

# Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States Navy



Naval History and Heritage Command, 2011

**Asians and Pacific Islanders of various nationalities and ancestry—Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Southeast Asian, Asian Indian, Polynesian—have been serving in the Navy since the early 19th century. Some groups have made the Navy their service of choice.**

**As a boy in Shanghai, China, Ming E. Chang watched U.S. Navy ships in the Whangpoo River. His father was a petty officer and cook on one of them. Chang eventually joined the U.S Navy, overcame obstacles his foreign birth presented early in his career, and commanded cruiser and destroyer divisions during a 34-year career. His promotion to rear admiral in 1980 made him the first naturalized Asian Pacific American to reach flag rank.**

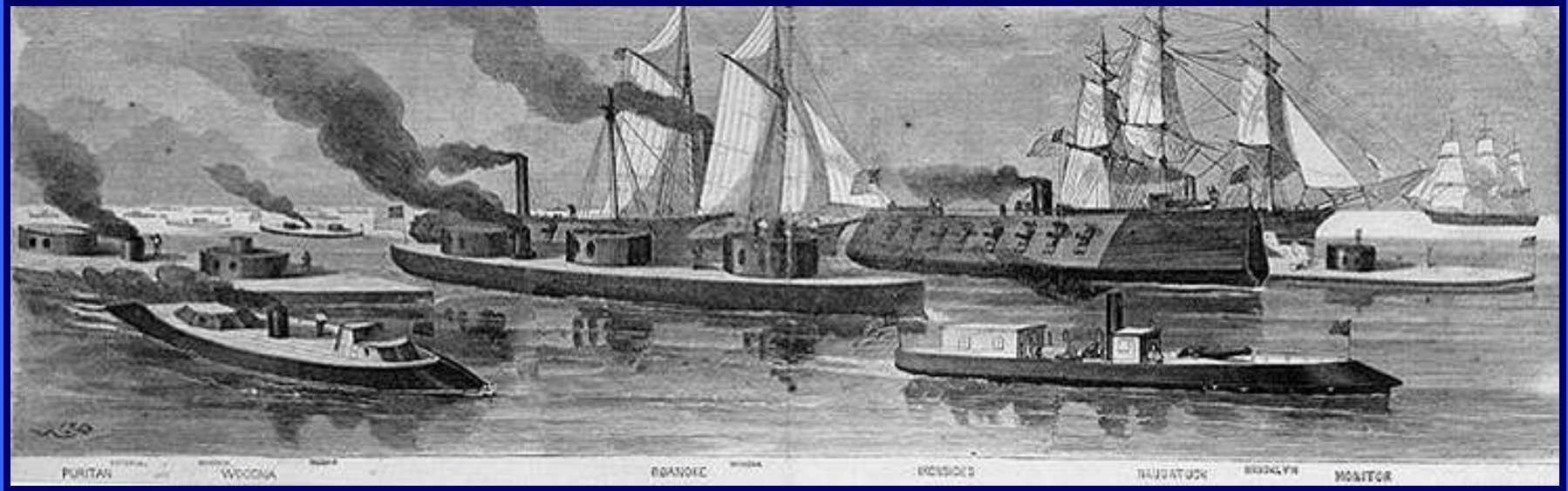




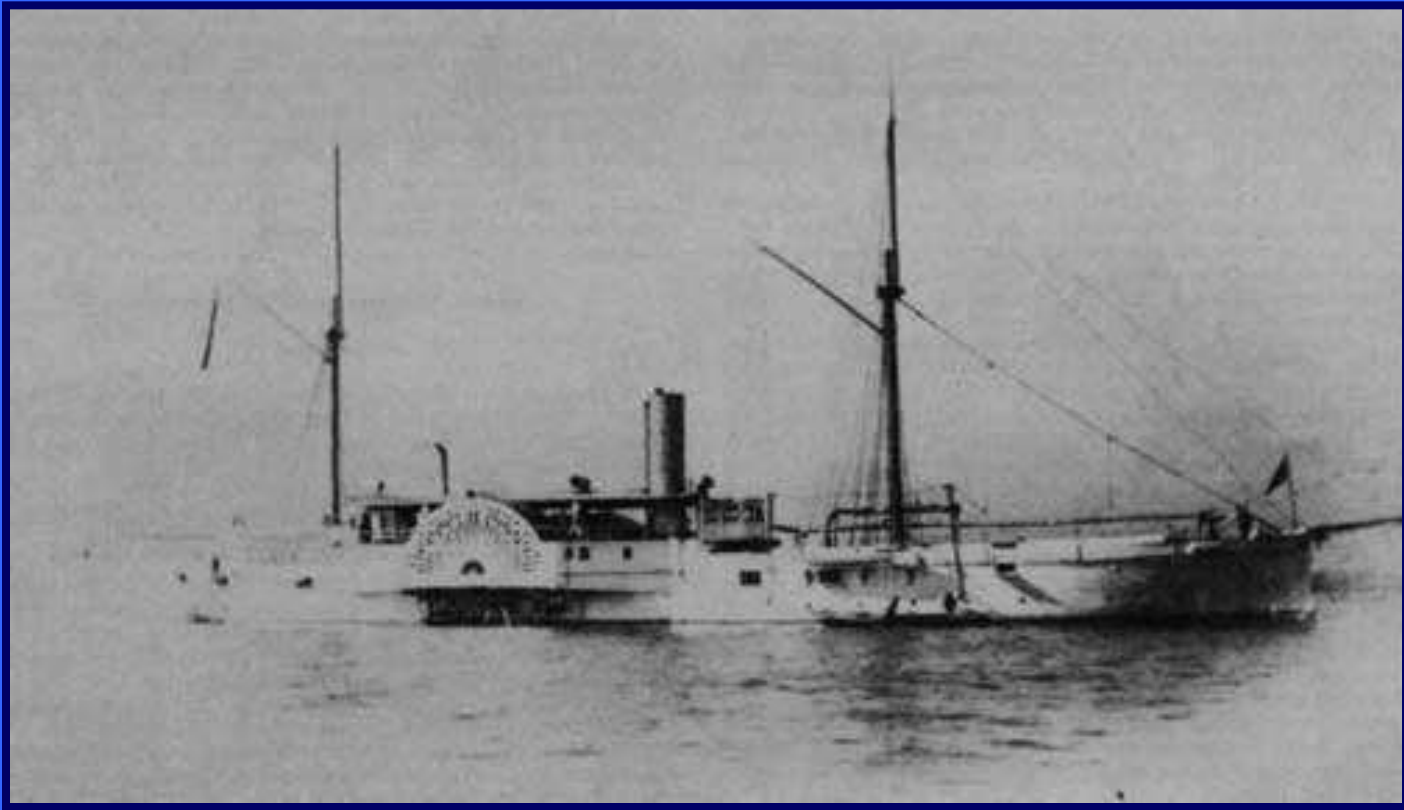
**Following in her family's tradition of naval service, the newly commissioned Ensign Donalda Charlotte Chang, stands with her father Rear Admiral Ming Chang , October 1982.**



**Capt. David Yoshihara, Commander Destroyer Squadron 9, embarked on the carrier *USS Carl Vinson* (CVN 70), escorts his parents on the carrier's flight deck in 2003. His father, retired Navy Capt. Takeshi Yoshihara, was the first Japanese American to attend the U.S. Naval Academy.**



**The U.S. Navy's presence in East Asia since the 1830s meant that ships' crews counted men of Asian descent. In the Civil War, Chinese men served on dozens of Union vessels, and during the rest of the century Asians continued to show up on the rolls of U.S. Navy warships.**



**The gunboat *USS Ashuelot*—part of the Asiatic Squadron, which operated along the coast of China, up the Yangtze River, and among the Japanese treaty ports—recorded four-fifths of her crew as Thai, Japanese, and Chinese in 1883.**

**In 1898 the battleship *USS Maine* exploded and sank in Havana harbor, Cuba. The blast, which killed 266 men, including those of Japanese and Chinese extraction, provided the catalyst for the Spanish American War. Divers here examine the wreck shortly after the explosion.**



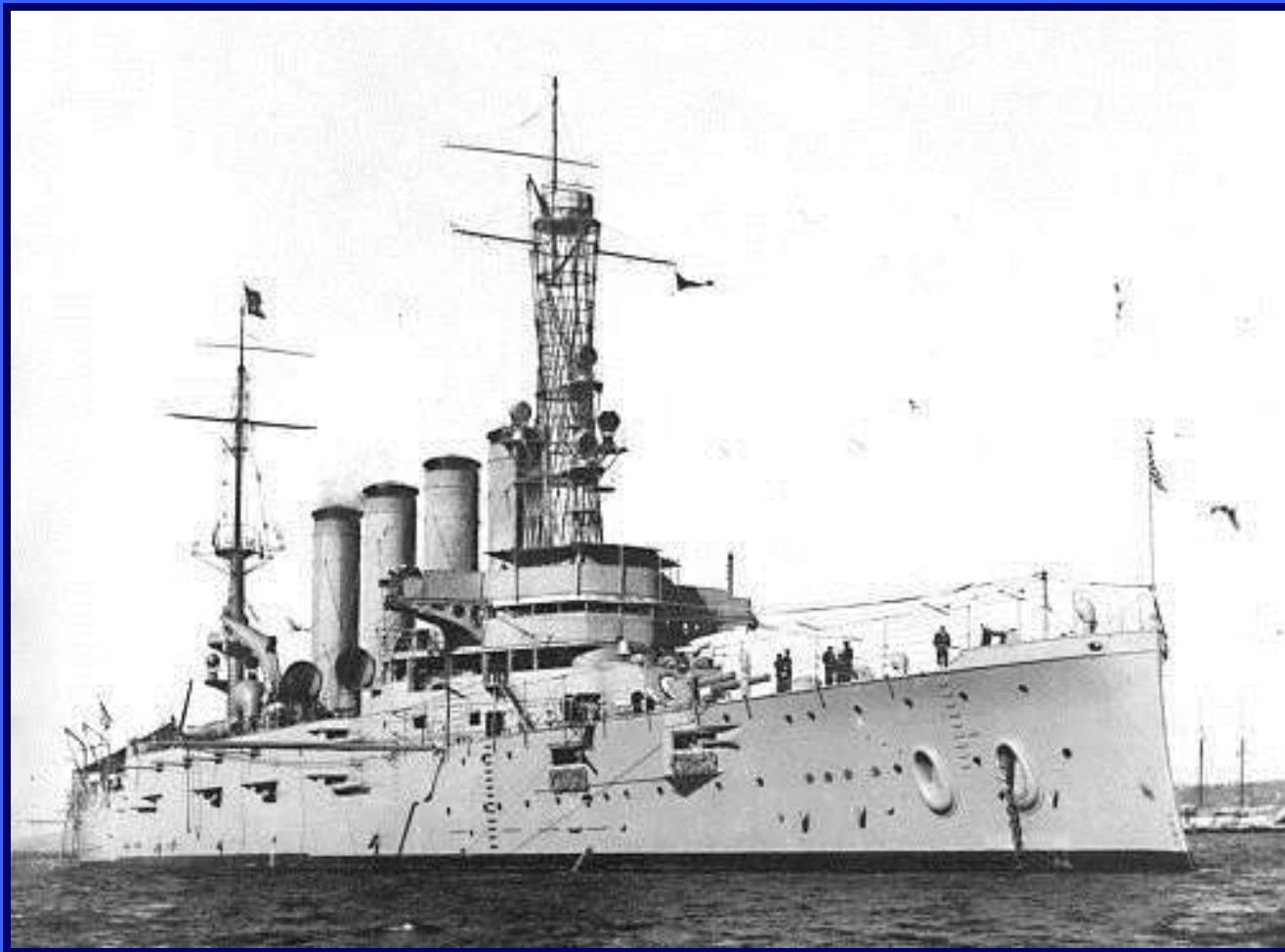


UD # 1142  
#1115

For extraordinary heroism in the line of his profession  
on the occasion of the accident to one of the boilers of the  
U.S.S. San Diego on January 21, 1915  
Telesforo Trinidad

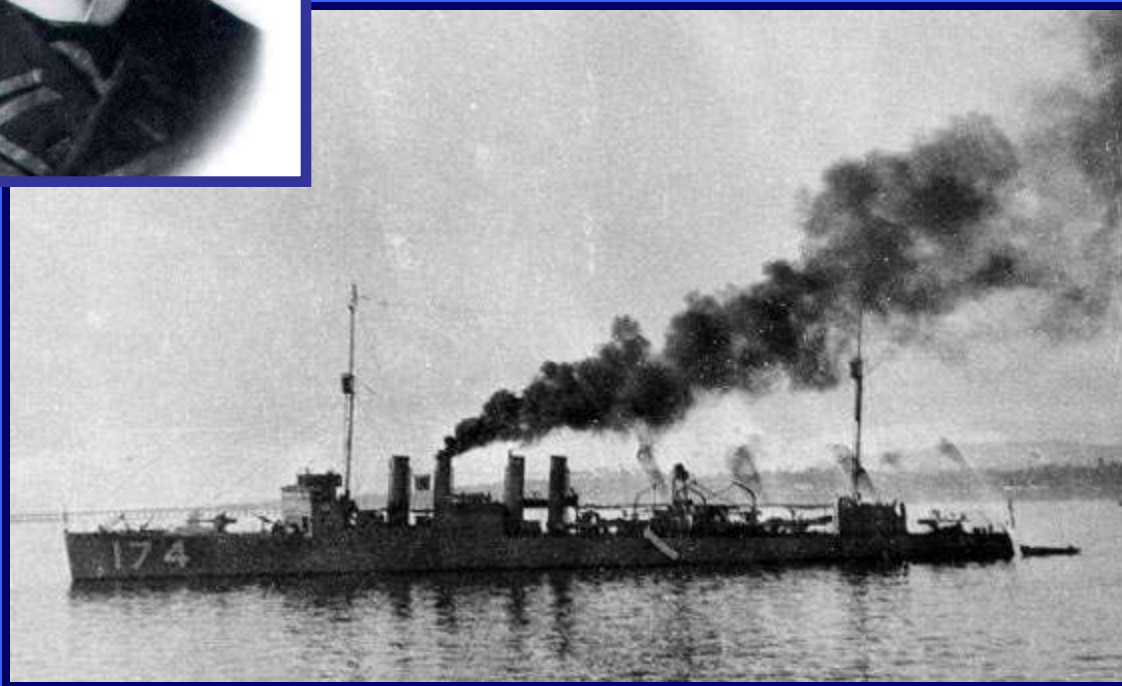
Approved 6-2-1917  
U.S. Navy  
corrected  
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J. G. C.

**During U.S. sovereignty of the Philippines (1898 -1946),  
Filipinos were eligible to serve in the U.S. Navy and  
many did so, including Medal of Honor recipient  
Fireman 2nd Class Telesforo de la Cruz Trinidad, whose  
citation appears above.**



**De la Cruz Trinidad received the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest service award, for rescuing two men after a boiler exploded on board the armored cruiser USS *San Diego*, above, on 21 January 1915.**

**Destroyer USS *Rizal*, newly commissioned in 1919, was donated to the U.S. Navy by the Philippine legislature and named in honor of the martyred Philippine patriot, Dr. Jose Rizal (1861-1896), inset. The crew was predominantly Filipino American.**



**Gordon Chung-Hoon, a Hawaiian-born Chinese American and a 1934 U.S. Naval Academy graduate, was the first Asian American to command a Navy warship, USS *Sigsbee* (DD 502). When a kamikaze attack caused explosions and flooding on board the destroyer, Chung-Hoon directed damage control, enabling the crew to save the ship. Awarded the Navy Cross for his actions, he was later promoted to rear admiral, making him the first Asian American flag officer.**



**In 2004, in recognition of Rear Admiral Chung-Hoon's extraordinary service, the Navy named a guided missile destroyer after him, USS *Chung-Hoon* (DDG 93).**





**The three Ahn siblings, Ralph, Philip, and Susan, from one of California's first Korean immigrant families, enlisted in the U.S. military in 1942. Susan Ahn Cuddy was the first Korean American woman in the U.S. military and the first female Navy gunnery officer. For her service in the WAVES (the women's reserve component of the Navy), she reached the rank of lieutenant.**

**Rear Admiral Eleanor  
“Connie” Mariano,  
M.D., daughter of a  
Filipino U.S. Navy  
recruit, joined the U.S.  
Navy in 1981 and served  
as White House chief  
physician during the  
Gorge H. W. Bush and  
Clinton administrations.**



**As head of the White House medical unit, Dr. Mariano treated President Bill Clinton after his 1997 surgery. When the President promoted her to rear admiral (one star) in 2000, she became the first female Filipino American to reach flag rank in the U.S. Navy.**







**Promoted to vice admiral in 1988, Robert K. U. Kihune was the first native Hawaiian to wear three stars. Educated in the Navy as an engineer, he rose to become commander of the Pacific Fleet Naval Surface Forces. His command provided half of the naval forces in support of the First Gulf War (1990–1991).**

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By 1992 the U.S. Navy's Filipino American officers numbered 653, representing nearly half of all ethnic Asian naval officers. Among them, Captain Tem E. Bugarin, the son of a retired senior chief radioman, became the first Philippine-born naval officer to command a Navy warship, USS *Saginaw* (LST 1188), in August 1989.



**Captain Ric Sadsad, a Philippine-born American citizen, is a naval aviator who became one of the highest ranking Filipino American naval officers. As commander in 2008 of Florida's Whiting Field, the U.S. Navy's basic flight school, he was responsible for hundreds of aircraft. In 2009 he became the commanding officer of Naval Support Activity Bahrain, which supports our naval forces in the Middle East.**





**Vice Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr. is the highest-ranking Japanese-American naval officer. An aviator with 4,400 flight hours, including 400 in combat, he served in numerous joint and naval commands. In 2009 he was assigned command of the Sixth Fleet, one of Navy's largest commands with about 40 ships, 175 aircraft, and a diverse force of 21,000 officers and enlisted men and women.**

**Navy Captain and astronaut Sunita L. Williams, of Asian Indian parentage, epitomizes the range of opportunities for all minorities. She served as flight engineer for the Expedition-14 crew and science officer at the International Space Station in 2007. Her four space walks and six months in orbit set records for women at the time.**



**Suni Williams takes one of her walks in space.**



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**Filipino American Rear Admiral Eleanor V. Valentin, commander of the Navy Medical Support Command, was named the director of the U.S. Medical Service Corps on 1 October 2009. She is the first woman to hold that position.**



**Deputy Commander, Navy Region Hawaii Rear Admiral James E. Beebe addresses Japanese sailors at Naval Station Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, May 2005. The visitors were there to develop seamanship and leadership skills for Japan's future leaders.**



**People of Asian Pacific heritage are undertaking many roles in the Navy. Lieutenant Manuel Querido, a Navy chaplain with the Marines in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, shows an Afghan citizen how to use a radio during a civic action mission.**





**Lieutenant Commander Elysia Ng, a Chinese American and staff judge advocate for Commander, Logistics Group Western Pacific, and her counterpart from the Royal Thai Navy, observe maneuvers from the dock landing ship USS *Harpers Ferry* (LSD 49) during bilateral exercises, July 2009.**

**U.S. Seventh Fleet Command Master Chief Marcos Sibal hosts students and instructors from the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force on board the fleet's flagship USS *Blue Ridge* (LCC 19), January 2010.**



**Rear Admiral Peter Gumataotao, the first Guam native to achieve flag rank, receives his new flag officer combination cover from a family member in September 2009. A 1981 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Gumataotao became Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Korea after his promotion.**



**Commander Michael V. Misiewicz, commanding officer of the guided missile destroyer USS *Mustin* (DDG 89), is greeted by his family as *Mustin* arrives in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, December 2010. This was Misiewicz's first visit to his native country since he immigrated to the United States in 1973.**





**U.S. Naval Academy  
Midshipman 3rd Class  
Melody Lee fires an M-  
16 down range from the  
flight deck of the  
amphibious assault ship  
USS *Nassau* (LHA) as  
part of her summer  
training cruise, July  
2009.**

**That same year the  
Academy recorded 68  
Asian American  
graduates, including 12  
women.**

**“America’s greatest asset is not our assembly lines or weapons systems, or even our great ships, submarines, and airplanes. . . . It’s our people.”**

**—Vice Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr.,  
Commander, U.S. Sixth Fleet, 2011**