

BOOK REVIEW

Capturing the Aspirations and Inner Conflicts of Chinese Veterans

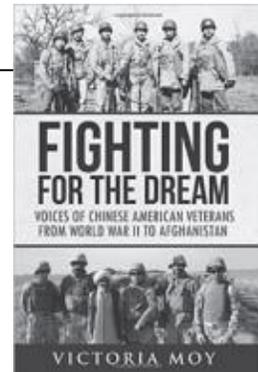
Reminiscences not only about war experiences, but also about the American dream, about Chinatowns, about how America was, and about how it is still evolving

By Foster Stockwell

This is a collection of the histories of 40 Chinese-American men and women, told in their own words, persons who served on the side of the United States in five different wars. These are reminiscences not only about war experiences but also about the American dream, about Chinatowns, about how America was, and about how it is still evolving. It is well illustrated with pictures of these soldiers, sailors, air men, marines, and nurses.

During World War II approximately 20,000 Chinese-Americans served in the U.S. armed forces. Unlike the African Americans and Japanese Americans, most of the Chinese Americans were assigned to integrated units. There were, however, ten all Chinese-American units. The few Chinese women who enlisted during World War II were assigned to either the WACS (Women's Army Corps) or the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services).

The fact that so many Chinese Americans served in the armed forces is somewhat surprising because of the long history of bad treatment that the Chinese received in America—deportations, the Chinese Exclusion Acts, and the forced removal of Chinese from one city or another in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Also, traditional Chinese culture has tended to frown on military service. A prevalent Chinese adage holds that “Good iron is not used for nails; good men do not become soldiers.”



Fighting for the Dream: Voices of Chinese American Veterans from World War II to Afghanistan by Victoria Moy, 2014.
9780930377069:
Amazon.com: Books

Among the oral histories in this book is one by Major Kurt Lee, the first Asian American to receive an unrestricted regular commission in the Marine Corps, and one by Elsie Seetoo, who had returned with her father to China from America, where she joined the Chinese Red Cross Medical Relief Corps in Guiyang and then the U.S. Army Nurse Corps.

World War II proved to be a watershed moment for the Chinese Americans, as well as for other minorities and women. Defense jobs opened up so that Chinese Americans were no longer relegated to just hold laundry and restaurant positions. The War Brides Act after

From World War II to the more recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, many Chinese joined the American military and fought for the country. Their stories are worth remembering.

World War II allowed Chinese Americans to bring wives over from China, which the Exclusion Acts had made much more difficult before. Thus Chinatowns were transformed from bachelor societies to family communities.

During the Korean War, however, repression of the Chinese in America came once more to the forefront. Under the red scare of McCarthyism many Chinese Americans were thought to be enemy agents. E. F. Drumright of the U.S. consul in Hong Kong alleged that almost every Chinese in America had entered the country illegally and that the “paper son” system used to circumvent government restrictions was devised by the Communists to send spies into America. Yet despite the injustice and unethical treatment accorded the American Chinese during this Korean War period, there were still some Chinese who served with distinction in the American armed forces.

While each individual’s account in this book depicts a different and often experience, some of the authors suffered racism and harassment even as late as when they were serving in the Vietnam War. And during the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars two Chinese American soldiers committed suicide as a result of the hazings they experienced at the hands of their fellow non-Chinese enlistees.

The compiler of these oral accounts captures the aspirations and inner conflicts of these Chinese veterans of different generations while touching on similar themes, such as what it means to be an immigrant and the idea of “Americanness.”

This book is a good read for anyone interested in oral history and is a must for collectors of military history. It is published and available from The Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

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Foster Stockwell grew up in China (12 years) first in Fujian Province and then in Szechuan Province (city of Chengdu) as the son of American missionaries. He returned to the

U.S. just before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941. After completing college, he became a writer and editor working for various magazine, newspaper, and book publishers. For 20 years was a senior editor for World Book Encyclopedia in Chicago, and for 10 years was the publishing director for China Books and Periodicals in San Francisco.

Has written six published books, two of which are about China (Religion in China Today, and Westerners in China) and has traveled to China more than 15 times over the past 25 years, working as a polisher and consultant for the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing. Now retired and living in Des Moines, Washington.