

## New project seeks to recognize the contributions of the Chinese-Americans who fought in WWII

By **DONG LESHUO**  
leshuodong@chinadailyusa.com

**T**hey are dying almost every day, and Ed Gor is trying to find them before they do.

"They" are the estimated 20,000 Chinese-Americans who fought in World War II. Nobody knows how many are still alive.

"The youngest who served would be 88 now. The oldest still alive is 101," said Gor, national president of the Chinese-American Citizens Alliance. "We're trying to find them as quickly as possible."

Many of the veterans' parents were unable to join their families in China, and they could not get them to the United States because of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which banned Chinese laborers from entering the country. The act came into force in 1882, but was not rescinded until 1943.

When WWII broke out, many Chinese-Americans believed it was their opportunity to fight, not only for the US but for the people of China as well, according to Gor.

Gor's father and uncle were among those who served.

The Chinese American WWII Veterans Recognition Project, initiated by the alliance, has recently been launched to recognize, honor and celebrate the Chinese-American servicemen and women who volunteered or were drafted during WWII when the exclusion act was still in place.

The project's goal is to ensure that the achievements and contributions of the "greatest generation" will never be forgotten.

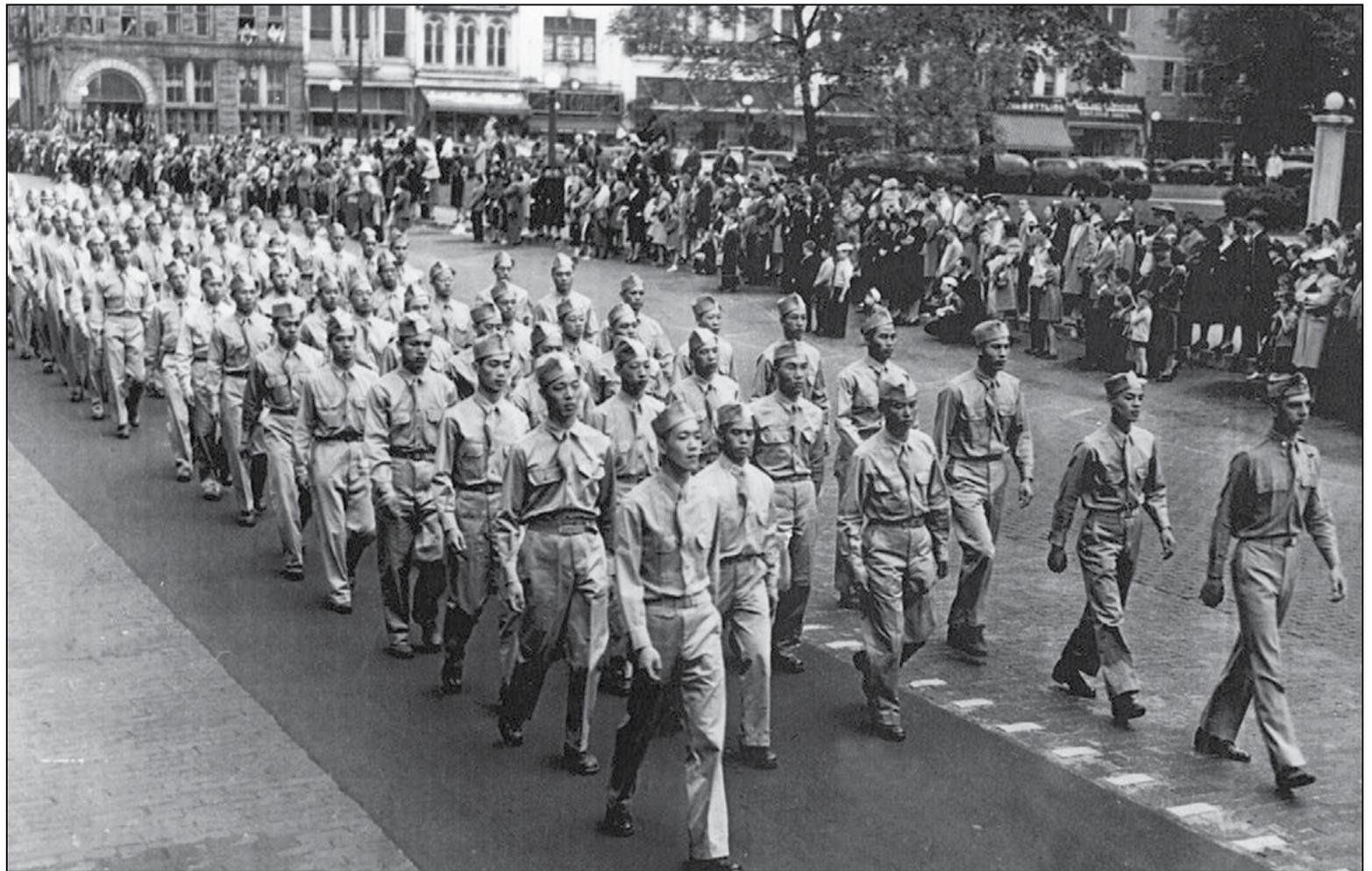
"As Chinese-Americans, if we do not capture and record our history, no one is going to do it for us," said Samantha Cheng, the director.

The project is working to create a public database that will carry the names of all Chinese-Americans who served in the US armed forces during WWII.

The team dug into the National Archives and began breaking everything down by common Chinese surnames. So far, it has been able to confirm more than 14,000 people who served in the US Army and US Army Air Force, Cheng said.

At the beginning of WWII, 77,504 Chinese were recorded as living in the US, and as many as 25 percent, approximately 20,000, served in the armed forces, according to *Fighting for the Dream: Voices of Chinese American Veterans from WWII to Afghanistan*, written by Victoria Moy, an Asian-American writer who divides her time between Los Angeles and New York City.

"People should know that they participated in significant numbers



Chinese-American units of the US Army Air Corps march in Dayton, Ohio, on Memorial Day, 1943. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Honoring brave veterans



Elsie Seetoo, WWII veteran, with her daughter Elaine in Washington last year.

— the highest of any national group. As many as 25 percent served in the armed forces and contributed to the effort, while 11.5 percent of the general US population did," Moy said.

In May, as part of the Chinese American WWII Veterans Recognition Project, a bill to award a collective Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of their service was introduced in the US Congress.

On Dec 2, Congress granted the Gold Medal of National Recognition to the 260,000 Filipino and Filipino-

American soldiers who served under the US Army in Asia.

However, Chinese-Americans who served have not been recognized or honored by the nation.

"We need 67 from the Senate and 290 from the House. We're about one-sixth of the way through on the House side and about 10 percent on the Senate side," Gor said.

The bill has 48 cosponsors in the House of Representatives. The two main sponsors are Democrat Ted Lieu and Republican Ed Royce, both from California.

There are seven cosponsors in the US Senate. The main sponsors are Democrats Tammy Duckworth of Illinois and Mazie Hirono of Hawaii, and Thad Cochran, a Republican from Mississippi.

Duckworth is a retired lieutenant colonel in US Army. She served as a helicopter pilot in Iraq, where she lost both legs and sustained injuries to her right arm, becoming the war's first female double amputee.

"More than 13,000 brave Chinese-Americans volunteered to risk their lives to protect their fellow Americans from our enemies during World War II," Duckworth said.

"Their unwavering commitment to their country, even after being initially turned away, should be recognized, and it's important we honor this brave group of veterans with a Congressional Gold Medal."

In February, a website (caww2.org) was launched as a platform to support the efforts to find Chinese-American veterans. So far, 78 people have registered. "We need to have more people respond," Cheng said.

According to Gor, the veterans were always modest. "Sometimes people don't even realize that their father or grandfather were veterans," he said.

"Sometimes it happens when people pass away, their children look at their records and they come across those military records. That's how

they find out that their parents were veterans.

"My father and uncle were like most people of their generation; they didn't talk about it very much. You almost had to ask them about it," he said.

Gor's father, Joe MF Gor, was born in China in 1918, and entered the US military at Camp Wolters Reception Center in Texas.

He served in multiple locations and was honorably discharged at Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas in 1945.

Ed Gor's uncle, George Gor, enlisted in the army in December 1942. He trained at the radar unit at Camp Crowder, Missouri, and was stationed in New Guinea.

"I remember he talked about the ship he was on, the *Liberty*. It was hit by torpedo and sank 200 miles off the Fiji islands. He and the crew spent three days in the water before being rescued," Ed Gor said.

George Gor was awarded a Purple Heart before being discharged from Fort Sam Houston, Texas, with the rank of sergeant.

Captain Francis B Wai is the only Chinese-American who served in WWII to have been awarded the Medal of Honor by Congress, the US' highest military award. In 2000, his posthumous Distinguished Service Medal — awarded in 1944 — was upgraded to a Medal of Honor.