Congress urged to honor WWII veterans

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By Lia Zhu in San Francisco |   
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San Francisco Board of Supervisors on Tuesday voted unanimously to urge the speedy passage of two congressional bills to award the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian award in the US, to Chinese-American veterans of World War II.  
Last May, the Chinese American World War II Veterans Congressional Gold Medal Act was introduced in the US House of Representatives and US Senate, but has since been stalled in committee.  
The timing of the passage of the congressional bills is crucial, as many Chinese-American World War II veterans are no longer alive to accept the recognition, said Norman Yee, a San Francisco supervisor and author of the resolution, at a news conference in San Francisco City Hall.  
He said Chinese Americans have served on behalf of the US in every conflict since the American Civil War but have never been honored.  
"It's a wrong picture," said Yee. "We should honor a history that is often overlooked and forgotten."  
More than 13,000 Chinese Americans served in all branches of the Army infantry and Army Air Force by the end of World War II, despite the fact that the total population of Chinese Americans living in the United States was under 120,000, according to the resolution.  
They served in all theaters in both combat and support roles, including in New Guinea, Iwo Jima, the Philippines, North Africa, Italy, the Normandy D-Day Invasion and the Battle of the Budge.  
Approximately 75 percent of the enlisted Chinese Americans served in the US Army, with ground units in Europe and the Pacific, and 25 percent of them served in the Navy, according to Dough Chan, vice-president of the Chinese Historical Society of America.  
"Still others served in specialized units, such as the all-Chinese-American 1157th Signal Corps, part of the 14th Air Service Group that would join the fight against Imperial Japan in the China-Burma-India Theater," said Chan.  
Those who served in the armed forces during World War II represented 20 percent of all Chinese-American men in the continental US, he said.  
However, the Chinese Americans served the country at a time of extreme racism and prejudice, especially as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 continued to restrict Chinese immigration to the US, said Yee.  
Approximately 40 percent of Chinese-American soldiers were not native-born citizens of the US and were unable to naturalize until after 1943, when the Chinese Exclusion Act was finally repealed.  
Allen Yuu, 95, a member of the Flying Tigers Signal Corps, said their barracks and restrooms were separated from white soldiers' during that time.  
He enlisted at 19 and was sent to South Africa, then India and China, where he taught Chinese civilians to use transmitters to gather intelligence for their unit. After the war, he worked at the Department of Defense as an electronic technician until retirement in 1974.  
Two other Chinese-American veterans, Ronald Won, 93, and Dale King, 98, also attended the press event to offer their support for the measure.  
So far, other historically overlooked military units, such as Filipino World War II veterans, Navajo Code Talkers and the Monument Men already have been honored with the Congressional Gold Medal.  
"The Veterans Administration projects that by 2036, no living veterans of World War II will be left to recount their experiences," said Chan. "We can do no less than honor the remaining survivors with the Congressional Gold Medal."  
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