



U.S. Coast Guard Historian's Office

Preserving Our History For Future Generations

Asian Americans & the U.S. Coast Guard

Historical Chronology

1853

- U.S contact with Asian cultures came only as the nation's borders expanded to the Pacific. The first documented case of an Asian man serving on board a Coast Guard asset took place in 1853, when the San Francisco-based cutter *Argus* rescued the lone survivor of the dismantled junk *Yatha Maru*, fed and clothed him, and enlisted him into the crew. The cutter's commanding officer, Lieutenant William Pease, phonetically spelled this first Asian recruit's name as "Dee-Yee-Noskee."

1867

- Cutter muster roles tell the rest of the story of Asian participation in the nineteenth century. Ethnically Asian names begin to appear on cutter muster rolls just after the Civil War. Expanded revenue cutter operations in the Pacific and the purchase of Alaska in 1867 presented an opportunity for more Chinese, Japanese and Filipino men to enter the rolls on West Coast cutters. As with other minorities, these men initially filled positions in food service or non-petty-officer enlisted rates. By the end of the century, virtually every Pacific-based cutter employed Asian crewmembers.

1879

- Chiaio-Shung Soong emigrated from China to Boston as a teenager to work in his uncle's teashop. Dissatisfied with this work, Soong enlisted on board the cutter *Schuyler Colfax* in 1879 and transferred to the North Carolina-based cutter *Gallatin* a year later. After his brief career in the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, Soong attended Duke and Vanderbilt universities before returning to China as a missionary. He became a wealthy and influential power broker in Chinese politics and his children were among early 20th century China's most powerful military, political and economic leaders.

1898

- The 1898 Spanish-American War altered the Service's overseas recruiting and the early 1900s saw numerous Asian enlistments from captured territory, primarily the Philippines.

1904

- April 1904 saw 37-year-old F. Miguchi, of Kobe, Japan, enlist as a cook on board the cutter *Gresham*. Before he left the service in December 1905, he had advanced in rate from ship's cook to wardroom steward; saved the life of a drowning cutterman; and received the first Silver



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Lifesaving Medal awarded to a minority Coast Guardsman. Little else is known about Miguchi and even his first name remains a mystery to this day.

1941

- After the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans were excluded from participating in the Coast Guard bringing to a temporary close an 85-year record of ethnically Japanese service members. That policy was later rescinded and Japanese Americans returned to the Service before the war's conclusion.
- The Filipino-American San Juan family, including father Vivencio and three sons served in the Coast Guard. Vivencio San Juan served on board the Coast Guard-manned attack transport USS *Samuel Chase* during the invasions of North Africa and then Salerno, Italy. His son, Pedro, was stationed on board the attack transport USS *Bayfield* and saw service during the Normandy invasion and the invasion of Southern France. Another son, Ramon, served on board four Coast Guard cutters during his career and retired from the service in 1969. A third son, William, served in the Coast Guard in the Vietnam conflict. He was awarded the Purple Heart Medal for a combat injury received during a Viet Cong mortar attack.

1942

- After the fall of the Philippines to Japanese forces in 1942, the exiled president of the Philippines, Manuel Quezon, transferred the patrol boat *Bataan* and its crew to the Coast Guard to serve the duration of the war.
- In December 1942, four former officers of the Philippine Army received commissions in the Coast Guard Reserve after finishing the U.S. Navy's Submarine Chaser School. They included LCDR Carmelo Lopez Manzano, LT Benjamin Ayesa, LTJG Juan B. Lacson, and ENS Conrado Aguado. They were certified as qualified to command patrol vessels.
- LCDR Manzano had served as a major in the Philippine Army and also served as an Aide de Camp to Philippine Major General Basilio J. Valdes. He had 14 years of seagoing experience and his last Philippine vessel was destroyed in an attempt to run the Japanese blockade of Bataan. He was born in 1904 and commanded an ocean-going vessel for four years.
- LT Ayesa was born in Barcelona, Spain, in 1904, and became a naturalized Philippine citizen in 1937. He held an all-ocean all-tonnage merchant marine license with 21 years of seagoing experience and had served as a captain in the offshore patrol of the Philippine Army.
- LTJG Lacson was born in 1898 and had 20 years' experience at sea. He held a master's ticket and had served in the offshore patrol of the Philippine Army. During 1940 and 1941, he was a second and a chief officer of the Philippine Coast Guard.
- ENS Aguado, born in 1913, attended San Beda College and the Philippine Nautical School. He had a chief mate's license and 10 years' experience at sea and had served as a lieutenant in the Philippine Army's offshore patrol.

1941-1945

- Florence Ebersole Smith Finch, whose mother was Filipino and father was American, became a member of the Coast Guard Women's Reserve (or SPAR) in the final year of World War II. She was living in the Philippines when the Japanese invaded in 1942. When the Japanese took control of the Philippines, she told enemy soldiers she was Filipino and was not imprisoned. She joined the Filipino underground and smuggled food, medicine and other supplies to Allied POWs; however, she was eventually caught and arrested by the Japanese. Finch was beaten with



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sabers, tortured and routed through three prison camps before the Americans liberated the Philippines in 1945. "We were terrified; we didn't know what was going to happen to us," she said. "We had seen the death march and the condition of the American troops. You just can't comprehend what it was like. I was 80 pounds when we were liberated." Immediately following liberation by U.S. forces, she boarded a Coast Guard transport back to the United States. In the U.S., she enlisted in the Coast Guard as a SPAR to help "avenge the death of her late husband," who was killed aboard a Navy PT boat while running supplies to besieged Corregidor. Finch was the only woman to receive the Pacific Campaign Ribbon, which she received for her service in the Philippines prior to joining the Coast Guard. She also awarded the U.S. Medal of Freedom, one of a few Asian Americans to be so honored and she is the namesake of a Fast Response Cutter.

1949

- Chinese American Jack N. Jones was the first minority cadet to graduate from the Coast Guard Academy. He graduated with the Class of 1949.

1958

- In 1958, Manuel Tubella, Jr., became the first Asian American and second minority member to serve as an aviator in the Coast Guard. He trained originally as a Marine Corps helicopter pilot beginning in 1954 before transferring to the Coast Guard in 1956. He was awarded the Coast Guard Commendation Medal in 1972 and 1976. He was also the first Asian American in the Coast Guard promoted to the rank of captain and third minority officer to reach that rank.

1962

- Kwang-Ping Hsu was the first Chinese-born and second minority Coast Guard Academy graduate. He was a member of the Class of 1962 and, following Tubella, he became the second Asian-American Coast Guard aviator and the third minority aviator in the service. He served for 30 years, flying fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft and flew Arctic and Antarctic missions.

1963

- Harry Toshiyuki Suzuki graduated from the Coast Guard Academy in 1963. He was the first Japanese American and third Asian American to do so.

1980

- The year 1980 saw Japanese-American Moynee Smith become the first minority female graduate of the Academy.

1981

- Patrick Trapp graduated from the Coast Guard Academy in 1981 and was the Academy's first Korean-American graduate. He was also the first Korean-American commanding officer of a cutter--the 82-foot patrol boat *Point Camden*, based in Long Beach, California. As commanding officer of Group Portland, Maine, he was the senior Korean-American in the Coast Guard as of 2004. Captain Trapp was the first Korean-American commanding officer of a Coast Guard



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station--first at Station Grays Harbor, Washington, then at Station Sandy Hook, New Jersey. Trapp was the first Korean American in the Coast Guard to attain the rank of captain. He was also the first Korean-American to command a sector.

1982

- In 1982, Jeanien Yee became the second Asian-American female graduate of the Academy.

1983

- In 1988, Jeffrey Lee became the first Korean American to graduate from the Coast Guard's Officer Candidate School. He was also the first Korean-American commanding officer of a 95-foot cutter - *Cape Cross*. Captain Lee was the first Korean-American commanding officer of an icebreaking tug, the 140-foot *Biscayne Bay*. Captain Lee was the first Korean-American executive officer of a 378-foot cutter, the *Hamilton* and was the first Korean-American to teach at the Leadership Development Center. Captain Lee was the first Korean-American to command a high-endurance cutter, the *Hamilton*, taking command on 19 June 2006. He retired in 2008.
- Captain Gilbert Kanazawa was the first Japanese-American to attain the rank of O-6 in the Coast Guard. During his distinguished career, Captain Kanazawa held a number of senior positions.

1986

- Captain Hung M. Nguyen was the first Vietnamese-American to graduate from the Coast Guard Academy, the first to command a Coast Guard unit, and the first to reach the rank of O-6.

1988

- Theodore L. Mar was the first Chinese-American commissioned officer to serve in the Rotating Commissioned Teaching Corps to teach an academic subject at the Coast Guard Academy. He taught during the 1988-1989 academic year.

1995

- Bryon Ing was the first Chinese-American Coast Guardsman to command a medium-endurance cutter when he commanded CGC *Venturous* from 1995-1997. He was the first Chinese-American Coast Guard Liaison Officer to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (J7-Doctrine) in 1997. He was the first Chinese American in DAWIA/DHS Level III Certified Systems Acquisitions (2002) and the first Chinese-American Major Acquisitions Systems Project Manager for Response Boat-Medium (RB-M), where he served from 2002-2006.
- In 1995, Japanese-American Academy graduate Mara Huling Langevin received her Coast Guard wings becoming the first Asian-American woman to do so. She flew HH-65A Dolphin helicopters.

2014

- In 2014, Captain Joseph M. Vojvodich was promoted to Rear Admiral (Lower Half), becoming the first Asian American to make flag rank. He was born in South Korea and grew up in Ohio before



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attending and graduating from the Coast Guard Academy. In 2018, RDML Vojvodich was promoted to Rear Admiral (Upper Half).

2015

- On 01 June 2015, Cynthia Moneda Samonte became the first female Asian American Master Chief Petty Officer in the Coast Guard. She was born in the Philippines and grew up in San Diego, California, where she joined the active duty workforce in June 1994. At that time, she pursued the rating of yeoman.

2016

- In 2016, Rear Admiral Andrew J. Tiongson became the Service's first Filipino-American flag officer and second Asian-American flag.

2019

- In 2019, Rear Admiral Andrew M. Sugimoto became the Service's first Japanese-American flag officer and third Asian-American flag.



Updated: 04/03/2020