

The Go For Broke Soldiers Stamp Dedications

3/23/21, Wayne Osako, *Co-Chair, Stamp Our Story Campaign*

“Always be proud of your heritage.” -Fusa Takahashi (93), *Stamp Our Story* Founder/Co Chair, and Go For Broke veteran widow.

The U.S. Postal Service has announced that the official release date of the *Go For Broke Japanese American Soldiers of World War II Forever Stamp* is Thursday, June 3rd, 2021. The first city of issue for the stamp will be Los Angeles, California, where Ms. Takahashi and her friends started the stamp campaign in 2005.

The little stamp with a big story cannot come soon enough for its supporters, especially in light of the rise in anti-Asian American violence and hate crimes.

The USPS is currently working with the *Stamp Our Story Campaign* and community partners that rallied for the stamp such as the Japanese American Veterans Association (JAVA), Go For Broke National Education Center (GFBNEC), Japanese American Citizens League (JAACL), National Japanese American Memorial Foundation (NJAMF), Nisei Veterans Legacy, and Friends of Minidoka, among many others. The goal is to collaborate and assist the USPS in their national rollout for the stamp.

A USPS national video dedication is being made, and special regional stamp dedications are being developed across the nation to commemorate the inspiring American legacy of the Go For Broke Soldiers. Organizers seek to celebrate the release of the historic stamp, which is the first to feature the image of an Asian American soldier. The stamp is also one of only a few in US postal history to feature a historical Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) subject.

Stamp Our Story is the coalition of family and friends of the *Nisei* soldiers that backed the proposal for the Go For Broke Soldiers Stamp, and includes the many organizations that have supported the cause. *Nisei* is the term for American citizens whose parents immigrated from Japan. Due to public petitioning by *Stamp Our Story*, a multitude of lawmakers across the country from both sides of the aisle sent letters of support for the proposal to the Postmaster General, that included 91 congressional lawmakers, three governors, seven state assemblies, and numerous mayors and local officials. The campaign even received the overseas support from French citizens and officials in areas that were liberated from German forces by the Go For Broke Soldiers.

Formerly called the *Nisei World War II Soldiers Stamp Campaign*, the effort was started in 2005 by three California *Nisei* women who each endured incarceration in US detention camps during the war: Fusa Takahashi (93) of Granite Bay, Aiko O. King (93) of Camarillo, and the late Chiz Ohira of Gardena. Two of the women are widows of U.S. Army Go For Broke veterans of the war. Ms. Takahashi's husband, Kazuo, was a Military Intelligence Service veteran from San Francisco, California. Ms. Ohira's husband, Ted, was a 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team veteran from Makaweli, Hawaii. Ms. Takahashi and Ms. King grew up in California's Central Valley farming communities, and they became lifelong friends in the Amache, Colorado camp. Ms. Ohira came from the prominent Masao Akiyama Family who owned and operated the well-known “KM Aikyama Company,” a general store in the heart of Little Tokyo in Los Angeles. She and her family would be forcibly removed and sent to the Poston, Arizona camp during the war.

“In the past, our founders have each expressed their wish that the stamp bring people and organizations together to remember and to honor what the Go For Broke Soldiers accomplished, and to be reminded of their American legacy that impacts us all today,” said *Stamp Our Story* Co-Chair Wayne Osako, who has been helping the campaign founders since 2006. His *Nisei* parents were confined as children in the Heart Mountain and Jerome incarceration camps, and a number of his relatives served in the 100th/442nd RCT, MIS, and WAC.

“Organizations such as JAVA, GFBNEC, JACL, NJAMF, and the many veterans family organizations have been friends of the campaign and we are forever grateful. We would like to highlight that campaign co-founder Aiko King was an avid Ventura JACL member, whose chapter strongly supported the campaign. Also, the late Chiz Ohira, our co-founder, was also a founding member of GFBNEC, and her husband, Ted Ohira, was a founding GFBNEC board member,” Osako emphasized.

Some dedications are planned to be virtual, and some in-person, though limited due to the ongoing pandemic. Outreach to communities is currently being conducted to see if there is interest in developing local events. Ceremony planning is already underway in Hawaii, California, Oregon, Idaho, and Texas. Those interested are encouraged to reach out to their local affiliated veterans organizations that may already be in contact with Stamp Our Story. If not, they can get more information at www.StampOurStory.org.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, the USPS will produce a national-level dedication in a virtual form only through a ten-minute video that will officially announce the release of the Go For Broke Soldiers Stamp online. *Stamp Our Story* and coalition partners are working with the USPS on the video tribute, which will feature multiple voices from the community sharing the story behind the stamp to the American public.

The campaign has long sought to honor the legacy of the *Nisei* men and women who served in the U.S. military during the war despite intense racial prejudice and war hysteria directed at them, and at the whole Japanese American community. The civil rights of over 120,000 Americans of Japanese heritage were removed, and they were forcibly confined in incarceration camps across the country.

Despite this injustice, 33,000 Americans of Japanese heritage enlisted anyway to show their American loyalty and help in the US war effort. The 100th/442nd RCT would become the most decorated unit for its size and length of service in US history, including 21 Medals of Honor, and 8 Presidential Unit Citations. Using their linguist skills, the MIS soldiers are acknowledged by historians as being critical to Allied victory in the Pacific Theater, shortening the war by at least two years, and saving countless lives in the process. The MIS were also important during the US Occupation of Japan, helping to rebuild and restructure Japan into a stable democracy which is now one of the strongest allies to the US. Following the end of the war, returning Go For Broke veterans became community leaders and entrepreneurs, and a number of them became prominent lawmakers, such as the late Senators Spark Matsunaga and Daniel K. Inouye.

Supporters also point out that the Go For Broke veterans not only helped to rebuild the Japanese American community, but they also contributed to building a stronger and more unified nation at large. “Their American story continues to inform and inspire us today,” said Osako. “Their legacy is a reminder to us all of the long-standing patriotic service from AAPIs that continues today. In addition, the Go For Broke Soldiers had an intense “can do” spirit that propelled them through incredible obstacles both on the battlefield, and at home in the US. This persevering spirit that we learn from their story can help all of us get through the difficulties of today.”

Ms. Takahashi, campaign founder, shared the following statement to supporters: “We thank all of you who have supported the stamp campaign over the past 15 years. It took the support from many, many organizations and individuals to make this stamp become a reality. We invite you to celebrate the stamp with us when it comes out. And remember to always be proud of your heritage. As *Nisei*, it’s what our parents taught us that made these soldiers give their best. Thank you!”

The USPS named the stamp after the “Go For Broke” motto of the U.S. Army’s 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team (RCT), but which now commonly refers to **all** of the American men and women of Japanese heritage

who served in the war. Most served in the 100th/442nd RCT, Military Intelligence Service (MIS), 1399th Engineer Construction Battalion, Women's Army Corps (WAC), Cadet Nurse Corps, and Army Nurse Corps.

NOTE: The first day that the USPS allows a stamp dedication to occur is the day after a national stamp release. Therefore, June 4th is the first day that stamp dedications. Events can also be scheduled later in the month, or even later in the year if desired.

Find more information at www.StampOurStory.org. We also encourage you to visit the websites of our coalition partners, who have extensive resources on the Go For Broke Soldiers.