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Chinese American Heroes Celebrates Its Fifth Year

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By Roger S. Dong

July 31st marked the 5th anniversary of the birth of Chinese American Heroes (CAH). It was born of an annual meeting of the Committee of 100, an organization of prominent Chinese Americans that fosters better relations between Asia and America and constructive dialog in the Asian American community. The question was asked if anyone was highlighting the hard work and immense contributions that Chinese Americans have made to America and the world. CAH was created after the enthusiastic reception that this idea received. The mission is twofold: 1). Highlight the achievements of Chinese Americans to set an example of accomplishments and charity for our youth and 2). To combat negative stereotypes and the perception that Chinese Americans are perpetual foreigners who are “not American” in their loyalties.

On the first point we are making gradual progress. As word of our website spreads on the Internet, www.chineseamericanheroes.org, more



Zhe "Zack" Zeng

and more youth are seeing our heroes and realizing that Chinese Americans have contributed and sacrificed just as much for the United States as other ethnic groups. We can look with pride on such people as Zhe “Zack” Zeng, who ran into one of the burning World Trade Center buildings on September 11, 2001 and sacrificed his life while saving others. We can also marvel at the courage and daring of 19th century pioneer journalist Wong Chin Foo, who heckled Denis Kearney, leader of the openly racist anti-Chinese movement of the time, from the very front row of his rallies while surrounded

by hundreds of angry white men. Wong challenged Kearney to duel him with anything, “chopsticks, Irish potatoes, or Krupp guns.” Kearney refused. Wong coined the term “Chinese American” in print for the first time in 1883 and in answer to the perpetual question asked of many Chinese Americans had the sarcastic reply, “I never knew that rats and puppies were good to eat until I was told by American people.”



Wong Chin Foo

On the second point, our record is mixed. In survey after survey a majority of Americans still express the belief that Chinese Americans are somehow more loyal to China than to the United States. This misconception is repeated despite the record that Chinese Americans and other minority groups have compiled in working for and even sacrificing our lives on behalf of the United States and fellow Americans. We have the example of Captain Francis B. Wai of the US Army during World War II. He was trained as a scientist and was exempt from combat service because of his work, but he chose to join the Army infantry. In 1944, the Americans landed in Leyte in the Philippines and were pinned down on the beach. Captain Wai repeatedly ran out to expose enemy strongpoints for his men by getting the Japanese to shoot at him. Wai was killed but was credited with having



Captain Francis B. Wai

made it possible for the beach to be seized rapidly with as few casualties as possible. Many Americans alive today possibly owe their lives to Captain Wai because their grandfather or great-grandfather wasn't killed that day in Leyte because of his Wai's courageous and heroic actions. After a thorough review of military his records, Francis B. Wai was awarded the nation's highest military honor, the Medal of Honor, in

1998, becoming the first Chinese American to be so awarded.

The mission of Chinese American Heroes continues.

For more information about some of our heroes please visit our website:

www.chineseamericanheroes.org