

# Who was Ruby Kim Tape?

Here’s a Chinese American veteran you’ve never heard about . . .

By Roger S. Dong

Chairman, Chinese American Heroes

This is the story of Ruby Kim Tape, a Chinese American woman from Marysville, California, born in 1898. In 1921 Ruby Kim married Frank Tape, the son of historically significant Mary and Joseph Tape of San Francisco. The Tapes were both Chinese, but in those less enlightened days they were given the last name ‘Tape’ by an Immigration/ Customs official’s mis-transliteration and were stuck with an unique Chinese family name. In the Toishan dialect, a closer transliteration would have been ‘Dip’.

Ruby’s mother-in-law was Mary Tape, who in 1884, had bravely fought against the San Francisco Board of Education, demanding that her daughter, Mamie Tape, be allowed to attend public school with white children. In those days, San Francisco public schools were segregated and white schools were closed to all minorities, especially the “dirty and smelly” Chinese. The Chinese Exclusion Act had just been passed in 1882, preventing Chinese men and their families from freely immigrating to America.

Another policy to prevent the Chinese from propagating in the U.S. was to threaten that if any non-Chinese women married a Chinese man, she would lose her American citizenship. In actuality, the law said that any American woman that married a foreign man could lose her American citizenship but legislation selectively enforced only those that married Asian men. Ultimately, the Chinese American population was expected to quietly dwindle and disappear from America as men without families and natural attrition

would resolve the “Chinese problem”.

When young Mamie was not allowed to attend her Spring Valley public school, Mary Tape sued Ms. Jane Hurley, the Principal of the school. Mary Tape won the lawsuit in Superior Court, which was upheld by the California State Supreme Court, citing the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment, California state law, and further acknowledging that Chinese paid school taxes. The 1885 “Tape vs. Hurley” case ~~is~~ was a landmark court decision that forced the San Francisco School Board to desegregate, at least on paper. What actually happened was that San Francisco created a separate-but-equal school system for Asian children, notably building the Oriental School that later became the Commodore Stockton Elementary School in San Francisco’s Chinatown.

This was the family that Ruby Tape married into, politically active and very community-minded.

In 1931, the Japanese Empire invaded China and committed numerous atrocities against the Chinese



people, as chronicled in Iris Chang’s book, “The Rape of Nanking.” These heinous crimes were reported and covered extensively in print and in newsreels and many people across the world were outraged, including Ruby Tape. This prompted her to join the Selective Service Board which regulated the military draft in the United States, raised funds to send to China’s Nationalist government to fight the Japanese, and created jobs for to sew clothing, blankets, and make bandages to ship to China.

In December 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor bringing the United States into World War II. Ruby wanted to do more to serve her country and fight the enemy. She decided to join the Army, but because she was 44-years-old her application was rejected. She ignored the rejection and went directly to a US Army field unit, took the Army physical exam, and passed with flying colors. Ruby Tape became a private in the US Army. Her capabilities, motivation, and enthusiasm meant that she would not be a private very long. Before long she attained the status of Technical Sergeant.

Ruby had an illustrious career in the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). At the time of joining the WAC, approximately 150,000 American women were recruited to handle administrative, communi-

cations, and clerical work for the Army, which freed the men for combat operations. Many Chinese women also served, working primarily in defense industries producing the weapons and other items needed to win the war.

Ruby was smart, mature, and a very loyal American. Assigned to the Military Intelligence Training Center at Camp Richie, Maryland, she supported the training of interrogators, translators, order of battle researchers, photo interpreters, and counter-intelligence operators.

After the war ended in 1945, Ruby continued serving in the military, which demonstrated that Chinese Americans were loyal citizens and fully capable of fulfilling military assignments. She decided to join General MacArthur’s postwar contingent of 5,000 Americans who were assigned to Japan to initiate the process of demilitarization and democratization of the country.

In 1949, Ruby Tape left government service and moved back to California to join her husband in Berkeley, California.

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For more information about Ruby Tape and the famous Tape family, I suggest that you read Columbia University Professor Mae Ngai’s book, “**The Lucky Ones - One Family and the Extraordinary Invention of Chinese America**” ([Houghton Mifflin Harcourt](#)). You can find it on Amazon.com. This book is the primary source for the information in this report.



TSgt Ruby Tape