The Department of Defense joins the nation in paying tribute to the Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native Hawaiians who demonstrated selfless service and sacrifice in the U.S. Army, Army Air Forces, Marine Corps, Navy, Coast Guard, and National Guard during World War II.

During WWII, Chinese and Japanese American men and women enlisted for military service in great numbers. More than 20,000 Chinese Americans, or one out of every five in the United States, served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Chinese American Hazel Ying Lee was one of the 38 Women Air Force Service Pilots who died in the line of duty.

Although barred from the naval service, Japanese Americans fought in some of the Army's most decorated units. The 442nd Regiment “Go for Broke” was one such unit. The 4,000 men who initially made up the unit in April 1943 had to be replaced nearly 2.5 times. In total, about 14,000 men served, earning 9,486 Purple Hearts.

Filipino Americans and Korean Americans also participated in the nation's war effort. More than 260,000 Filipino and Filipino American soldiers served during the war. One of California's first Korean immigrant families, the Ahn's, saw all three siblings, Ralph, Philip and Susan, enlist in 1942. Lieutenant Susan Ahn Cuddy became the first Korean American woman in the U.S. military and the first female Navy gunnery officer.

The service of Asians, Pacific Islanders and Native Hawaiians before and during World War II, paved the way for future generations of men and women to join what would become in 1948, a desegregated U.S. military.