

# ASIAN AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER HERITAGE MONTH

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UNITE OUR VISION BY WORKING TOGETHER

MAY 2018

# Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month

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Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, which is recognized nationally throughout the month of May, pays tribute to the contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to America's history.



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army

# The Month of May

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The U.S. Congress recognized the significance of May 7th and May 10th in the history of Asian/Pacific Americans.

May 7, 1843 is the date the first Japanese immigrants arrived in the United States.

On May 10, 1869 the first transcontinental railroad in the United States—built in large part by Chinese pioneers—was completed.

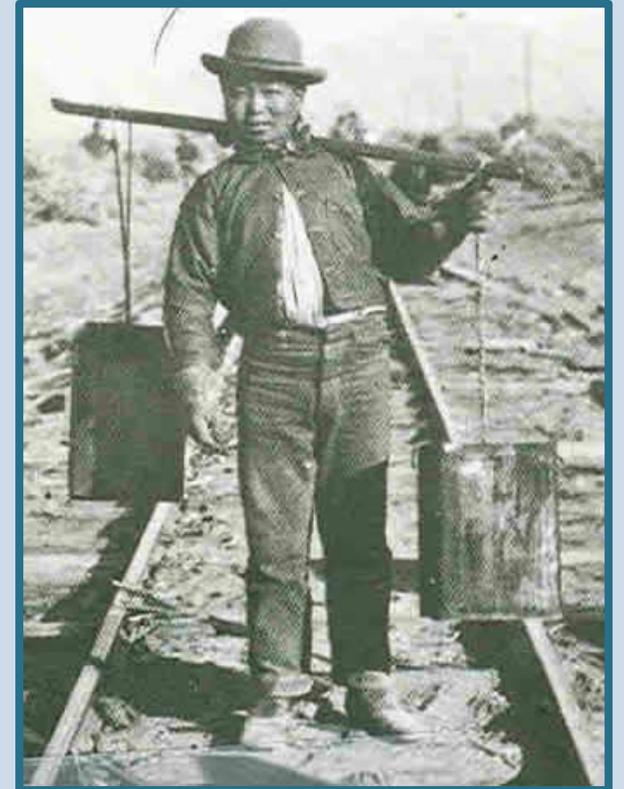
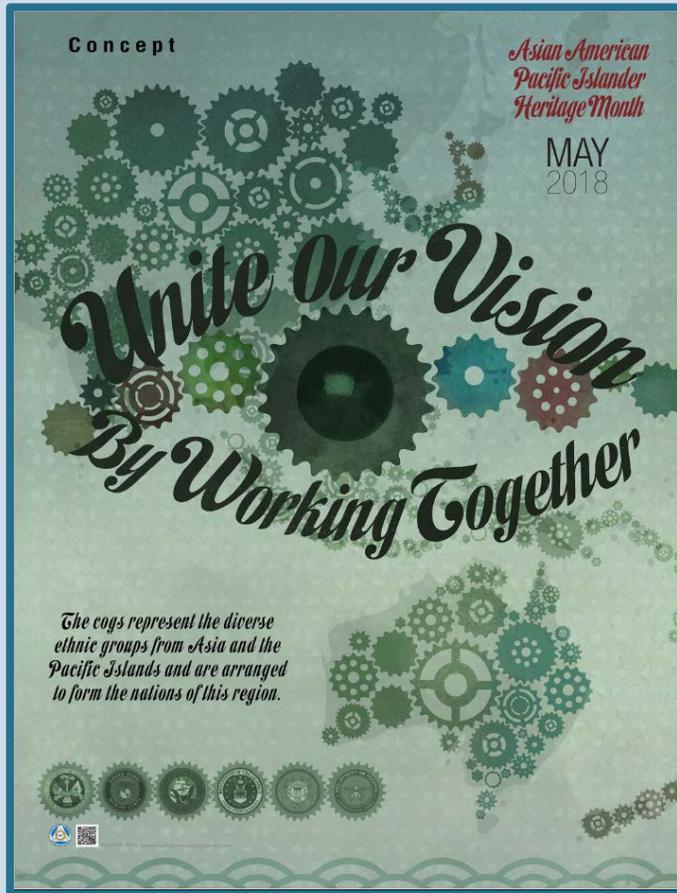


Photo courtesy of the Department of Labor

# Theme/Presentation Content



The Federal Asian Pacific American Council has selected the 2018 theme: *“Unite Our Vision by Working Together.”*

This presentation features Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders who helped shape and defend our nation: Rear Adm. Gordon Chung-Hoon, Pilot Hazel Y. Lee, Sgt. 1st Class Rodney Yano, Seaman Second Class Florence Smith Finch, and Brig. Gen. Vicente “Ben” T. Blaz and Sipex Sun.

# Rear Admiral Gordon Chung-Hoon

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Portrait courtesy of the U.S. Navy

Rear Admiral Gordon Pai'ea Chung-Hoon was the recipient of the Navy Cross, the second highest Navy award for combat valor, and the Silver Star for conspicuous gallantry and extraordinary heroism as Commanding Officer of USS Sigsbee.

On April 14, 1945, during the invasion on Okinawa, a kamikaze crashed into the Sigsbee, reducing her starboard engine to five knots and knocking out the ship's port engine and steering control. The attack killed 23 crewmen and nearly sank the destroyer.

# Rear Admiral Chung-Hoon

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Despite the damage, Chung-Hoon, then a commander, kept his anti-aircraft batteries delivering “prolonged and effective fire” against the air attack while concurrently directing the damage control efforts that allowed the destroyer to make port under her own power.

He retired as a two-star admiral and was the nation’s first Asian-Pacific American flag officer.

In 2004, the Navy honored him by naming a guided missile destroyer after him.

[Gordon Chung-Hoon](#)

# Pilot Hazel Ying Lee

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Photo courtesy of the U.S. Air Force

Hazel Ying Lee joined the Women Airforce Service Pilots, better known as WASP, and was trained to ferry aircraft. She was the first Chinese-American woman aviator, and the first Chinese-American woman to fly for the United States military.

Lee was killed in the line of duty, becoming the last WASP to die in service to her country. Identical landing orders were given to Lee and another pilot. The two planes collided, engulfing them in flames. Three days after her death, her parents were notified that Lee's brother Victor, who was serving with the U.S. Tanks Corps, had been killed in combat in France.

[Hazel Ying Lee](#)

# Sergeant First Class Rodney Yano

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Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army

Rodney Yano, a third generation Japanese-American, was born in Hawaii. He left high school before graduating and enlisted in the U.S. Army.

In 1969, he volunteered as a helicopter crew chief and door gunner on a combat mission. During a firefight, a grenade exploded inside the aircraft, severely wounding Yano. He hurled blazing ammunition from the helicopter enabling the crew to regain control of the aircraft and to land safely. He died later that day. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions. In 1997, a U.S. Navy ship was named in his honor.

[Rodney Yano](#)

# Seaman Second Class Florence Smith Finch

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Native Filipino Florence Finch worked for Gen. Douglas MacArthur's intelligence office before the Japanese invasion of the Philippines. After the fall of the island, she smuggled supplies to American prisoners-of-war and Filipino guerrillas.

The Japanese arrested Finch, where she was interrogated and tortured. She was freed by American forces in 1945 where she boarded a Coast Guard-manned transport bound for the United States.

She enlisted in the Coast Guard Women's Reserve, becoming the first Pacific Island-American woman to don a Coast Guard uniform.

[Florence Smith Finch](#)

Photo courtesy of the U.S. Coast Guard

# Brigadier General Vicente “Ben” T. Blaz

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Photo courtesy of the U.S. Marine Corps

Brig. Gen. Vicente “Ben” T. Blaz was only 13 years old when Japanese forces attacked and captured Guam in 1941. Through the occupation he was forced to be a laborer for his captors until Navy and Marine forces liberated the island in July 1944.

Blaz assisted the Marines during the liberation, guiding them through the terrain as they battled Japanese troops. At the beginning of the Korean War, he joined the Marine Corps Reserve and attended Officer Candidate School.

[Vicente Blaz](#)

# Brigadier General Blaz

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Blaz was commissioned a second lieutenant in the U.S. Marine Corps after graduation, and served in Japan during the Korean War. Through his time in service to the Corps, he attended a number of schools to include the Navy's School of Naval Justice, the Army's Artillery and Guided Missile School and the Naval War College, where he became a distinguished graduate.

In 1972, he was the commanding officer of the 9th Marine Regiment, one of the major units involved in the liberation of his native Guam.

Blaz retired from the Marine Corps with the rank of Brigadier General in 1980. He was the first Chamorro, or native of the Marianas Islands, from Guam to achieve the rank of brigadier general.

# Sipex Sun

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In 2017, Sipex Sun, project engineer and general engineer for Dugway's Test Support Division, was honored as one of 10 Asian American Engineers of the Year. A Civil Service employee for the Army, he was the only representative of the U.S. military selected for the honor.

Born in 1966 in Cambodia, he had just finished 3rd grade when the communist dictator Pol Pot and his followers took power in 1975. When North Vietnam overthrew Pol Pot in 1979, Sun and his family walked through mine fields to a refugee camp in Thailand.

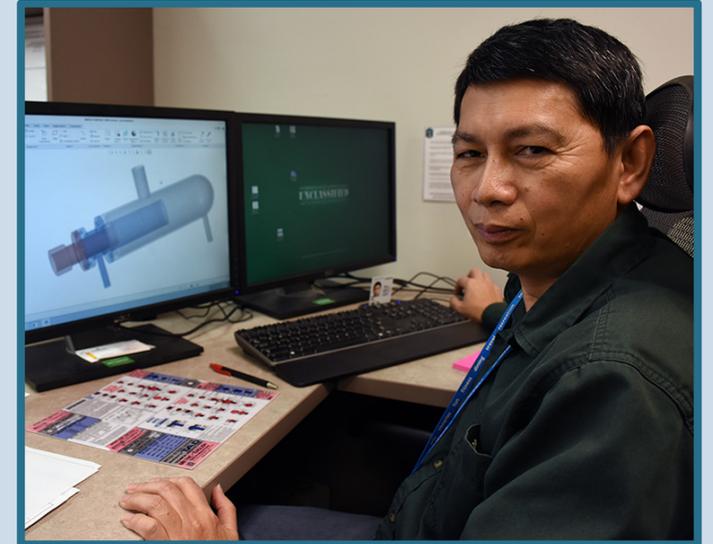


Photo courtesy Dugway Public Affairs

[Sipex Sun](#)

# Sipex Sun

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Two years later, Sun's family was sponsored to enter the United States.

In 1990, he became the first Cambodian to graduate from Utah State University, earning a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering.

He worked in a variety of jobs related to engineering until hired in 2002 by Dugway.

Sun's expertise, communication abilities across multiple levels, and innovation were emphasized in recommendations from management, coworkers and command for this award.

# Conclusion

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The rich heritage of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders spans the world and the depths of America's history.

Generation after generation, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have forged a proud legacy that reflects the spirit of our Nation—a country that values the contributions of everyone who calls America home.



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Navy

# End

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Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute,  
Patrick Air Force Base, Florida

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The findings in this report are not to be construed as an official DEOMI, U.S. military services, or Department of Defense position.