

Los Angeles Chinatown and World War II

Written by Annie Luong

Watch Mable Tang's film on Stanley Mu's Military Service

On December 7th, 1941, Pearl Harbor was attacked and the United States entered World War II. Among those who joined the armed forces were Chinese Americans who wanted to show their patriotism and loyalty to their country. Others fought a different battle, raising funds and selling war bonds. The war offered opportunities and experiences that would change their lives forever and affect the course of Chinese American history.

Approximately 15,000 to 20,000 Chinese Americans served in the war or 19-25% of the total Chinese population in the United States served in the U.S. Armed Forces. According to one survey of Southern California Veterans of Chinese decent, 42% served in the Army, 39% in the Air Corps, and the remaining 19% were in the Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, or Merchant Marines.¹ They were assigned a variety of jobs ranging from cook to pilots with ranks ranging from Private to Major.

As the war continued, Chinese Americans not in uniform fought the battle in a different way. Many joined the campaign to save, recycle, and/or ration tires, rubber, scrap metal, and gasoline. Even before American involvement in the war, Chinese Americans were trying to relieve China, who was suffering from its war with Japan. With Madame Chiang Kai-shek's visit in 1943, the Chinese Americans had already been raising funds for several years. Simultaneously, Chinese American women were entering the war industry as men were sent off to the war. Through this, they were able to expand the roles of Chinese Americans and women in the war industry.

Through the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (G.I. Bill), many war veterans were able to attend to college to resume their education. The bill provided loans to veterans who wanted to buy houses or start businesses and paid for the G.I.'s entire education if they chose to attend school. Through the bill, many Chinese Americans from Los Angeles Chinatown entered universities such as the University of Southern California, University of California, Los Angeles and the University of California, Berkeley. Many became engineers, teachers, judges, doctors, and professionals.

1. Jim Fong & Marjorie Lee, "The Unsung 390," in Marjorie Lee, editor, *Duty & Honor: A Tribute to Chinese American World War II Veterans of Southern California*, (Los Angeles: CHSSC, 1998), 81.

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