



U.S. Coast Guard History Program

Asian-Pacific Americans & the U.S. Coast Guard

Historical Chronology

1879

- Chiao-Shun Soong signed aboard the cutters *Gallatin* and *Schuyler Colfax* from 1879-1881 as a seaman, making him probably the first Asian-Pacific to serve in one of the Coast Guard's predecessor services. He went on to a successful business career in China and raised several children who went on to great success in that country.

1906

- Manuel Ferreira, a native of Maui, Hawaii, served as the keeper of seven lighthouses during his career, which began in 1908 with the U.S. Lighthouse Service and ended with his retirement from the Coast Guard in 1946. He was born on 15 August, 1885, and became known as "one of the grand old men of Hawaiian lighthouse lore." He ultimately became the keeper of the Kauiki Head Light Station on Maui. In 1919 he rescued the crew of a Japanese fishing trawler when that vessel ran aground off Barber's Point, Hawaii, where Ferreira served as the light keeper. He was also instrumental in saving the schooner *Bianca* and its crew in 1923 when the ship lost its sails and was in danger of smashing on a reef. Ferreira was unable to launch the lighthouse skiff due to the high surf. Instead, he ran three miles to the nearest telephone and called for help. The USS *Sunadin* was dispatched and reached the wallowing schooner just in time to tow it from the jaws of destruction. From 1927 through 1929, he served as a keeper of the Molokai Light Station, located only two miles from the Kalaupapa Leper Settlement on the island of Molokai.

1915

- Samuel Amalu became Hawaii's renowned dean of lighthouse keepers. He was the keeper of the Kilauea Light Station. Amalu, who had the longest tenure of any light keeper at Kilauea, took charge of the light on 9 April, 1915 and served there for ten years. He originally joined the Lighthouse Service in 1906 and by the time he reached the Kilauea light he had served as a keeper at the Kawaihae Light on the island of Hawaii and at Barber's Point Light on Oahu. A trailblazer among Hawaii's light keepers, Amalu laid a path of devotion to duty and discipline for Kilauea Point's successive keepers.

1941-1945

- The Sanjuan family, including the father, Vivencio, and two of his sons served in the Coast Guard. Vivencio Sanjuan served on board the Coast Guard-manned attack transport USS

Samuel Chase during the invasions of North Africa and then Salerno, Italy. His son, Pedro, was stationed on board the attack transport USS *Bayfield* and saw service during the Normandy invasion and the invasion of Southern France as well. Another son, Ramon, served on board four Coast Guard cutters during his career and retired from the service in 1969. Another son, William, served in the Coast Guard in the Vietnam conflict. He was awarded the Purple Heart for a combat injury received while under a Viet Cong mortar attack.

1942

- In December, 1942, four former officers of the Philippine Army received commissions in the Coast Guard Reserve after first finishing the U. S. Navy's Submarine Chaser School: LCDR Carmelo Lopez Manzano, LT Benjamin Ayesa, LTJG Juan B. Lacson, and ENS Conrado Aguado. They were certified as being qualified to command patrol vessels. LCDR Manzano and LT Ayesa also held all-oceans, all-tonnages merchant marine licenses. LTJG Lacson held a master's ticket and ENS Aguado held a chief mate's license.
- LCDR Manzano had served as a major in the Philippine Army and also served as an aide de camp to MAJGEN B. J. Waldes. He also had 14 years of seagoing experience and his last vessel was destroyed in an attempt to run the Japanese blockade of Bataan. He was born in 1904 and held command of an ocean-going vessel for four years.
- LT Ayesa was born in Barcelona, Spain, in 1904 and became a naturalized Philippine citizen in 1937. He formerly was a captain of the off-shore patrol of the Philippine Army and had 21 years of experience at sea.
- LTJG Lacson was born in 1898 and had 20 years' experience at sea. He also served in the off-shore patrol of the Philippine Army. During 1940 and 1941 he was a second and a chief officer of the Philippine Coast Guard.
- ENS Aguado, born in 1913, attended San Beda College and the Philippine Nautical School. He formerly was a second lieutenant of the Philippine Army's off-shore patrol and had 10 years' experience at sea.
- Florence Ebersole Smith Finch, a member of the Coast Guard Women's Reserve (or SPAR) during World War II, was the only SPAR to receive the Pacific Campaign ribbon. She earned the ribbon for her service in the Philippines prior to her joining the Coast Guard. Finch, whose mother was a Filipino and whose father was a former U.S. soldier, was in the Philippines when the Japanese conquered the islands in 1942. When they took control of the island nation, she told enemy soldiers she was Filipino and was not imprisoned with the other Americans. She immediately joined the Filipino underground and smuggled food, medicine and other supplies to the American captives. However, she was eventually caught and arrested by the Japanese. Finch said she was beaten with sabers, tortured and routed through three prison camps before the Americans liberated the Philippines in 1945. "We were terrified; we didn't know what was going to happen to us," she said. "We had seen the death march and the condition of the American troops. You just can't comprehend what it was like. I was 80 pounds when we were liberated." Immediately following her release, she caught a ride aboard a Coast Guard transport back to the United States, where she enlisted in the Coast Guard to help "avenge the death of her late husband, who was killed aboard a Navy PT boat while running supplies to besieged Corregidor. Finch was also awarded the U.S. Medal of Freedom, one of the few American women to be so honored.

1949

- Jack N. Jones was the first Asian-American and the first Chinese-American graduate of the Coast Guard Academy graduate. He was a member of the Class of 1949.

1958

- In 1958 Captain Manuel Tubella, Jr., became the first Asian-Pacific Island American to serve as an aviator in the Coast Guard. He trained originally as a Marine Corps helicopter pilot beginning in 1954 before transferring to the Coast Guard in 1956. He was awarded the Coast Guard Commendation Medal in 1972 and 1976.

1962

- Kwang-Ping Hsu was the first Chinese-born Coast Guard Academy graduate. He was a member of the Class of 1962. Hsu became an accomplished Coast Guard aviator, who flew in the Arctic and Antarctic and served for thirty years.

1968

- The first Chamorro (Pacific Islander from Guam) to graduate from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and from any military service academy was Juan T. Salas, Class of 1968. He was also the first Chamorro to command a cutter, USCGC *Lipan* (WMEC 85) 1986-1988. He was the first active-duty Asian-Pacific-Islander-American to attain the rank of O-6 in the Coast Guard. Additionally, he was the first Cutterman to be Captain of the Port, Marine Safety Office Guam, 1992-1994.

1981

- Patrick Trapp, the commanding officer of Group Portland, Maine, was the senior Korean-American in the Coast Guard as of 2004. He was the first Korean-American commanding officer of a cutter - the 82-foot patrol boat *Point Camden* (WPB-82373), out of Long Beach, California. He was also the first Korean-American to graduate from the Coast Guard Academy. He graduated with the Class of 1981. Captain Trapp was the first Korean-American commanding officer of a Coast Guard station -- first at Station Grays Harbor, Washington then at Station Sandy Hook, New Jersey. Captain Trapp is the first Korean-American to attain the rank of O-6. He was also the first Korean-American to command a sector.

1983

- Jeffrey Lee was the first Korean-American to graduate from Coast Guard OCS (1983). Captain Lee was the first Korean-American commanding officer of a 95-foot cutter - *Cape Cross* (WPB-95321). Captain Lee was the first Korean-American commanding officer of an icebreaking tug, the 140-foot *Biscayne Bay* (WTGB-104). Captain Lee was the first Korean-American executive officer of a 378-foot cutter, the *Hamilton* (WHEC-715). Captain Lee was the first Korean-American to teach at the Leadership Development Center. Captain Lee was the first Korean-American to command a high endurance cutter, the *Hamilton*, taking command on 19 June 2006. He retired in 2008.
- Captain Kanazawa was the first Japanese-American to attain the rank of O-6 in the Coast Guard. During Captain Kanazawa held a number of important positions during his distinguished career.

1986

- Captain Hung M. Nguyen was the first Vietnamese-American to graduate from the Coast Guard Academy, the first to command a Coast Guard unit, and the first to reach the rank of O-6.

1988

- The first Chinese-American commissioned officer to serve in the Rotating Commissioned Teaching Corps who taught an academic subject at the Coast Guard Academy was T. L. Mar. He taught during the 1988-1989 academic year.

1995

- Bryon Ing was the first Chinese-American Coast Guardsman to command a Medium Endurance Cutter when he commanded USCGC *Venturous* from 1995-1997. He was the first Chinese-American and Coast Guard Liaison Officer to the Joint Chiefs of Staff (J7-Doctrine) in 1997. He was the first Chinese-American DAWIA/DHS Level III Certified Systems Acquisitions (2002) and was the first Chinese-American Major Acquisitions Systems Project Manager for Response Boat-Medium (RB-M), where he served from 2002-2006.

2008

- On 11 March 2008, Ensign Mark A. Unpingco became the first Chamorro (Asian Pacific Islander from Guam) Dive Officer of the Coast Guard after graduating from the Marine Engineering Dive Officer (MEDO) course at the U.S. Navy Dive and Salvage Training Center in Panama City, FL.

2010

- In 2010 F&S2 Ifong Lee became the first and only Samoan CWO2 in the Coast Guard.

2012

- Chief Warrant Officer Kilohana Akim became the first female Pacific Islander of Hawaiian descent to make INV3 in the Coast Guard when she was promoted on 1 June 2012.

2014

- In 2014 Captain Joseph M. Vojvodich was promoted to Rear Admiral (Lower Half), becoming the first Asian-American to make flag rank. He was born in South Korea and grew up in Ohio before attending and graduating from the Coast Guard Academy.

2015

- On 01 June 2015, Cynthia Moneda Samonte became the first female Asian Pacific-American Master Chief Petty Officer in the U.S. Coast Guard. She was born in the Philippines and grew up in San Diego, CA, where she joined the active duty workforce in June 1994. She quickly pursued the rating of Yeoman.

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