

## Congressional Gold Medal Act Enacted to Pay Tribute to 20,000 Chinese-American World War II Veterans

On Dec. 20, 2018 President Trump signed into law the Chinese-American World War II Veteran Congressional Gold Medal Act, which had been passed unanimously on Sept. 12, 2018, by the U.S. Senate (S. 1050) and unanimously on Dec. 12, 2018, by the U.S. House of Representatives (H.R. 2358). The bill passed the House five days before the 75th anniversary of the 1943 Magnuson Act, which repealed the regrettable Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

By 1941, over 100,000 Chinese-Americans had immigrated to the United States. Before the Magnuson Act, the Chinese-American community faced widespread discrimination, in part due to the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which restricted immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States. More than 20,000 brave Chinese-American men and women rose to serve the country from every state in the union, in every theater of battle, and in each branch of the armed services. Many earned citations for their heroism and honorable duty to our nation.

The congressional bills, H.R. 2358 and S. 1050, were championed through the legislative process with support from the Chinese American Citizens Alliance (C.A.C.A.) and veterans' organizations across the country.

*The White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders extends our gratitude to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and C.A.C.A. for their collaboration and partnership in honoring the Chinese-American World War II veterans today.*



## White House Initiative on ASIAN AMERICANS and PACIFIC ISLANDERS

### *Chinese-American World War II Veterans Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony*

*January 29, 2019*

*10:00 a.m.*

**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

810 Vermont Ave., NW

Washington, D.C.

## *Pledge of Allegiance*

## *National Anthem*

## *Introductory Remarks*

*General Counsel, performing the duties of Deputy Secretary*

*James Byrne*

*U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs*

*The Honorable Secretary Betsy DeVos*

*U.S. Department of Education*

## *Remarks from WWII Veterans*

*James L. Eng*

*Harry Jung*

*Henry (Hank) Lee*

*Robert M. Lee*

*Elsie C.Y. Seetoo*

## *Keynote Remarks*

*The Honorable Secretary Elaine L. Chao*

*U.S. Department of Transportation*

## *Closing Remarks*

## **ELSIE C.Y. SEETOO**

*U.S. Army Nurse Corps 1944 - 1946*

Elsie Chin Yuen Seetoo was born as Elsie Chin in Stockton, California in 1918. When the Depression set in, she and her family moved to Xinhui in the Guangdong province of China for most of her childhood. She entered nurse's training at Queen Mary Hospital in Hong Kong and graduated in 1942. She walked 700 miles from Hong Kong to Guiyang to join the Chinese Red Cross Medical Relief Corps. Stationed in Kunming, in 1943, she was part of a medical service training unit that went to Camp Ramgarh in India to train Chinese soldiers as medical orderlies. In 1944, she joined the U.S. Army Nurse Corps, commissioned as a First Lieutenant. She was stationed with the 14th Air Force as a member of the Air Service Command. She continued her service, assigned to the 95th Station Hospital Kunming and Chengdu, and with the 172nd General Hospital in Shanghai. She returned to the United States in February 1946 and was discharged from the Army.

After the war, she attended Women's College of the University of North Carolina for her bachelor's degree in nursing. She married Joseph Yuen, who worked on electrical systems for satellites at the Naval Research Laboratory in Washington, D.C. Together they raised their family there. Elsie has four children, seven grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren. Elsie became a translator of Chinese medical literature into English, most notably translating The Barefoot Doctors Manual, a reference for Chinese folk medicine. She went on to become a technical publication writer-editor at the Naval Medical Center and National Institutes of Health, retiring in the mid-1980s. After Joe's death, she remarried Ben Seetoo, who died in the late 1990s. Elsie currently resides in a life-care community outside of Washington, D.C., recently celebrating her 100th birthday with family and friends.



## ROBERT M. LEE

*U.S. Army Air Corps 1944 - 1946*



Robert Lee and his family fled South China after Japan's invasion and occupation which started in December 1941. They headed west, eventually finding refuge in Kunming where the U.S. had established an air base to help the Chinese army. Although under aged, Robert enlisted as a private in the 14th Air Force of the U.S. Army Air Corps, known as the Flying Tigers. In 1945, he was sent to India to work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which was building the Ledo Road, an alternate route to the Burma Road (which had been cut off by Japanese troops) to bring

supplies from India into China. After his army discharge in mid-1946, Mr. Lee remained in India for many years working for the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) which was building dams. In the 1950s, Mr. Lee joined the U.S. Foreign Service and was posted to Burma where he was liaison between the American Embassy and the Karen rebels in the north. Robert has served in all three countries of the CBI Theater, both in a military and civilian capacity. He earned the State Department's "native fluency" rating in Chinese, Burmese and Hindi.

Robert retired in 1991 after 14 years as staff in the U.S. Senate. He has long been influential in the 14th Air Force Association where he served twice as president until the Association disbanded in 2008. He has been invited by both the PRC and Taiwan governments to visit for WWII commemorative events.

## Biographies of WWII Veterans Present Today

### JAMES L. ENG

*U.S. Navy 1944 - 1946*

James L. Eng was born May 30, 1923, and spent most of his childhood in San Antonio, Texas. He was near the end of his junior year at Texas A&M during World War II when a team of U.S. Navy recruiters arrived on campus to sign people up for a new school teaching advanced electronics equipment. He joined the Navy and had his basic training at the San Diego Naval Station, followed by electronics training at Wright Jr. College in Chicago, then Gulfport, Mississippi, and finally in Corpus Christi. Eventually he was given a choice: Land-Based or Aviation Electronics. Mr. Eng selected Aviation Electronics and was sent to San Diego Naval Station in Southern California. He was assigned to a team controlling the base's radio station. The Navy honorably discharged him on July 3, 1946. He returned to college, graduating from UC Berkeley and then returned to San Antonio in June of 1949.

In the 1950s Mr. Eng worked for the U.S. Government during the Cold War as an electronic engineer. He got his start at Kelly Air Force Base working for the Ground Electronic Engineering Installation Agency, or GEEIA. Next, he spent 4 years at the U.S. Air Force Base in Tachikawa, near Tokyo, Japan. Later, he worked for NASA as an aerospace technologist during the Apollo project followed by a 5 year assignment with the U.S. Army in Bangkok, Thailand. Later, he would work for the secret Stanley R. Mickelsen Safeguard Complex near Minot, N.D. His last job was with the U.S. Army in Seoul, South Korea maintaining the military telephone systems.



## HARRY JUNG

*U.S. Army 1942 - 1945*

Harry G. Jung, born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on June 1, 1924, is a World War II veteran (Private First Class) who served in the United States Army from November 28, 1942 until July 27, 1945. At the young age of 18, Mr. Jung left his job at RCA to join the military after hearing an announcement about Adolf Hitler and Germany come over the loud speakers, and he felt that it was his patriotic duty to stop them from seizing control of Europe. After being sworn



in on December 1942, PFC Jung was sent to Fort Indiantown Gap in Cumberland, PA and then was assigned to Camp Adair, Oregon for basic training. During basic training, PFC Jung was under the 104th Infantry Timberwolf Division and shortly assigned to the 414th Regiment, 1st Battalion, Company C under Commander Colonel Touart. Eventually, he became a rifleman and was a messenger that delivered verbal and written communications between the platoon leader and the commanding officer.

During his tour under the 414th Regiment, PFC Jung was shortly stationed aboard the U.S. George Washington prior to reaching his destination, which was in Cherbourg, France. The port of Cherbourg was in ruins and they had missed their rendezvous point, near the Village of Valognas. On October 14, 1943, PFC Jung's Regiment was ordered to go to Velvorde, Belgium, north of Brussels, then to a city in Holland. The 414th Regiment was ordered to guard supply route trucks for General Patton's tanks. Months later, the 413th and the 414th Regiment participated in a night assault on the Village of Eschuerler. During this assault, PFC Jung suffered multiple injuries to his right hand caused by grenade fragments. By dawn the 413th and 414th Regiments, as well as the opposing army, suffered many casualties. PFC Jung was shipped to England for medical care for a week before boarding the Queen Mary to return to Camp Picket Hospital in Virginia for surgery on his hand. After finishing rehab, PFC Jung was Honorable Discharged and awarded the Purple Heart Medal at Camp Pickett, Virginia, on July 27, 1945. In addition, Mr. Jung was also awarded the Bronze Star Medal, Good Conduct Medal, World War II Victory

Medal, European Campaign and American Campaign Medals.

After his separation from the military, PFC Jung went on to get married and have two daughters, two grandchildren, and attended trade school for refrigeration under the G.I. Bill. Eventually, Mr. Jung found a job and worked as a printing press operator for a printing company for 35 years before he was unfortunately laid off. He then worked as a salesman at a discount toy store in Pennsauken, NJ for 10 years before retiring. His current hobbies include bowling, watching sports, and word search puzzles.

## HENRY (HANK) LEE

*U.S. Army 1946 - 1949*

Henry Lee was born in San Francisco on January 15, 1928 to Lafayette Lee and Betsey Chinn. He enlisted in the U.S. Army as a volunteer and was stationed in the Philippines where he assisted with the repatriation of enemy combatants to their countries. He was then transferred to Okinawa where he supervised POWs working as cooks in the Officer's Club. He fulfilled his enlistment and was discharged on March 19, 1949 from Fort Lewis in Washington State. He met his future wife, Toannie Wong, when he moved later in 1949 to Memphis, Tennessee. They married on September 10, 1950 in Houston, Texas where they lived until her death just 2 weeks shy of their 67th wedding anniversary. Hank and Toannie owned and operated the E-Z Way Food Market for 45 years prior to retiring. They have 2 children, Larry and Cindy as well as 3 grandchildren - Melissa Lee, Brittany Lee Chang and Courtney Lee - and 3 great grandchildren - Alyssa and Presley Lee Doan, and Beau Martin. He is now a well-known singer in the Houston area where he's called Hank Sinatra.



