**Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month**

Thank you for inviting me here today. It is an honor and a privilege to represent the greatest maritime force in the world, and to celebrate the brave Sailors and civilians who have made that distinction possible.

In 1992, President George H.W. Bush signed the Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month into law, extending a celebration first inaugurated by President Jimmy Carter. Throughout the month of May, the Navy recognizes the service and dedication of the men and women of Asian American and Pacific Islander heritage, and honors the diversity that is central to the United States Navy’s identity and critical to maintaining our role as a Global Force for Good.

May is a particularly appropriate time for this celebration. It commemorates the entrance of the first Japanese immigrant into the United States in 1843, and marks the 144th anniversary of the completion of the first transcontinental railroad in 1869, which was constructed in large part by Chinese immigrants.

There are 19,000\*\* uniformed personnel and more than 29,000\*\* civilians of Asian American and Pacific Islander heritage currently serving in the Navy. Their contribution to America’s security and freedom continues a tradition of outstanding Asian American and Pacific Islander service in the United States Navy. It is a history punctuated with stories of trailblazing heroism from Sailors that exemplify the best of who we are - Sailors like Fireman 2nd Class Telesforo Trinidad.

Born in the Philippine Islands, Trinidad was working in the fire room of the USS San Diego in 1915 when one of the ship’s boilers exploded, driving Trinidad from the fire room but trapping a crewmate inside. Upon realizing what had happened, Trinidad turned around and re-entered the smoke-filled room. As he rushed his crewmate to safety, a second boiler exploded, burning Trinidad’s face as they escaped the flames. He and his crewmate survived, and Trinidad was awarded the Medal of Honor in gratitude for his bravery.

In the hour of our greatest need, extraordinary men and woman of Asian American and Pacific Islander heritage joined our cause. Less than a year after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Susan Ahn Cuddy became the first Korean American woman to serve in the U.S. Navy and reached the rank of lieutenant. Her two siblings, Ralph and Phillip, also enlisted in the U.S. military.

Three years later, Rear Admiral Gordon Pai'ea Chung-Hoon, the first Asian American citizen graduate from the United States Naval Academy, commanded the USS Sigsbee as it assisted in the destruction of 20 enemy planes while protecting a carrier strike force off the Japanese island of Kyushu. On September 7, 2004, the USS Chung-Hoon was welcomed into the U.S. Naval Fleet in honor of his leadership.

The tradition continues with service members right here in [Local AREA]. [Mention of any notable Asian American or Pacific Islanders in Local AREA]

These stories, and this celebration, remind us that the true source of America’s greatness is not in the power of our weaponry, but in the courage and integrity of those who serve. The Navy takes enormous pride in maintaining a diverse force that reflects the cultural richness of the country we serve. This month is more than an opportunity to celebrate a proud history; this is a time to build the foundation for an even brighter future.

Attracting, developing, and retaining a high-quality, diverse workforce that values a culture of inclusion is one of the Navy’s most vital missions. We are continuing to recruit Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders into the Navy by making more communities aware of the unique experiences that are available to them. Joining the Navy combines the great honor of serving this country with incredible opportunities for personal growth, unparalleled career potential and long-term financial stability.

The emphasis we put on diversity reflects our understanding that it is not found in statistics, percentages, or quotas. We do not strive for diversity for its own sake.

For the Navy, diversity is about achieving our peak performance. It is about gathering the widest possible set of talents and backgrounds to maximize our capabilities, address new threats and challenges, and take advantage of new opportunities. It is about the unique personal characteristics and skills that each Sailor and civilian adds to our total force. And finally, it is about that distinctly American notion that people with different backgrounds and cultures are bound together by the common belief in liberty and justice for all.

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Our people have always been our greatest asset. Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month is a chance to celebrate those who have served this country, both here and abroad, and to learn this important lesson from their stories: Protecting America’s security and way of life can only be accomplished by a force that reflects the courage, wisdom, strength and culture of this entire country.

That is our vision for the United States Navy. And by pursuing this vision, with your support, we will honor our nation’s history and develop a new generation of leaders who will maintain our role as a Global Force for Good for decades to come.

Thank you and God Bless.

\*\*For updated information check navy.mil