

A REPORT
ON THE WELFARE OF
ASIAN AMERICANS AND
PACIFIC ISLANDERS
SERVING IN THE
UNITED STATES
MILITARY



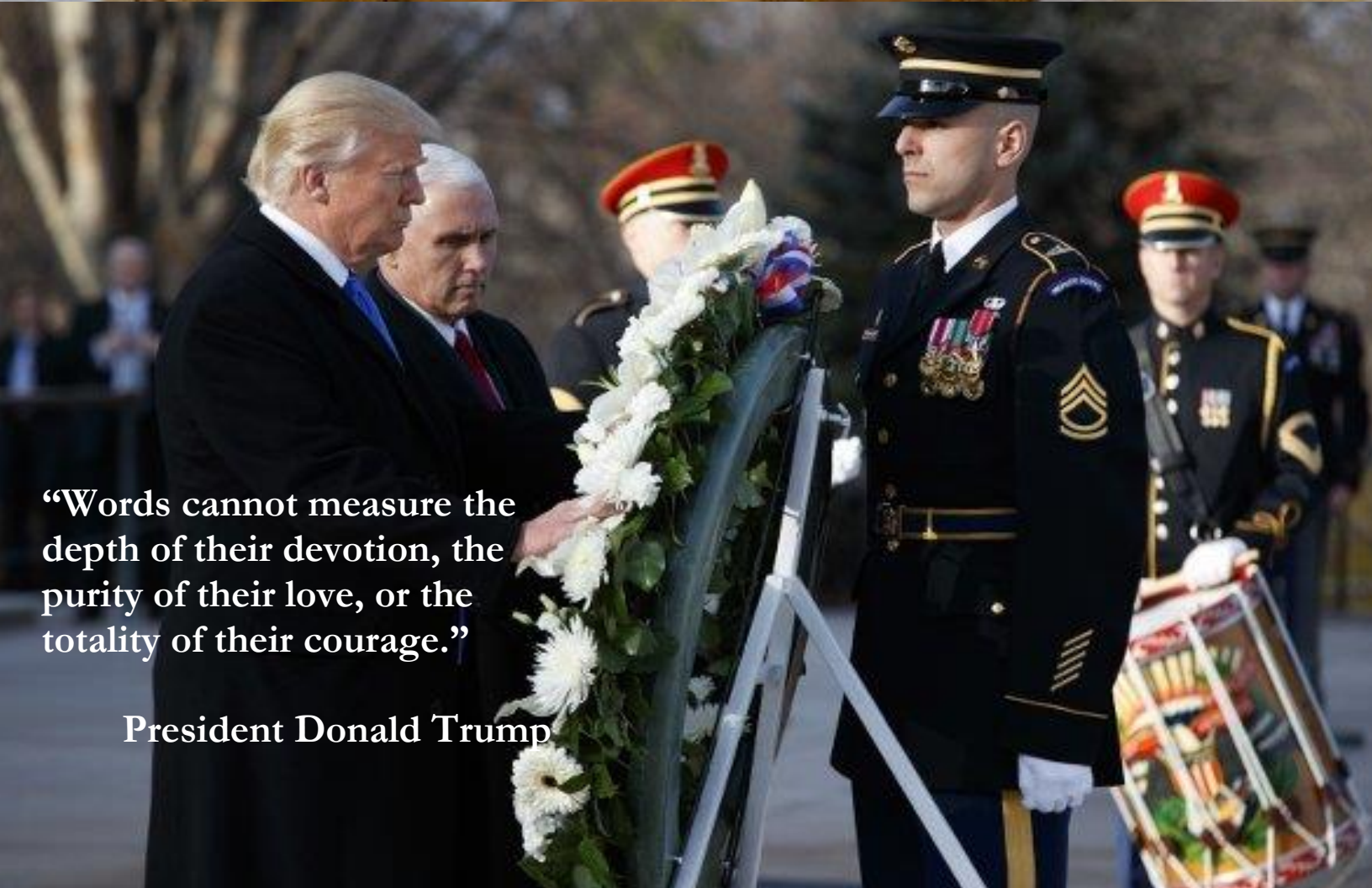
A BI-PARTISAN REPORT PREPARED BY
THE PRESIDENT'S ADVISORY
COMMISSION ON ASIAN AMERICANS
AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS

NOVEMBER 11, 2017



**“Everyone can do more for our veterans.
This has to be a national effort.”**

President Barack Obama



**“Words cannot measure the
depth of their devotion, the
purity of their love, or the
totality of their courage.”**

President Donald Trump

Dear President Trump

The President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders is proud to submit the nation's first report on the welfare of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) serving in the United States Military.

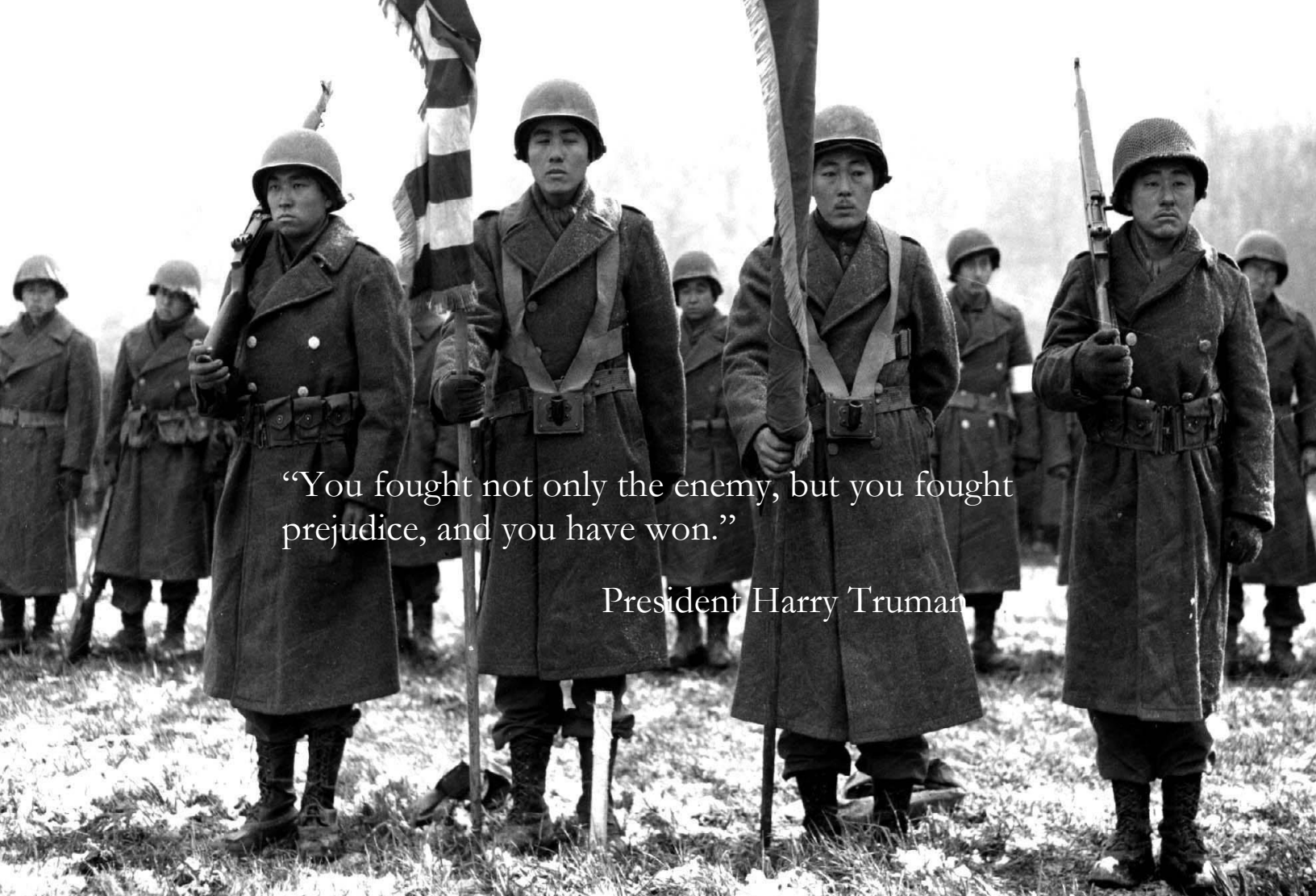
The men and women who serve in the United States Military come from all walks of life, and represent communities across our great land. Ready at a moment's notice, servicemembers respond to national security and humanitarian crises ranging from threats to the homeland, conflicts on distant shores, and even natural disasters occurring within our own communities. Naturally, they represent the finest our nation has to offer. Recognizing and raising awareness of the challenges our military, veterans, and their families face should remain a top priority for our nation's leadership.

In the past decade, the U.S. military has become more and more diverse, a reflection of the changing demographics across the nation. One such demographic shift is occurring in the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Community. AAPIs are now the fastest growing racial group in America, and have served in nearly every armed conflict in our nation's history. Due to this rapidly changing dynamic, the President's Advisory Commission on AAPIs conducted a two-year review, focusing on examining the unique challenges and opportunities faced by AAPIs serving in the military and veteran community. We sought to step directly into their world, understand their challenges, and relay that information directly to senior leaders in government with actionable recommendations.

This report provides a summary of that review, on behalf of the thousands of AAPIs serving proudly in the U.S. military and broader Veteran Community. It is designed to provide key observations, issues, and opportunities within this demographic with the end goal of improving both the readiness and quality of life of our men and women in uniform. This report represents the first of its kind for AAPIs, and we hope the recommendations will help build an action-oriented agenda from the knowledge gained. I look forward to future discussions on this matter, and strengthening bipartisan support for the men and women who selflessly serve our nation.



Ravi Chaudhary, Commissioner
President's Advisory Commission on AAPIs



“You fought not only the enemy, but you fought prejudice, and you have won.”

President Harry Truman



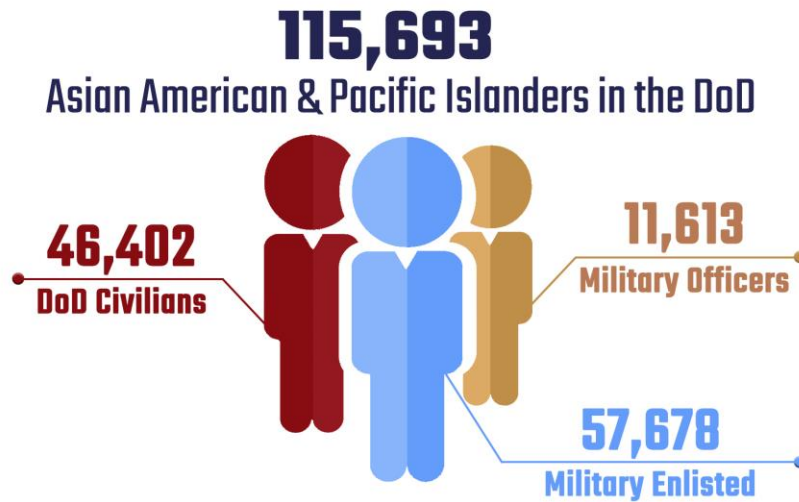


Figure 1. AAPIs in the Military (Source: DoD, 2015)

OVERVIEW AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are the fastest growing racial group in the U.S. From 2000 to 2010, the AAPI population in the U.S. grew by 46%.¹ Similar demographic trends have emerged in the U.S. Military (see Figure 1 above).² Currently, there are over 68,000 AAPIs serving in the U.S. military. As the broader population of AAPIs in America grows, more and more AAPIs are answering the call to serve in the Department of Defense (DoD). Recent trends indicate that AAPIs are answering the call to serve their nation in significantly greater numbers. For example, in 2009 an 80% increase in Asian American military recruits was reported in the Los Angeles metropolitan area.³ That

same year Asian Americans made up 4.4% of the U.S. Army Officer Corps. An analysis of DoD demographic reporting conducted by the President’s Advisory Commission on AAPIs revealed that from 2010 to 2015, the number of Asian American Officers in the military increased from 3.8% to 4.7%, reflecting an increase of over 22%. Additionally, the Commission observed that citizens of the U.S. Territory of Guam serve in the military at a higher rate per capita than nearly all other states in the nation. The rapidly increasing numbers of AAPIs answering the call to serve has brought about the need for DoD and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to account for this demographic shift, and

¹ President’s Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, “Building the American Mosaic,” Washington, D.C., May 2014, p. 7.

² Available at the following website: https://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0516_aapi/

³ Teresa Watanabe, “Asian Americans Driving Recruiting Boom in L.A.,” Los Angeles Times, December 2009.



examine issues impacting AAPIs serving. The DoD has concurred with this assessment, and articulated the need to develop a new framework for addressing this demographic shift. DoD seeks to transform policy from the legacy concept of “military equal opportunity” to a more agile approach DoD might pursue to recruit and retain a more diverse force representative of the nation’s demographic trajectory.⁴ With this context, the President’s Advisory Commission sought to partner with the DoD, the VA, and a broad stakeholder community in order to develop a more strategic approach to addressing the future needs of AAPI servicemembers and veterans. This report presents the methodology, activities, accomplishments, and recommendations to improve the quality of life of AAPI Military Members and Veterans. During the period of execution (encompassing the timeframe

from May of 2014 to November of 2017), the Commission determined that significant opportunities exist to address the critical issues facing AAPIs serving.

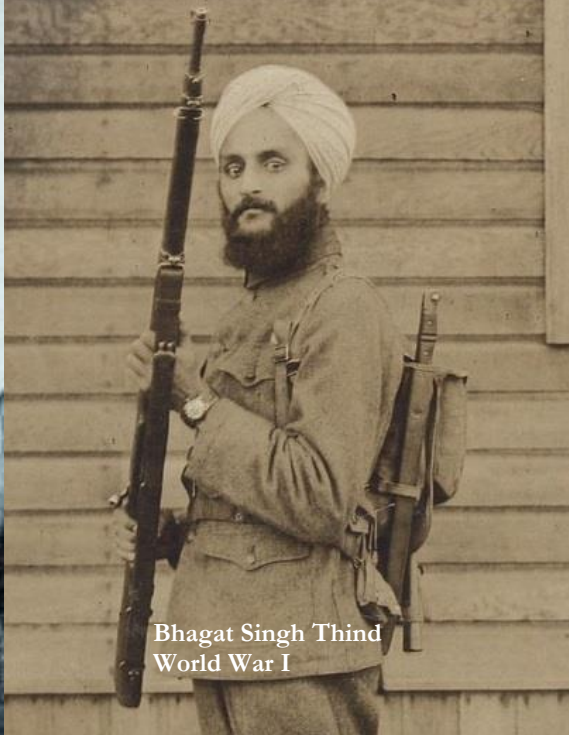
Recommendations for DoD and the VA are presented on page 37. They provide extensive guidance for action in order to increase military readiness and improve quality of life for AAPI military members and veterans. Some of the recommendations require resourcing, while other initiatives are institutional in nature, and can be accomplished at little or no cost. Regardless, inclusion in future legislative authorizations and appropriations are recommended in order for policy-driven solutions to generate desired effects. Ultimately, future success will be dependent on a collaborative stakeholder community, guided by a desire to improve quality of life for AAPI military members and veterans.

⁴ U.S. President Barack Obama, Military Leadership and Diversity Commission, “From Diversity to Inclusion, Diversity Leadership for the 21st Century Military. Report to the President,” available at,

http://diversity.defense.gov/Portals/51/Documents/Special%20Feature/MLDC_Final_Report.pdf (March 15, 2011), p. 23.



Corporal Joseph Pierce
U.S. Civil War



Bhagat Singh Thind
World War I



Hazel Ying Lee
World War II

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ASIAN AMERICANS IN THE U.S. MILITARY

In 1945, the U.S. military was a segregated institution, a reflection of the societal norms in the broader American population.⁵ Units such as the 442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT) consisted of Japanese Americans and remained segregated throughout World War II.⁶ Many of the Japanese Americans that served in the 442nd had enlisted in the army even after President Roosevelt had signed Executive Order 9066, which detained approximately 120,000 Japanese Americans and confined them to internment camps across the nation.⁷ The U.S. military has a long history of enlisting segregated units, dating back to the revolutionary war. Examples of segregated minority units include the 54th Massachusetts Regimental Infantry Unit

during the U.S. Civil War, as well as the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II.

Many of these units earned acclaim for their heraldry on the battlefield. Eventually, the Japanese American Nisei soldiers of the 442nd RCT became one of the most decorated combat units in U.S. history. For their efforts, President Truman said of the Nisei soldiers, “You fought not only the enemy, but you fought prejudice, and you have won.”⁸ The performance of the 442nd as well as many other segregated units such as the Tuskegee Airmen and the Native American Code Talkers led the newly formed Department of Defense to

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Matthew Elms, *When the Akimotos Went To War* (Washington: American Battle Monuments Commission, 2015), 47.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Harry Truman, Senate Congressional Record, V. 146, Pt. 8, June 13, 2000 to June 21, 2000, 10420.



442nd RCT
World War II



U.S. Filipino Scouts
World War II

conduct detailed studies of minorities serving in the military, and the eventual pursuit of full integration.

The performance of segregated units also resulted in an incremental shift in thinking on the state of equality in their respective institutions, which impacted broader societal norms across America in the period following World War II. However, it took approximately twenty years following the end of World War II for minorities to serve in increasing numbers.⁹

Even before World War II, Asian Americans had served in nearly every American conflict since the founding of our nation. Filipino Americans had manned defensive batteries at the Battle of New Orleans during the war of 1812. In the U.S. Civil War, individuals such as Chinese American Corporal Joseph Pierce

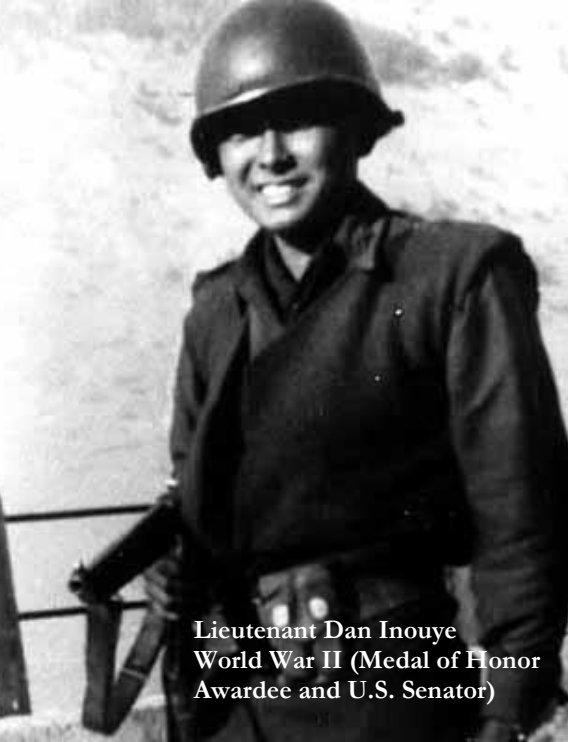
fought at the battles of Antietam and Gettysburg.¹⁰ Despite the discriminatory provisions of the Chinese Exclusion Act, Chinese Americans volunteered and fought under General Pershing in the Mexican Expedition in 1916. During World War I, Bhagat Singh Thind, an Indian American from the Sikh faith tradition, served honorably in the U.S. Army and eventually took his fight for citizenship to the U.S. Supreme Court.¹¹ In 1941, more than 250,000 Filipino soldiers responded to President Roosevelt's call-to-arms and later fought under the American flag during World War II. Many made the ultimate sacrifice as both soldiers in the U.S. Army Forces in the Far East and as guerilla fighters during the Imperial Japanese occupation of the Philippines. Later, a large number of these soldiers became U.S. citizens,

⁹ Alan Gropman, *The Air Force Integrates, 1945-1964*, Smithsonian Institution, (Washington, D.C., Office of Air Force History, 1998), XIV.

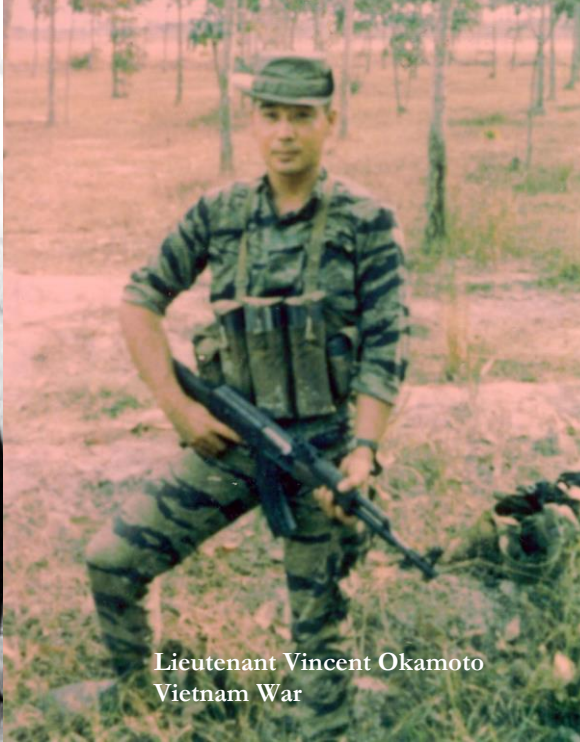
¹⁰ The National Park Service, *Asians and Pacific Islanders and the Civil War*, edited by Carol

Shively, Department of Interior, Washington D.C., 2015, p. 64.

¹¹ U.S. Supreme Court, *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, 261 U.S. 204 (1923), Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit.



Lieutenant Dan Inouye
World War II (Medal of Honor
Awardee and U.S. Senator)



Lieutenant Vincent Okamoto
Vietnam War



Sabu Dastagir (first row middle)
World War II

despite having been stripped of their benefits by the Rescission Act of 1946.

In 1962, President Kennedy launched the Gesell Commission, a Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces.¹² Initially, members of Congress reacted negatively to the formation of the committee; however, most of its recommendations were adopted by the military.¹³ The precedence set by the Gesell Report was instrumental in setting the stage on reforms for minority servicemembers, and also affected changes in the broader American society. Issues such as equal rights for women and other disadvantaged communities often followed the policy changes instituted by the U.S. military. In the case of integration of minorities into the U.S. military during the 1950s and 1960s, many of the leaders involved did not change their perspectives on integration until

commissions were formed that entered into a dialogue on the subject. The numerous studies and reports allowed leaders to conclude that institutional integration of minorities ensured military readiness for the nation.¹⁴ This context played an important role in the development of new diversity policies for the DoD in response to changing demographics during the 1980s and 1990s. Military equal opportunity programs have relied on this foundational approach since then, with advances moving appreciably but incrementally. It is for this reason that the President’s Advisory Commission on AAPIs has assumed a renewed focus on supporting servicemembers and veterans.

A 2010 study on diversity and inclusion by the Department of Defense provided an alert on the changing demographics in the nation, as well as the military.¹⁵ However,

¹² Gropman, *The Air Force Integrates*, p. XIV.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. XIV.

¹⁵ U.S. President Barack Obama, “From Diversity to Inclusion,” p. 23.

the study did not examine if this was occurring in the Asian American community, at least to the extent that it would identify a need for policy reforms. The absence of data upon which to draw conclusions, coupled with the rapidly changing demographics in the U.S. military, caused the President’s Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to establish a robust outreach plan. The purpose of the plan was to establish a platform to garner feedback from Asian Americans serving in the military, and determine if a more formal review was warranted.

Important Acronyms

AAPI	Asian American and Pacific Islander
APAICS	Asian Pacific Am. Institute of Cong. Studies
DASD	Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
DoD	Department of Defense
FVEC	Filipino Equity Compensation Fund
IG	Inspector General
MAVNI	Military Accessions Vital to National Interest
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
OPE	White House Office of Public Engagement
PPALM	Pan Pacific American Leaders and Mentors Org.
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
RCT	Regimental Combat Team
VA	Department of Veterans Affairs
WHIAAPI	White House Initiative on AAPIs

“There can be no greater dagger into the heart of extremism than to have the extremists see all the world’s cultures, visibly marching in one formation, and united against bigotry and hatred. American Exemplarism is the definitive strategy in this fight, and designed to complement kinetics; it is a precision weapon that our enemies will find difficult to circumvent.”

Commissioner Ravi Chaudhary



ADVISORY COMMISSION ACTIVITIES

Commission activities began in May of 2014, with the appointment by the President of an active duty Air Force Officer to the President’s Advisory Commission on AAPIs. Prior to the appointment, a number of efforts had already been under way. Led primarily by non-profit stakeholder groups, in October of 2010 the President signed S.1055, awarding the Congressional Gold Medal to Japanese Americans who fought during World War II (see inside front cover). The President also authorized the release of a one-time, lump-sum payment to eligible veterans under the World War II

Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund (FVEC) of 2009. An effort was also undertaken by the non-profit community to seek the Congressional Gold Medal for Filipino World War II Veterans. Members of the Filipino community received support from the previous Advisory Commission, to include several outreach activities. However, limited resources and experience working on civil-military matters prevented focused attention on efforts by the Commission. Given the potential for future gaps in support, leaders in the White House Office of Public Engagement (OPE) and



Commission outreach at the Office of Naval Research



Diwali Ceremony at Walter Reed Medical Center



Terasita Smith discusses the challenges Guam Veterans face

White House Initiative on AAPIs (WHIAAPI) sought to bolster support with the appointment of a Commissioner to address key issues affecting AAPI military members and veterans. With the Commission now populated by an active duty military member [considered a new endeavor for a domestic Presidential Commission], activities were postured to advance civilian-military discourse. Commissioners conducted a series of interactive activities for AAPI members within DoD and the broader veteran community. Events started with key speaking engagements and the initiation of AAPI cultural festivals in DoD and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

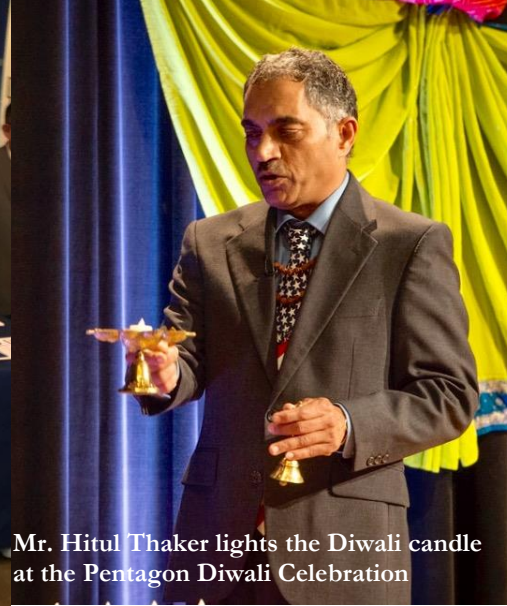
More events followed with leadership discussions at organizations such as the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Navy’s Office of Scientific Research, and VA Center for Minority Veterans. Follow-up briefings and military base visits were conducted and service members were allowed to interface directly with the Commission. Military members and veterans and provided feedback on key issues affecting AAPIs in the military and

veteran community. Primarily focused on quality of life challenges, DoD members and veterans raised issues that included but were not limited to organizational climate, equal opportunity, recruiting, retention, and cultural accommodations for AAPI service members. For the veteran population, issues comprised of resource limitations for AAPI veterans located in areas such as the U.S. Territory of Guam, as well as broader recognition and for select veteran populations, such as Filipino and Chinese American World War II Veterans.

The Commission sought to gather initial feedback from AAPI military members and veterans in both formal and informal settings in order to determine where challenges may lie. Areas such as quality of life, organizational climate, career development, recruiting, and accessions were discussed in depth with military members in formal and informal settings. The information enabled active engagement with the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in order to develop



Honoring South Asian military members at the White House Seva Conference



Mr. Hitul Thaker lights the Diwali candle at the Pentagon Diwali Celebration

collaborative solutions to the challenges identified by servicemembers. The combination of public outreach and social media interaction allowed the Commission to establish communication channels for AAPI military and veterans to share experiences unique to the AAPI community that they were previously unable to access. Participation in community outreach activities also yielded productive discourse with prominent AAPI veteran organizations and a

determination of focus areas to support veterans. In some instances, issues were resolved at the field level, while others required the initiation of collaborative approaches directly with the Pentagon or affected agencies. The cumulative feedback from stakeholders resulted in key actions, as well as the formulation of the recommendations presented later in this report.



WHIAAPI Regional Director, Paul Chang, (second from right) conducted several outreach events at military installations in California





“It’s been nearly 50 years since the U.S. welcomed my family as immigrants, and I’m proud that my brother, husband, and I are continuing the legacy of my father, who served for 20 years in the U.S. Army.”

Major Renee Lee
(shown above with husband, Captain Jason Yee)



Floyd Mori, APAICS President, addresses attendees at the APAICS/PPALM annual military leadership luncheon



A COMPLEX STAKEHOLDER COMMUNITY FOR AAPI MILITARY MEMBERS AND VETERANS

Since the tragic events of 9/11 and the subsequent war on global terrorism, the stakeholder community for veterans, particularly in the non-profit sector, has experienced dramatic growth. Through the Joining Force Initiative, the Office of the First Lady of the United States (FLOTUS) played a key role in energizing industry and non-profit entities to support the issues of military members, veterans, and their families. The President's Advisory Commission on AAPIs served as part of a broad stakeholder community that leveraged a whole-of-nation approach to addressing the challenges posed to AAPIs. The AAPI military and veteran

stakeholder community is expansive, and includes large networks in the public and private sector. A significant number of AAPI non-profit organizations include support for AAPI veteran issues in their respective portfolios, and are estimated in the thousands. Conversely, some military and veteran organizations have dedicated portions of their portfolio towards addressing minority challenges, including issues faced by AAPIs. The number of non-profit organizations that are solely dedicated to AAPI military and veteran issues is significantly smaller, and is estimated at approximately 3000 organizations nation-wide.



Additionally, a number of AAPI social media platforms have emerged as networks for AAPIs to initiate critical dialogue on civil-military issues, mentorship, and AAPI specific challenges such as cultural awareness, chaplain support, equal opportunity, and wellness. The stakeholder community can be characterized using the broad categories described below:

Key stakeholders:

- The DoD and individual services (including their respective offices of diversity and inclusion, personnel, and the military service academies)
- The Department of Veterans Affairs (to include the Center for Minority Veterans)
- Other Federal Agencies connected with Service Member and Veteran Issues
- Members of State and Local Governments
- Members of Congress and their respective Committees and Staffs (in particular, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus)
- Military and veteran non-profit organizations

- AAPI military and veteran social media networks
- AAPI military members, veterans, and their families

In the course of interacting with the stakeholder community, the Advisory Commission made several observations. First of all, many of the non-governmental organizations supporting AAPIs in the military and veteran community interacted with their governmental counterparts on a periodic basis, engaging them directly on issues affecting their constituencies. Stakeholders engaged governmental organizations on policy issues such as religious accommodation, establishment of new chaplaincies, cases of discrimination, and recognition for veterans. Second, this created a logistical problem, since many of the federal agencies responsible for these issues did not have formal guidance from their respective departments to address such issues. This challenge was particularly problematic with agencies such as DoD, since it responds and interacts in accordance with governing directives and

strategic guidance set forth by the White House. Third, the logistical challenges resulted in sub-optimal policymaking, even when stakeholders agreed on a particular course of action. In the absence of guidance, agencies were reluctant to commit resources or even communicate coordinated responses with stakeholders. In turn, stakeholders often became frustrated with this fact, and in some cases initiated interactions with Congress in order to address policy issues. In several instances, organizations resorted to lawsuits that widened gaps among stakeholders and reduced information flow among governmental and non-governmental entities.

Despite these challenges, stakeholders did achieve a number of key milestones as a result of direct engagement with governmental organizations, as witnessed by the approval of FVEC in 2009, as well as the Congressional Gold Medal for Japanese American Veterans from World War II in 2010. In 2011, non-governmental organizations also honored South Asian Military members for the first time at the White House Executive Office Building, and DoD approved the establishment of a Hindu Chaplaincy. In March of 2015, the National Park Service (NPS), released a book titled “Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the Civil War,” which provided an early history of AAPIs serving in the military (shown in Figure 2).

The addition of civilian-military issues to the President’s Advisory Commission portfolio sought to close these gaps, enhance communications, and provide a

platform for agencies to engage the White House on policy issues raised within stakeholder communities. This new stakeholder approach proved helpful in reducing duplicative communication efforts among the agencies addressing



Figure 2. National Park Service Handbook

military and veteran issues. Agencies were also able to consult the Commission for advice and clarity on policy directions, as well as access information received from AAPI servicemembers providing direct feedback to the Commission on their challenges. By synchronizing policy guidance from the White House with the appropriate agencies, stakeholders reported improvements in advancing policies of interest to servicemembers and their families. Additionally, the President’s Advisory Commission was able to serve as a focal point for activities and identify issues of a common nature so

that stakeholders might cooperate for mutual benefit and share resources. Validation of this network culminated in December of 2016, when stakeholders gathered at the first-ever National Forum for AAPI Military Members and Veterans, hosted by the President's Advisory Commission on AAPIs. A full description of this event is provided in the accomplishments section. In the future, the Commission will continue to cultivate a stakeholder community that leverages resources across the enterprise and seek common solutions that benefit servicemembers across the diverse spectrum of the AAPI community.



Air Force Colonel Jimmy Canlas greets Filipino World War II Veteran Celistino Almeda



AAPI Heritage Month Celebration Fort Bragg, North Carolina

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The President’s Advisory Commission recognizes that the accomplishments of the AAPI community on military and veteran issues reflect the collective efforts of the entire stakeholder community. Often times, stakeholders representing various AAPI groups assumed lead roles in their respective endeavors. On a number of occasions, the President’s Advisory Commission served in a facilitator role, providing key connection points or access to governmental networks capable of solving problems affecting AAPIs in the military and veteran community. In other cases, the Commission provided direct support of servicemembers on issues related to religious accommodation and equal opportunity. In this respect, the Commission successfully cultivated key partnerships with the DoD, VA, and Members of Congress in order to improve

the lives of servicemembers and retirees in the military.

As such, the Commission realized several key accomplishments for AAPI military and veterans over the course of the Administration. Those accomplishments are outlined below, and divided into two key categories—consisting of outreach and advocacy. The third accomplishment reflects the Commission’s endeavor to bring AAPI stakeholders together by convening the first National Forum for AAPI Military Members and Veterans. While the administration has made significant strides in supporting the broader population of military members, veterans, and families through initiatives such as the First Lady’s Joining Forces Initiative, the following accomplishments reflect administration and stakeholder activities specific to the AAPI community.



Commissioners worked with local faith groups to honor AAPI veterans in communities



U.S. Air Force Academy Cadets meet with senior Pentagon leaders, including Mr. Gabe Camarillo, Air Force Assistant Secretary for Manpower

ACCOMPLISHMENT #1:
Stakeholder outreach, education and awareness of AAPI military and veteran issues.

Over the course of President Obama’s Administration, Commissioners established a comprehensive outreach program using both person-to-person and digital platforms to develop a productive stakeholder community that addressed issues of importance for AAPI military members and veterans. The Commission conducted numerous speaking and outreach engagements with DoD and VA headquarters and field organizations. Several of the events are listed below (note: the events listed provide a representative sample of activities, and are not all inclusive).

- In partnership with the White House Office of Public Engagement (OPE), the Commission sponsored tours for AAPI service members, and secured attendance at a number of White House events such as the Annual Easter Egg roll, state welcome ceremonies, and other key events

- Commissioners attended as guest speakers at Veterans Affairs AAPI Heritage Month celebrations and conducted live-stream question and answer sessions
- Commissioners visited numerous military installations across the nation, and served as guest speakers at AAPI Heritage Month Celebrations (the installations visited included, but were not limited to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, The Office of Naval Research, Virginia, Walter Reed, Maryland, and Wright Patterson AFB, Ohio)
- Commissioners attended, organized, and spoke at faith-based celebrations (the events included, but were not limited to community events, the DoD Pentagon Chaplain Diwali, Vaisakhi, and Ramadan Celebrations)
- Commissioner installation visits also included interactive round tables and ‘sensing sessions’ with military members and diversity representatives to hear their perspectives on critical issues affecting AAPIs



Army Secretary Eric Fanning at the 2017 Pentagon Diwali Ceremony



White House OPE honoring AAPI soldiers

- Commissioners developed activities with local non-profits, attended the White House Seva Conference, and delivered an address honoring South Asian Members in Military Service
- In conjunction with the White House Initiative on AAPIs (WHIAAPI) and Office of Public Engagement, the Commission sponsored White House tours for AAPI servicemembers and their families
- Commissioner Billy Dec delivered a presentation honoring Filipino Veterans at the White House celebration of Filipino American History Month

The outreach efforts were effective in raising awareness and understanding of emergent issues in the AAPI military and veteran community. Additionally, leaders from the OPE played a key role in ensuring AAPI military members and their families were represented at AAPI events, an activity that built greater awareness of contributions within the AAPI community. OPE enabled regular White House tours for AAPIs during AAPI Heritage Month observances and other holiday events, in order to recognize

the service of military members. AAPI military members were also selected to represent the community at a number of key White House events. In 2011, the Army's first Hindu Chaplain, introduced President Obama at the White House Diwali Festival. In subsequent years, Commissioner Chaudhary introduced First Lady Michelle Obama at the 2013 White House Diwali Festival. The inclusion of AAPI military members and their families by OPE increased awareness of the contributions of AAPI military members. Through coordination and partnering with the OPE, AAPI military and veteran contributions were regularly reflected in the remarks of POTUS, VPOTUS, and FLOTUS when discussing important AAPI issues. Representation of AAPI military members and veterans at formal state arrivals also played a significant role in defining the impact of AAPI immigrant communities and the broader role of diasporas in building global partnerships. In December of 2016, OPE hosted a discussion highlighting the service of Japanese Americans who served in the 442nd RCT during World War II, and also welcomed



Members of the Muslim American community meet with Japanese American World War II Veterans at White House OPE hosted event



Mr. Joe Montano from the Office of Senator Tim Kaine mentors a Naval Academy Cadet at the APAICS/PPALM Military Luncheon.

representatives of the Muslim community in order to promote a cross-cultural conversation on discrimination.

Additionally, several non-profit organizations played key leadership roles in holding events highlighting the military service of AAPIs. In 2014 the Asian Pacific American Institute of Congressional Studies (APAICS) and Pan-Pacific American Leaders and Mentors (PPALM) initiated the first Annual Military Appreciation Luncheon for AAPIs. The events played a significant role in building awareness of AAPIs in military service and the broader veteran community. The event was widely attended by senior leaders in government, to include Members of Congress, AAPI military and flag officers, as well as distinguished veterans who served from as far back as World War II. APAICS also partnered with the U.S. Coast Guard and Google to hold a leadership symposium for active-duty AAPIs in the Coast Guard that focused on leveraging social media to improve leadership skills. Keynote speakers included former Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta and Congressman Mike Honda.

Recognizing the need for military transition programs tailored to the needs of AAPIs, non-profit organizations such as the Asian American Government Executive Network (AAGEN) and Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC) established robust training and formal mentorship programs tailored for transitioning military members and veteran hiring support. Additionally, the Army Association AAPI Committee and the Army Historical Society presented a comprehensive tribute to Asian American Soldiers, and which featured a keynote address from former VA Secretary Eric Shinseki.

Digital outreach by the Commission on AAPI military and veteran issues proved essential in creating national awareness of the contributions of immigrants to our nation, and established important dialogue on issues crucial to AAPI veterans. The approach was effective for several reasons. First, social media has emerged as an important tool for connecting military and veteran AAPIs. The



Figure 3. The WHIAAPI Social Media Regularly Highlighted AAPI Veteran Experiences

Commission and WHIAAPI Initiative connected with a variety of AAPI military and veteran social media networks in order to garner critical feedback on military family and veteran issues (see Figure 3). Commission engagement and collaboration with AAPI military and veteran social media sites has enabled important dialogue directly with AAPI veteran communities, and established a valuable community-of-practice for AAPI veterans. Second, blog posts and opinion articles published by the Commission highlighted the contributions of AAPIs in military service, and publicized key contributions of AAPI immigrants in the U.S. Military. Third, social media and electronic discussions resulted in a review of service-related concerns—among the issues that surfaced was a discussion on Eastern faith group internments at Arlington National Cemetery. Commissioners established connections to several AAPI digital communities-of-practice, which enabled a productive conduit for information flow and generated opportunities to better-

understand AAPI military members and veterans. Organizations such as the Japanese American Veterans Association (JAVA) held commemorative events honoring Nisei soldiers of World War II, and the Vietnamese American Uniformed Service Organization (VAUSA) conducted annual banquets honoring Vietnamese Americans who served in the military. Commissioners also advised the South Asian community with the launch of its first non-profit organization dedicated to supporting military families. In Washington D.C., the Commission assisted metropolitan faith groups to launch annual Veterans Day commemorations in 4 different locations, and welcomed AAPIs from the U.S. Naval and Air Force Academy during several traditional celebrations. Ultimately, the outreach strategy played an integral role in broadening servicemember and veteran awareness of stakeholder activities, as well as providing organizations greater access to AAPIs they were dedicated to supporting.



Stakeholder Veterans Saif Khan and Terasita Smith meet with Congresswoman Bordallo at the Department of Veterans Affairs

ACCOMPLISHMENT #2: AAPI Military and Veteran Advocacy

Activities. Outreach activities also played an important role in cultivating dialogue of a depth and quality that enabled the Commission to understand emergent issues affecting AAPI military members. The outreach was also foundational in developing an understanding of how issues could be solved. As a result of the outreach, a significant amount of follow-up requests for action were received on issues ranging from command climate, equal opportunity, accommodations, and even recruiting challenges. Since these topics posed a significant impact on the mission readiness of the armed services, they uncovered key areas of focus for the Commission. Subsequently, several issues were brought to a favorable resolution, while others require continued development and collaboration for resolution.

Military Diversity and Inclusion:

Prominent members of the Sikh American community reached out to the Commission in order to engage DoD on religious accommodation for members of

the Sikh faith to wear articles of clothing during military service. Historically, a limited number of Sikh service members had received individual waivers after extensive engagement with DoD, however a broader inclusion policy had not yet been established. This required members to pursue a new waiver with the installation commander each time they changed duty stations, or even traveled on temporary duty. Commissioner Chaudhary brought this issue to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, as well as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Diversity and Leadership. The discussions yielded a face-to-face meeting between key advocates from the Sikh Community and DoD in order to develop a foundation for ongoing discussion. Previous attempts to engage DoD on this issue had been unsuccessful. The meetings and subsequent orientation at the Pentagon resulted in the initiation of cultural activities aimed at building awareness of Sikh culture and historical contributions of the community to DoD. The Sikh community had already launched



Army Lieutenant Colonel Kamal Kalsi briefs senior leaders on Sikh accommodation issues



In 2017 U.S. Military Academy approved Sikh accommodations

an extensive campaign to advance a broader inclusion policy, including significant engagement with Congress and a letter from general officers to the Secretary of Defense recommending approval of a new policy. Cumulative efforts, primarily led by members of the Sikh community, resulted in expanded approval of waivers, as well as loosening of the requirement to pursue waivers at each duty station. In January of 2017, the U.S. Army approved a new policy for members of the Sikh community seeking to serve in the military. The request allowed for religious accommodation approval with their local command structure, thus validating a new policy for Sikhs to serve with their articles of faith, including wear of a turban. However, the remaining services in DoD have not yet implemented such a policy.

Military Hazing, Command Climate, and Recruiting for AAPIs: In 2014 the DoD Inspector General's office (DoD IG) reached out to Commissioner Chaudhary for information on organization climate for AAPI members, particularly for rights of conscience

protections for religious accommodations or potential adverse actions taken against members. The request resulted from the absence of a formal AAPI stakeholder communication channel for DoD to interact with. Commissioner Chaudhary sent out the IG survey to members of the AAPI military community, requesting formal or informal feedback. The request revealed a significant number of instances of discrimination against AAPIs that went unreported, with members citing command climate and fear from reprisal as the primary reason for abstaining from filing equal opportunity complaints. The passage below and Figure 4 provide examples of the feedback (names withheld):

“I was sitting in the scheduling office when an O-6 Colonel came in. He asks me ‘what is my religion’...when I stated to him that I was Hindu, he went on a furious angry rant about how terrible my religion is...”

AAPI Military Pilot

“I asked the psychiatrist if my answer [on my religious preference] was why Capt X would not sign off on my flight status. The psychiatrist confirmed this and said that the whole reason why Capt X wanted me to come in was because of the answer I gave him on my religious views as ‘I believe in one religion, but also believe in others.’ According to the psychiatrist, Capt X cited my answer [secular views on religion] as a sign of a potential mental issue I may have.”

AAPI Military Officer in Flight Training

“I saw a form of discrimination early on at my first operational assignment. Instead of viewing my hard work for what it was, my flight commander and squadron commander thought my being Indian made me overly ambitious. This was seen as a negative, and it was clear to me that my ethnicity would keep me on the outside of their inner circle. I’ve come to accept that while continuing to give my best to my country.”

AAPI Military Officer

Figure 4. Direct Feedback from AAPI Military Members.

The Commission also received several complaints of alleged hazing and discrimination against AAPIs. Through collaboration with stakeholders, Commissioner Chaudhary worked with both DoD and individual services to secure favorable outcomes for some of the military complainants. For each case, the Commissioner encouraged members to pursue complaints through formal military channels. However, outreach and collaboration with DoD leadership was required in certain instances. In those cases, working with the chain of command and/or equal opportunity processes (sometimes over the course of months), uncovered support structures that were unresponsive to the member’s needs and required active engagement on their behalf. Several of these instances are summarized below:

- An Army enlisted soldier stationed in Korea reached out to the Commission due to extensive hazing and command climate issues. He stated that he was a vegetarian, and had endured regular harassment in the form of racial epithets from his peers and supervisory chain of command. In a separate incident, the soldier reported he had been force-fed

meat by his peers. The member’s attempts to report the incident were quelled at lower levels in the chain of command. The Commission reported this case to the Army Inspector General’s (IG) office, and an investigation into the matter occurred. In the course of the investigation, the member chose to separate from military service due to the command climate he experienced

- A U.S. Army physician reached out to the Commission stating he had been removed from his medical program, and after successfully petitioning for redress his reinstatement orders were received. However, upon receiving the determination, he was ordered to report to artillery school, a request he felt was a veiled attempt to trigger his resignation. The Commission engaged with the Army Medical Corps leadership, followed by direct engagement with the office of the Secretary of the Army. A successful resolution was achieved, and the member was reinstated into the Army Medical Corps, where he would have otherwise been forced to resign and pursue his medical vocation as a civilian

- An AAPI Army dental officer reported harassment and a climate of discrimination in his unit to the Commission. In a professional and open setting among his peers, the officer was compared to having a likeness of “ISIS” by his direct supervision. After several months of requesting an investigation with Army Military Equal Opportunity, the officer received no formal notification of a pending investigation or resolution. The Commission requested the local command conduct an investigation, which was accomplished. However, despite several witnesses being present, the allegation was dismissed. In collaboration with Army leadership, the Commission requested redress from an external organization. The review uncovered transgressions with the investigation, as well as evidence substantiating the allegations. Army leadership took substantive disciplinary action in the case, to include removal of local leadership. However, the process took well over a year to accomplish, and exacted a substantial toll on the quality of life of the military member. After two years of stagnated training, the member opted to resign from the program, and pursue separation from the military due to adverse command climate. The Commission requested DoD IG investigate the command climate within the organization, which is ongoing
- DoD’s first Hindu Chaplain was hired to meet the needs of the growing South Asian population in U.S. Military

Within weeks of arrival at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, alleged instances of discrimination, intimidation, and workplace bullying by her chain of command were reported. The Chaplain repeatedly experienced and subsequently reported evidence of a hostile work environment, including defamation of her organizational picture and intimidating threats of removal and deployment to combat zones. After reviewing documentation and evidence presented by the chaplain, the Commission engaged Army diversity leadership in order to determine the level of investigation required to resolve the issues. In the course of the year-long inquiry, the chaplain separated from the military, citing quality of life challenges associated with the command climate

- A military recruit reached out to the Commission due to a recruiting accession problem. The individual had been selected for officer accession, but his training start date was jeopardized due to a myriad of medical appointment delays. Months of attempts at seeking resolution with his recruiter failed to resolve the issue, and repeated attempts to contact the recruiter failed. The Commission reached out to senior recruiting leadership, who, upon reviewing the situation removed the recruiter and completed processing of the member’s medical appointments without delay. The member continued through his commissioning program and successfully completed training

“Resourcing for military equal opportunity programs in the Army is at an all-time low. I have one staff member to cover 3000 or more soldiers. With my work divided amongst sexual assault education and outreach, supporting military equal opportunity for soldiers becomes a physically impossible task. This results in sub-optimal investigations, or investigations that just don’t happen when they should.”

Army Military Equal Opportunity Representative

“Staffing for diversity offices at the Pentagon are terrible. We’ve lost entire staff. This has created shortfalls in education and outreach programs that we need to build more cultural awareness on.”

Equal Opportunity Representative

“Racial epithets specific to AAPIs quite honestly just don’t get the attention they deserve, which result in either underreporting or dismissal of even the worst hazing cases.”

Military Equal Opportunity Representative

- A soldier entering initial training, after receiving an official accommodation to wear his Sikh articles of faith, was forced to remove his turban in front of his peers. He was also directed to shave his beard, despite receiving a similar accommodation. This was reported to the Commission by a Sikh advocate organization. Both the Commission and a Sikh advocate organizations reached out directly to the office of the Secretary of the Army, and the situation was efficiently resolved

In the course of conducting installation visits, Commissioners were also able to interact extensively with diversity and equal opportunity representatives from DoD in order to garner their feedback. The feedback shown in the captions above relay some of their statements, both in the field and at headquarters levels, while conducting the focus groups. Given

the nature of the data, anonymity of the members was preserved.

These indicators provide evidence that organizational climate for AAPIs is an issue that may require a more formal review in order to determine the breadth and rate of occurrence of incidents. Added to this, investigations by DoD of several high profile suicides of AAPIs have revealed climates of hazing, bullying and intimidation. This data, when coupled with the information presented above, provides enough evidence to support a broader investigation of command climates experienced by AAPIs in the military, and its impacts on mental health issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among veterans.

“I was feeling suicidal, so I went to my clinic for care, and the attendant stated I had an appointment in Hawaii in 8 hours, and needed to schedule a plane flight or I would miss the appointment. That was unbelievable, and made my depression worse. How was I going to save my life, and who was there to support me? I needed care right away.”

Guam Veteran

Resourcing for Guam Veterans: The Commission also reviewed ongoing issues concerning AAPI veterans. On the U.S. Territory of Guam, military members serve at a per capita rate greater than many U.S. States, yet veterans serving there are resourced at a lower rate than nearly every state in the nation. Furthermore, veterans on Guam are reporting the urgent need to improve the quality and timeliness of care for mental health issues such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Following a panel discussion in October of 2014, veterans receiving mental health care provided a testimonial to Commissioner Chaudhary, outlining resourcing challenges for veterans on Guam. One veteran shared the statement shown in the caption above.

Other Guam veterans echoed similar instances, and VA health care representatives on Guam suggested federal resourcing should be increased. VA regional headquarters officials stated

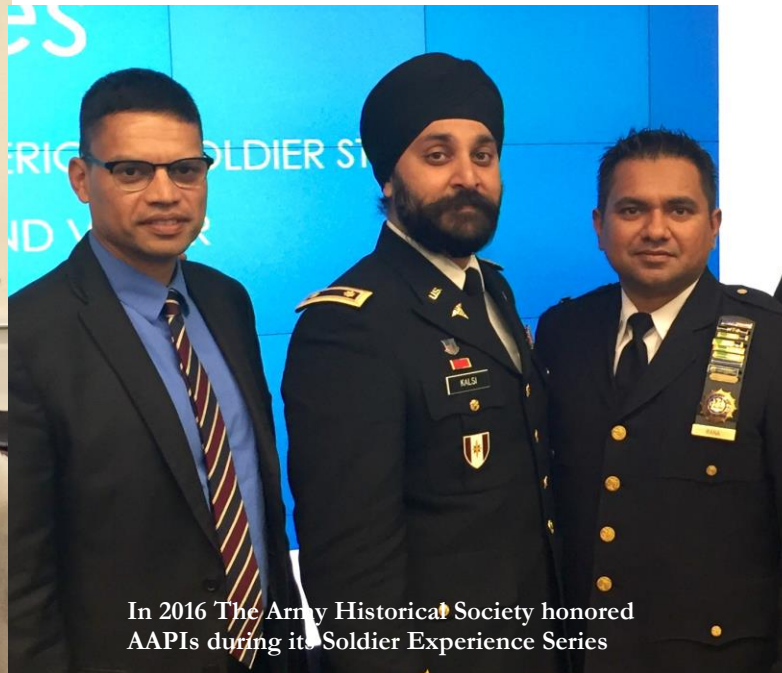
the situation is improving, and the level of care is warranted for the size of the population. However, veterans on Guam contend that the numbers of veterans requiring care is significantly underreported due to data disaggregation challenges and incorrect categorization of ethnic demographics of veterans living on Guam. A member of the VA Advisory Committee representing AAPIs echoed this sentiment. Informal discussions with the VA Secretary yielded potential opportunities to broaden the discussion to include support for other Pacific Islanders. To date, a decision on additional resourcing has not yet been made by the VA.

Filipino Veteran Recognition:

Commissioners also attended outreach events, conducted key round tables with the WHIAAPI Initiative, and authored articles in support of efforts to garner recognition for Filipino Veterans. The Commission also articulated support for this endeavor at a commemoration event



Major General (Retired) Tony Taguba introduces a Filipino Veteran to Congressman Mark Takano



In 2016 The Army Historical Society honored AAPIs during its Soldier Experience Series

held by the Embassy of the Philippines in 2016. In 1941, more than 250,000 Filipino soldiers fought under the American flag during World War II. For over 60 years, Filipino veterans and community advocates have fought to obtain compensation for those who served with American soldiers during World War II. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which the President signed into law, contained a provision for creating the Filipino Veterans Equity Compensation Fund. Eligible veterans who are U.S. citizens receive a one-time payment of \$15,000; eligible veterans who are not U.S. citizens receive a one-time payment of \$9,000. The Department of Veterans Affairs established a process, in collaboration with the Department of Defense, to determine eligibility to receive payments from the Fund. To date, over 18,000 claims have been approved. However, many Filipino veterans may have been impeded from filing claims or believe their claims were improperly denied. The recognition effort also included an

initiative to award the Congressional Gold Medal to Filipino World War II Veterans. In 2015 legislation was introduced and on December 16, 2017, the President signed H.R. 2737, awarding Filipino World War II Veterans the Congressional Gold Medal.

Other key issues: The impact of Hepatitis B on AAPIs currently serving or seeking to serve was brought to the attention of the Commission for continuing engagement with DoD on a more rigorous study to determine potential impacts. AAPI members serving the intelligence community brought forward issues of profiling and discrimination that impacted career progression and quality of life for members serving in key intelligence community positions. Finally, stakeholders have contacted the Commission in order to seek assistance in support of legislation for award of the Congressional Gold Medal for Chinese Americans Veterans of World War II.



In 2016 the Commission hosted a National Forum for AAPI Military Members and Veterans

ACCOMPLISHMENT #3: National Forum for AAPI Military and Veterans.

In December of 2016, the President’s Advisory Commission convened the first National Forum for AAPI Military Members and Veterans.¹⁶ The purpose of the event was to establish a forum dedicated to hearing the voices of AAPI military members and their families, and establish a direct link to senior leaders and policy makers in the nation.

The event welcomed AAPIs from all military branches and ranks to Washington D.C. for a day of panel discussions, cultural interaction, and strategic dialogue. Senior leaders in government attended the event, including the Secretary of the Army, members of Congress, and a representative from the Pentagon at the Assistant Secretary level.¹⁷ Field commanders from bases across the nation also attended and shared their perspective on the wellness of AAPIs in the military. The forum marked the first

time stakeholders representing multiple AAPI military and veteran groups gathered together to address problems as a collective network. The gathering was also multi-generational, and included Filipino veterans and several family members of Japanese Americans that served during World War II. Active duty, reserve, and retired military officers also attended, to include senior generals. Added to this, mid-level and junior military members attended, ranging in rank from Private to Lieutenant Colonel. Culturally, attendees represented a diverse range of Asian American heritages, including Japanese, South Asian, Vietnamese, Filipino, Chinese, and multi-ethnic backgrounds.

The event blended several cultural performances with key panel discussions with veterans and servicemembers. Leaders also engaged in story-telling, from both a historical and personal perspective.

¹⁶ U.S. President Barack Obama, White House Blog, “Coming Together to Honor AAPI Military Members and Veterans,” available at, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/>

[2017/01/09/coming-together-honor-aapi-military-members-and-veterans.](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2017/01/09/coming-together-honor-aapi-military-members-and-veterans)

¹⁷ Ibid.



Marine Corporal Kamal Saini shares his perspective on AAPIs in the military

AAPI veterans and military members employed design thinking and a systems approach to provide feedback to senior leaders on key policy challenges and potential solutions

The Army Secretary provided a foundation for the event by delivering a brief history of Asian Americans serving in the military.¹⁸ Other senior leaders shared first-hand accounts of their experiences as military members of Asian descent. Stories were provided by Filipino World War II Veterans and family members of Japanese Americans detained during the 1940s.¹⁹ Subsequent discussions involved generational interactions between senior leaders and younger service members. The young servicemembers' personal accounts of their experiences informed senior leaders on burgeoning challenges in the AAPI military community.

During the second half of the day, attendees employed design-thinking techniques in order to garner feedback from servicemembers on the challenges AAPI military members face, and potential solutions that might be employed. The purpose of the session was to match executive leaders experienced in crafting strategic policy with the experiences of young military

members. A professional facilitator trained in design-thinking led the session to collect feedback from junior servicemembers to construct a future strategy for AAPIs military members and veterans.²⁰ Senior generals and DoD civilian leadership partnered with the junior military members in order to hear their concerns. The group totaled approximately one hundred individuals, who were organized into smaller teams of ten. They took the time to brainstorm key problems faced by Asian Americans, and used a systems approach to determine potential root causes. Aided by senior policy leaders in Washington, the teams developed cross-functional strategies to address the challenges, out-briefed leaders at the conclusion of the session.

The feedback provided by servicemembers provided insight on the challenges AAPI military members and veterans face while serving. The participants cited the problem of general ignorance and lack of understanding in the military of the cultures represented in the AAPI community. Participants

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.



Congresswoman Grace Meng addresses AAPI Military Members



Senior leaders discuss critical challenges for AAPI military members and veterans



Brigadier General (Ret) Balan Ayyar moderates a diversity panel

suggested that this has been causal to cases of discrimination and hazing across the spectrum of military service. The attendees reflected on the suicides of Danny Chen, Harry Lew, and Raheel Siddiqui, three servicemembers who had committed suicide under conditions of hazing and harsh treatment. Over the course of the feedback session, servicemembers reported that “micro-aggressions” or other forms of bigotry against AAPIs occurred with enough frequency that a formal command climate assessment for AAPIs was warranted. Members also shared that racial epithets specific to AAPIs did not receive appropriate attention when reported, and that normalization in this area was commonplace. Members consistently reported that within their unit that, “I always had to defend how American I was.” The problems reported by the servicemembers were consistent in nature to the information reported in the individual incidents discussed in the previous section. Attendees also cited the need to have more open access to AAPI role models, and fora that facilitated that access. Ultimately, the attendees felt that under the current command climate, they

anticipated cultural isolation and potential mental health issues would continue without a concerted effort to address the problem. Finally, servicemembers provided feedback on the Military Accessions Vital to National Interest (MAVNI) program as a successful opportunity worth expanding upon. However, they reported the amount of red tape in the application process as a major barrier to entry in the program.

The design-thinking process yielded a number of potential solutions. Servicemembers recommended a comprehensive education program aimed at raising the level of awareness of the AAPI community in order to foster greater understanding. They also suggested educational initiatives and active engagement at senior levels in the military and veteran community. Members also called for more resources in the military equal opportunity community designed to address issues specific to AAPIs, to include a review of religious accommodations under consideration. Members suggested a formal review of promotion success in the AAPI community, and determine where gaps

exist. They requested the establishment of affinity groups and the creation of a speaker's bureau to conduct outreach. Servicemembers also suggested a more introspective approach within the AAPI community, to include more outreach in order to foster a better understanding of military service and strengthen the sense of identity for AAPIs who serve. Representation of AAPIs on boards of the service academies was also suggested as a method of improving diversity in the AAPI military leadership community. Ultimately, the National Forum on AAPI Military Members and Veterans provided servicemembers with an opportunity to provide direct feedback to senior leaders in Washington, and cultivate solutions that supported recommendations presented in this report.





“Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have contributed to the power of our example, and the example of our power.”

Army Secretary Eric Fanning
National Forum on AAPI Military
Members and Veterans

BEST PRACTICES AND STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Development of a broad stakeholder community to support AAPI military members, veterans, and their families is a new endeavor. Yet, through engagement and interaction with the community, key issues emerged that revealed AAPIs may be underserved in a number of areas. Appointment of a military member to the President’s Advisory Commission on AAPIs reflects the Administration’s foresight and focus on ensuring better awareness of and support for military and veterans among the domestic commissions. As the number of veterans concluding their term of service in the military increases, the need for

collaboration within the stakeholder community will also increase. As such, several best practices emerged that will ensure growth of this important area into the next administration:

1. Appointing military members to the White House Initiative and Advisory Commission was effective at raising awareness of key support issues for military members in the AAPI community.
2. Attendance and participation in AAPI veteran events established a community of practice that allowed the

Commission to understand key issues and develop insight on potential corrective actions. Developing a robust stakeholder community consisting of military/veteran members, DoD partners in all services, and AAPI non-profit support organizations allowed the Commission to engage on critical issues in a substantive manner.

3. Commissioner visits to military installations in order to meet with leadership and AAPIs serving was effective in resolving issues for AAPIs when challenges emerged.
4. Commissioner participation in DoD and VA events related to broader national security matters provided a platform for building relationships with DoD and an understanding of the operational environment in which AAPIs are expected to serve in.
5. Leveraging interactions with AAPI social media organizations enabled an important communication channel with veterans and yielded feedback on critical issues such as mental health, diversity, and broader challenges of military service. This medium was especially effective at building connections with younger military members and veterans.

Overall, the feedback received by the stakeholder community was positive.

Historically, AAPIs experiencing the types of challenges presented in this report were supported by advocacy groups not generally associated with the AAPI community. Naturally, information gaps emerged that prevented effective articulation of key challenges to government entities, often times to the detriment of servicemembers.

Establishing an active stakeholder community consisting of DoD, VA, AAPI advocacy groups, White House Commissioners, and others organizations ensured a collaborative space in which issues could be adjudicated efficiently and with maximum transparency.

In some cases, stakeholders requested direct engagement with senior leaders in DOD and VA prior to establishing substantive policy guidance. Based upon experiences from previous efforts, the Commission requested more granularity on behalf of stakeholders in the development of policy proposals. While this process appeared slower to some stakeholders, they ultimately recognized that assistance from the Commission was a positive experience that resulted in stronger arguments that moved issues to resolution much more quickly and with favorable long-term outcomes. As a result of this effort, both DoD and VA expressed appreciation for the Commission's discretion, judgment, and cooperation in forwarding issues concerning military members.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UPCOMING NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT (NDAA) AND OTHER LEGISLATION

The recommendations provided below are based upon the spectrum of experiences by the Commission outlined in the previous sections. They encompass the collective feedback from servicemembers, their families, and the broader stakeholder community. In short, they are focused on improving quality of life for AAPI military members and veterans. The subsequent benefits to military readiness are foundational in nature, and self-evident from the historical review presented earlier in the report. Finally, the recommendations are designed to provide future administrations, DoD, and the VA with collaborative approaches on issues related to military readiness and veteran care.

Commission-specific recommendations:

- Strong consideration should be given to appointing another military member or veteran to the next Advisory Commission in order to continue development of this important stakeholder community
- Given the number of issues that emerged from the AAPI demographic that were previously unknown to both DoD and the VA, consideration should be given to populating other domestic commissions with a veteran or military member
- WHIAAPI Regional Networks should develop individual plans for military & veteran outreach, and partnerships with local military bases and local VA facilities

Recommendations for the Department of Defense:

- In response to several high-profile AAPI military suicides attributed to hazing, and the experiences of servicemembers presented in this report [citing similar instances of hazing and harassment], the DoD should conduct a comprehensive directed-study and report on command climate issues encountered by AAPIs who serve, including research on the frequency of racial epithets, reasons for dismissal from service, unsubstantiated equal opportunity complaints, and command climate issues impacting retention of AAPIs. This study should also include the military service academies. This effort should include research into the impact of this command climate on mental health, and its impact on suicide rates among AAPIs serving in the military
- DoD should increase resourcing for military equal opportunity programs in the next NDAA, both at the headquarters level and field organizations in order to meet the demand for education of military personal on the changing demographics in DoD, with particular emphasis on AAPI cultural awareness. This effort should include a portfolio dedicated to support for the AAPI community
- The DoD should benchmark concepts from other federal agencies in order to improve accountability of its military equal opportunity programs (such as executive accountability

boards that review individual cases and complaints to ensure investigations are completed in accordance with prescribed timelines)

- The current system of registering faith groups to endorse chaplain candidates is antiquated, and requires a system that actively keeps pace with changing demographics in DoD. The Department of the Army should conduct a review of the recent Hindu Chaplaincy program, including an interview with the Hindu Chaplain and her associated MEO complaint history, in order to determine root causes for the quality of life challenges experienced, and present a course of action to integrate more Eastern faith traditions into the military chaplaincy to support the growing numbers of AAPIs serving. DoD's Chief of Chaplains office should conduct a similar inquiry for Buddhist and Muslim Chaplains as well, and develop a strategic roadmap for incorporating Eastern faith traditions into their Chaplain training pipeline
- DoD should develop a standing religious inclusion policy in the next NDAA that enables Sikh Americans to serve with their articles of faith in all of the services, as well as convene a periodic governance forum to discuss accommodation opportunities for other AAPI faith traditions
- DoD should establish a broad education program to increase awareness of hazing of AAPIs, to include greater understanding of racial epithets considered offensive in the AAPI community
- DoD should take steps to increase participation, education, and awareness of the contributions of AAPIs during AAPI Heritage Month at military installations.
- DoD should expand targeted recruiting activities and talent management initiatives tailored for the AAPI community
- Since there is significant data to support discriminatory behaviors that affect command climate for AAPIs, DoD should work with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to conduct a detailed review of MEO policy, with a focus on an initiative to incorporate disparate treatment cases into consideration for MEO complaints
- DoD should champion the formulation of AAPI affinity groups tasked with establishing a comprehensive channel of communication to improve knowledge and understanding of AAPI issues
- DoD should provide a report to the Commission on the experiences of AAPIs in the Military Accessions Vital to National Interest (MAVNI) Program, including an analysis of key challenges faced by its participants
- DoD shall provide an update on these initiatives by December of 2019, in the form of a written progress report delivered to the President's Advisory Commission on AAPIs, House and Senate Armed Services Committee, and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus

Recommendation for the Department of Veterans Affairs:

- The VA should develop a resourcing strategy for Veterans on the U.S. Territory of Guam, with a particular focus on responding to the challenge of data disaggregation of demographics in the territory
- The VA should develop an annual roadmap for supporting the Pacific Islander community, which includes an analysis of resource challenges and funding level increases.
- The VA should accomplish a study that focuses on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and Suicide within the AAPI community
- The VA should conduct discussions with AAPI community stakeholders in order to incorporate more non-traditional methods of health care, including those used in Eastern medical traditions
- The VA should publish an annual report on the progress of Filipino Veteran cases, and include metrics and milestones for resolution of outstanding issues



“At a time when threats to our security exists both here and abroad, our military needs the best and the most capable of those willing to serve our nation...AAPIs that have served can help to inform the broader community about the opportunities that exist within the military.”

Major General Garrett Yee



“In a dogfight, competence...not color,
wins the day.”

Major Raj Shah

SUMMARY: TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Our nation’s military serves under the most austere conditions to ensure that the freedoms we enjoy in our democracy are preserved. As such, they place special trust in our nation’s leadership to deliver the resources that ensure their readiness—to include quality of life programs that enable them to navigate the challenges of military life with their families. In the past decade, issues specific to the growing number of AAPIs in the military and broader veteran community have emerged. Addressing these issues must remain a top priority for our nation. The activities, data, and recommendations presented within this report were formulated to provide our nation’s leadership greater insight into the needs of servicemembers, particularly within the

AAPI demographic. Following a review completed by the President’s Advisory Commission in AAPIs during the period from May of 2014 to October of 2017, a number of issues emerged that can be addressed by the AAPI military and veteran stakeholder community. Data reflects feedback provided by servicemembers and veterans working closely with the Commission. Some issues are being addressed, while others require further examination, resources, and focused attention. In the future, the President’s Advisory Commission on AAPIs will cultivate this important arena, and work across stakeholder communities to better serve the men and women proudly serving in our nation’s armed forces, our veterans, and their families.

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Photo Credits

Photo of President in Oval Office with Japanese American Veterans, p. 2, courtesy of the Japanese American Veterans Organization, accessed 1 Nov, 2017, available at <http://javadc.org/news/press-release/adam-schiff-to-receive-high-javas-courage-honor-patriotism-award/>

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Photo of American Legion Parade, p. 15, courtesy of American Legion Post 328, Boston, accessed from their Facebook website. Post 328 website located at bostonchinatownpost328.org

Photo of Major Kamal Kalsi, p. 25, courtesy of Public Radio International, accessed on 10 Nov, 2017, available at <https://www.pri.org/stories/2015-12-17/why-should-it-be-so-hard-sikh-serve-us-military>

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Photo of West Point cadets and Army Officer, p. 25, courtesy of Stars and Stripes, accessed on 10 Nov, 2017, available at <https://www.stripes.com/news/more-bearded-turbaned-sikhs-join-army-as-pentagon-reviews-religious-articles-ban-1.455730>

Photo of Army Secretary Eric Fanning, p. 25, courtesy U.S. Army, accessed 10 Nov, 2017, available, https://www.army.mil/article/179389/fanning_equality_inclusivity_are_not_experiments_but_american_values

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The President's Advisory Commission
On Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders