

**Remarks by Secretary Eric K. Shinseki
Asian Pacific Heritage Month Program
United States Secret Service
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Good morning, everyone. I am honored to be here. My congratulations to all of you for the manner in which you handle your critically important and demanding missions. Very few organizations have “no fail” in their mission statements—you are one. My thanks for the high performance you bring to government.

Having grown up in the middle of the Pacific, I marvel at the expanse of cultures we, as a nation, honor this month. They are rooted in more than 40 countries—from the Pacific Ocean to the Pacific rim; from the two most populous nations on earth—India and China—one, the largest democracy—the other, the largest communist state—to the 600 islands of Micronesia, where just 110,000 people are scattered across an ocean expanse five times the size of France—and to Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim nation and fourth most populous country, which, if we were to overlay its archipelago of 17,000 islands across the United States, would stretch from New York to California.

Today, some 16 million Americans claim Asian-Pacific heritage, and their personal histories are linked to one of the most diverse regions of the world—a unique blend of nationalities, cultures, languages, dialects, religions, and ethnicities. America is the most diverse nation on earth, and Asian-Pacific Americans are certainly a microcosm of that national mix.

But despite these differences, we do share some things in common. For one, we are the products of those, maybe even some here, who left distant homelands for essentially the same reason that millions of others continue to arrive on these shores. America is a nation of immigrants—not entirely, but largely—a nation of immigrants, who journeyed here from every corner of the globe in search of a better life. Their quests sought justice, equality, peace, and freedom—in many cases, principles not available to them at home. But above all, it was the promise of opportunity that was compelling.

My grandparents came from Hiroshima—in their day, one of the poorest regions in Japan. Like others, who made similar choices, they were courageous beyond imagination—allowing themselves to be swept up by the great swirl of human migration, seeking what often eluded them in the old country—opportunity, and the dream of a brighter future for their children.

For most, the immigrant experience was a saga of hard work and hope; prejudice and pride; passion and perseverance; and, eventual triumph. As they patiently and deliberately laid the foundation upon which their own, and much of America’s—progress and prosperity—would be built, they became the guardians of our common trust, “liberty and justice for all”—and the keepers of our common canon, “all men are created equal.” These timeless ideals are the moral anchors that hold us together—a “nation indivisible”—with each successive wave of new arrivals, shaping and tempering our “nation of nations.”

Asian-Pacific Americans have enriched our country beyond measure—in science and technology, education, the arts, sports, fashion, business, government—and in our military. Today, almost 90,000 Asian-Pacific Americans are serving in our active and reserve forces, but Asian Pacific Americans have written boldly across the pages of our military history since the early 19th century—and advanced our social well-being at the same time.

When America was plunged into the crucible of World War II, nowhere was the attack on Pearl Harbor more keenly felt than by the Japanese community. All Americans of Japanese ancestry were reclassified 4C, enemy alien. Presidential Decree 9066 ordered the resettlement of more than 120,000 Japanese—almost 60 percent of them American citizens. Despite the injustice, Japanese Americans, some even volunteering out of these camps, were amongst the vanguard to rush to defend America against her enemies.

Second generation Japanese-Americans formed all-“Nisei” units, which today have attained legendary status amongst that community—the 100th Infantry Battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat Team, and the Military Intelligence Service.

The 442nd Regimental Combat Team—the famed *“Go for Broke!”* remains today one of the most decorated combat units in the nearly 234-year history of our nation. A unit that averaged little more than 4,500 soldiers at any one time, earned seven presidential unit citations—five of them in one month, and an incredible 18,000 plus individual awards, including almost 9,500 Purple Hearts and 21 Medals of Honor. All this from a unit that existed, then, for a little over three years, unlike other storied regiments which trace their lineage back to the American Revolution. To give you an idea of their fearsome resolve, I’d like to share one of their remarkable stories:

Near Seravezza, Italy, his unit pinned down by grazing fire from the enemy’s mountain defense, Private Sadao Munemori launched 1-man, frontal assaults, knocking out two machine guns with grenades. Withdrawing under murderous fire and showers of grenades from other enemy emplacements, he had nearly reached a shell crater where two of his buddies sought cover, when a grenade bounced off his helmet and rolled toward his comrades. Pfc Munemori rose in the withering fire, dived for the grenade, and smothered its blast with his body.

Posthumously awarded our nation’s highest military award for valor, the Medal of Honor, Pfc Munemori—by his heroic action—gave renewed meaning to the words of scripture: “Greater love has no man than to lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Meanwhile, half a world away, in Bataan province, a young Philippine scout named, Jose Calugas, was in the fray when a battery gun position was bombed and shelled by enemy forces. One gun was put out of commission and all its cannoneers killed or wounded. Sgt. Calugas, without being ordered, sprinted 1,000 yards across fire-swept terrain to the disabled gun position. Under heavy artillery fire, he quickly organized a volunteer squad that placed the gun back in commission, and then proceeded to return fire against the enemy. For his bravery, Sgt. Calugas also earned the Medal of Honor.

“Indistinguishable’ from the Japanese, Korean-Americans were also classified as enemy aliens yet in Los Angeles, fully one-fifth of the city’s Korean population joined the National Guard to form a “tiger brigade”—which trained to defend the Pacific coast against the possibility of invasion.

During that tumultuous time, the army assigned one Korean-American officer to the all-Nisei 100th Infantry Battalion. But, because Korea was then under Japanese occupation, Lieutenant Young Oak Kim was offered a reassignment as his superiors were afraid he wouldn’t mix well in an outfit made up almost entirely of Japanese-Americans.

Kim’s response cuts to the heart of our national identity—of who we are, how we define ourselves, and how we measure our worth. Adamantly refusing the transfer, Lieutenant Kim made and won his case for remaining with his unit, asserting that, “there [are] no Japanese or Koreans here. We’re all Americans and we’re fighting for the same cause.”

Kim went on to serve that cause well at the Battle of Anzio, where the entire U.S. Fifth Army clung to a 10 mile strip of beach for two months, while the enemy concentrated its fire on them. The pinned-down Allied forces desperately needed intelligence about enemy troop and tank locations to enable them to forge a breakout. Then-Captain Young Oak Kim volunteered to go behind enemy lines. Creeping along drainage ditches, crawling through heavy briar and across 250-yards of wheat fields, he captured and disarmed two enemy soldiers in broad daylight, all the while hearing the talk and laughter of other soldiers just yards away. The Allies got the intelligence they needed, and Fifth Army was able to break out of the beach head and liberate Rome. General Mark Clark, Fifth Army’s commander, personally awarded Captain Kim the Distinguished Service Cross—our nation’s second highest award for military valor. Over the course of his career, Colonel Kim would be awarded 18 additional medals, to include two Silver Stars, two Bronze Stars, and three Purple Hearts.

If we look to the twenty thousand Chinese who fought for America during World War II, fully 40 percent were born overseas, and many did not have families stateside—for the most part, their wives and children were still in China. They had little personal stake in the war—yet, they, too, served to demonstrate their resolve and willingness to defend America.

One Chinese-American from my home state of Hawai’i rose to heights of heroism above and beyond the call of duty in the ferocious fighting at the Battle of Leyte Gulf in the Philippines.

In their grinding push across the Pacific toward Japan, on 20 October 1944, U.S. troops invaded the island of Leyte. Among them was Captain Francis Wai. He had come ashore in the face of a concentrated barrage from enemy guns. Finding the first wave of American Soldiers leaderless, disorganized, and pinned down on the open beach, he immediately assumed command. Issuing orders and disregarding heavy enemy machine gun and rifle fire, he began to move inland without cover. The men, inspired by his cool demeanor and heroic example, rose from their positions and followed him. During the advance, Captain

Wai repeatedly determined the locations of enemy strong points by deliberately exposing himself to draw their fire and then destroying them. In leading the assault against the last remaining Japanese pillbox, he was cut down. By his heroic example, Captain Wai is largely credited for securing the entire initial beachhead and was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions.

Such was the stuff of Asian-Pacific American heroism in a war of epic proportions. Within their formations, “uncommon valor was an all too common virtue.” As America’s freedom hung in the balance, these men—and thousands of other Asian-Pacific Americans, men and women, military and civilian—contributed to the war effort. They anchored our country’s most fervent hopes for victory and for delivery from our darkest fears—because for them, failure was never an option—not even when injustice, segregation, and discrimination invaded their own lives. How do you characterize the quality of their patriotism? By their example in war and in peace, they became vanguards for social change, as well.

Because they cherished freedom and loved liberty enough to fight for it, not only did they preserve those cherished ideals for all of us, but they also bequeathed to us the legacy of free men everywhere. That legacy empowers us to state unequivocally, as others have before us, “I know that when I die, I will die a free man, on my feet, not on my knees, with my head up, not bowed to any man.”

Their legacy is also my legacy—and it is yours, as well. And because we share in that legacy, our children and grandchildren have the right to make the same unequivocal statement of free men. Only the free, who cherish freedom and love liberty enough to fight for it, can bequeath that legacy to others.

Today, young Americans are serving in distant lands preserving our rights and privileges as citizens of this great land of opportunity—this great land for which our forbears abandoned what little security they might have had in ancestral homelands to gamble on our futures here. Keep the flame of their dreams alive—preserve your cultures and traditions in this land of the free and home of the brave.

God bless those who serve and have served in—and out—of uniform. God bless this wonderful country of ours.