

Filipinos as colonized people. In 1941, President Roosevelt issued a military order that called “into service of the Armed Forces of the U.S. all of the organized military forces of the government of the Commonwealth of the Philippines“. Approximately 142,000 Filipinos fought along side U.S. soldiers under the American flag of whom one was awarded the Medal of Honor.

The 442nd Regimental Combat Team “Go for Broke“, composed primarily of Asian-Americans, was the most decorated unit of its size (*at full strength it numbered 4500*) with seven Presidential Distinguished Citations and 18,000 individual decorations, including 47 Distinguished Service Crosses, 350 Silver Stars, 810 Bronze Stars with more than 3,600 Purple Hearts, the unit spent two of the bloodiest weeks of the war rescuing 'The Lost Battalion,' the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment, of the Texas National Guard, which was surrounded by German forces. The Asian American unit sustained more than 800 casualties to rescue 211 Texans. The rescue is listed in the Army annals as one of the most significant military battles of the century. Many of the Japanese Americans who served in the 442nd had volunteered from the internment camps, where their families had been relocated at the outbreak of war. The 100th and 442nd fought in eight major campaigns in Italy, France and Germany, including battles at Monte Cassino, Anzio and Biffontaine.

Many Asian-Americans served in combat units during the Korean War and have fought in many wars since then. Asian-Americans continue to keep alive the proud heritage and legacy of military service their predecessors established. Unlike in World War II when there was the Japanese-American 442d RCT, there were no separate Asian-American units during the Korean War. The Department of the Army dropped the designation "Asian-American" after World War II, so an approximate number for the Korean War has not been determined. The National Japanese-American Historical Society has estimated that 5,000 Nisei served in Korea with

American forces and concluded that 213 of them lost their lives. Several units did remain predominantly Asian-American like the 100th Battalion, 442d Infantry, U.S. Army Reserve and the 5th Regimental Combat Team, both from Hawaii.

When the Korean War began, many Nisei were among the first American troops sent to the peninsula. The United States lacked Korean translators, and because Japanese was the language mandated during Japan's colonial domination of Korea (1910–45), Nisei soldiers were able to provide valuable linguistic support. During the Korean War, Nisei in the Military Intelligence Service served as interpreters, interrogators and translators and provided other linguistic support.

During the Korean conflict, there were more Nisei in higher enlisted ranks, in company grade and in field grade ranks than had been the case during World War II. Several Asian-Americans who served in the U.S. Army in Korea received the Medal of Honor. Two of these men were members of the 7th Infantry Regiment, 3d Infantry Division: Corporal Hiroshi H. Miyamura of Company H, a Nisei soldier born in Gallup, New Mexico, and Sergeant Leroy A. Mendonca of Company B, a native of Honolulu. Another Asian American Private First Class Herbert K. Pililaau also from Hawaii was assigned to Company C, 23d Infantry Regiment, 2d Infantry Division earned the Medal of Honor.

On the night of April 24, 1951, Miyamura's unit occupied a defensive position near Taejon, South Korea, when it was attacked by the enemy. As the enemy force overran the Americans' position, Corporal Miyamura, a machine-gun squad leader, leaped from his shelter and, in close hand-to-hand combat, killed 10 of the enemy with his bayonet. After the first attack, while Miyamura administered first aid to the wounded and ordered the evacuation of his men, the enemy dealt another savage blow. Miyamura delivered devastating fire with his machine gun until he ran out of ammunition. He then bayoneted his way to a second gun emplacement and

covered the withdrawal of his unit with machine gun fire until his ammunition was depleted. Miyamura killed more than 50 of the enemy before he was severely wounded and later captured. He spent 28 months as a prisoner of war and was released in August 1953. Word of his Medal of Honor was kept secret during his time in captivity for his protection.

Sergeant Leroy Mendonca's platoon of Company B had captured Hill 586 near Chich-on, North Korea, on July 4, 1951. A large enemy force assaulted his platoon during the night, and Mendonca volunteered to remain in an exposed position to cover the platoon's withdrawal. Under heavy enemy fire, he fired his weapon and hurled grenades at the enemy. When he ran out of ammunition, Mendonca used his rifle as a club and his bayonet in hand-to-hand combat. It is estimated he killed 37 enemy soldiers before falling mortally wounded. Mendonca's bold action stalled the crushing enemy assault, protected his platoon's withdrawal to secondary positions and enabled his unit to repel the attack and retain possession of its key hilltop position.

In 1996 Congress directed the Secretary of the Army to conduct a review of all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross in World War II “to determine whether any such award should be upgraded to the Medal of Honor.”(9) The team completed their research on September 1998 and turned their findings over to the US Army’s Military Awards Branch. On 21 June 2000 President William Clinton awarded the Medal of Honor to 22 Asian-Pacific Americans of the 442<sup>nd</sup> regimental Combat Team. To date the most famous Asian-American is General Eric K. Shinseki retired COS.

Since the earliest days of America, people from all cultures have traveled to our Nation seeking the promise of freedom, opportunity, and justice. Many Asian/Pacific immigrants came to America to discover the promise of our Nation and to realize their dreams. Asian/Pacific Americans have proudly served our Nation with honor and courage in wars and conflicts,

including most recently in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

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