

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for joining us today to celebrate the culture, traditions, and history of Americans who can trace their ancestry back to countries like Japan, China, and Korea (PAUSE) Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam (PAUSE) Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines (PAUSE) India and Pakistan as well as to many Pacific Island subgroups, like Hawaii and American territories in Samoa and Guam.

Since the early years of our nation and our Army, Asian American and Pacific Islanders have played a crucial role in writing and shaping our history. Beginning in SEVENTEEN SIXTY THREE with a group of Filipino sailors who established a settlement in Saint Malo, Louisiana, after fleeing mistreatment aboard Spanish ships, people from Asia have come to America seeking refuge, freedom and new opportunities.

Since then, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have fought to preserve the Union between the North and the South, connected our nation from east to west, received our nation's highest medal for valor, and even had cases heard before the Supreme Court to gain their U.S. citizenship. They have served at all levels of the Army from private to Chief of Staff, have been elected to the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate, and currently serve as advisors to President Obama.

They are, as Andrew Jackson defined it, the good citizens who make this country's honor their own.

More than THIRTY SIX THOUSAND Asian American and Pacific Islander Soldiers serve in today's Army. In order to honor these men and women and those who came before them, we will open the history book and share with you some of the contributions made by Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to the United States Army, because, as the Chinese proverb says, "A book tightly shut is but a block of paper."

Despite facing racial discrimination, hatred, violence, bigotry and even internment, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders served this country with honor and patriotism. Time and time again, they proved that, as President Franklin Roosevelt said, “Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry.”

By the start of the Civil War thousands of Asians were living in the United States. History notes that a number of Asian men who fought in the war. Private Joseph Pierce, a Chinese-born Soldier from Connecticut, fought with the FOURTEENTH Connecticut Infantry at the Battle of Chancellorsville and helped repel Pickett's Charge at the Battle of Gettysburg. Many more like him brought honor upon themselves for their defense of the Union.

As the nation healed after the Civil War and the states of the North and South reunified, the transcontinental railroad connected the east and west in EIGHTEEN SIXTY NINE. Thousands of Chinese immigrants worked and died to complete this project that changed our nation's landscape forever. In the face of rising racial hostility, immigration restrictions and discriminatory laws, Asian Americans continued to pursue the American Dream and serve their nation in times of war.

In the years that followed the Spanish-American War, men like Private Jose (HO-say) Nisperos, who was the first Asian American to be awarded the Medal of Honor, served bravely as Philippine Scouts, and some of these Scouts went on to receive commissions from the United States Military Academy.

Despite numerous instances of discrimination, many Asian-Americans joined the U.S. Army and served with distinction during World War One on the battlefields of France.

Sergeant Bhagat (Bah-GAHT) Singh (SING) Thind was an Indian American who had enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War One and fought to be granted U.S. citizenship in a case heard by the Supreme Court. EIGHTEEN years after the end of the war, Thind and other Soldiers of Asian ancestry were recognized for their contributions to the war effort and were allowed to become naturalized citizens in NINETEEN THIRTY SIX.

After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, in NINETEEN FORTY ONE, the government placed many Japanese Americans living on the mainland in internment camps. Despite this, thousands of these men stepped forward to swear allegiance and serve our nation.

Made up of mostly Nisei (NEE-say), Japanese Americans born in the U.S., the FOUR-FORTY-SECOND Regimental Combat Team was one of the most decorated units of World War Two. TWENTY-ONE men were awarded the Medal of Honor, including Senator Daniel Inouye (In-OO-ay) of Hawaii.

Though the FOUR-FORTY-SECOND was mainly Nisei, Colonel Yong-Ok (OAK) Kim, was the only Korean American during his service with the FOUR-FORTY-SECOND and was the first minority officer to command an Army combat battalion.

As Calvin Coolidge said, “No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been their reward for what he gave.” And the men of the FOUR-FORTY-SECOND gave everything they had to achieve victory and lived up to the unit’s motto, “Go for broke.”

And for the next sixty five years Asian American and Pacific Islanders continued to “Go for Broke” in their service to the nation.

Throughout the wars in Korea and Vietnam, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders served with distinction, including General Eric Shinseki, a Japanese American born in Hawaii, who served as an artillery forward observer in Vietnam and rose in the ranks to serve as Chief of Staff of the Army and the highest ranked Asian American in the military. He now continues to serve our Veterans as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Major Tammy Duckworth, a Chinese-American who was born in Thailand, was a helicopter pilot in Iraq, when she was severely injured. Despite losing both her legs, she was appointed as the Assistant Secretary of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs for the Department of Veterans Affairs and continues to serve in the Illinois National Guard.

These brave men and women are just a few examples of brave Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who have shaped and served this nation. They bring traditions, strength and honor that have contributed to the diversity that makes the tapestry of America rich, bright and colorful.

As the Army moves forward in this era of persistent conflict, we will face new challenges of restoring balance and maintaining our combat edge. Looking to the examples of Senator Inouye (In-OO-way), General Shinseki (Shin-SHE-kee), Major Duckworth, Sergeant Thind, Private Nisperos, and the Four-Forty Second, we must live up to the motto, “Go for broke,” and give all that we have to modernize our force and build resilience in our Soldiers, Families, Veterans and the Army.

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are the strength of our Army, and America’s Army is the Strength of the Nation.