

MILITARY CONTRIBUTIONS AND SACRIFICES OF  
IMMIGRANTS

BY STUART ANDERSON

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In his [final speech](#) as president, Ronald Reagan said, “We lead the world because, unique among nations, we draw our people – our strength – from every country and every corner of the world. And by doing so we continuously renew and enrich our nation. While other countries cling to the stale past, here in America we breathe life into dreams. We create the future, and the world follows us into tomorrow. Thanks to each wave of new arrivals to this land of opportunity, we’re a nation forever young, forever bursting with energy and new ideas, and always on the cutting edge, always leading the world to the next frontier. This quality is vital to our future as a nation. If we ever closed the door to new Americans, our leadership in the world would soon be lost.”

By providing opportunity, America has given much to immigrants. Throughout America’s history, immigrants have given much in return. Many immigrants have sacrificed their lives while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. In researching the past and present contributions of immigrants to America’s military, this report from the National Foundation for American Policy found:

- During service in America’s wars and conflicts, 22% of the recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor have been immigrants. Recent immigrant Medal of Honor recipients include Florent Groberg (born in France), Alfred Rascon (born in Mexico), Tibor Rubin (born in Hungary) and Leslie Sabo Jr. (born in Austria).
- Today, approximately 80,000 immigrants serve in the U.S. Armed Forces, representing 6% of service members on active duty.
- Currently, more than 1.5 million veterans of U.S. military service are immigrants or the children of immigrants. Approximately 539,000 immigrants are veterans.
- Immigrants, including Baron Friedrich von Steuben, credited with transforming the Continental Army under General George Washington, helped secure America’s independence. During World War I, 18% of the soldiers serving in the U.S. Army were foreign-born. More than 300,000 immigrants were enlisted or inducted into the U.S. Army during World War II.
- Refugee scientists, many of the world’s most brilliant scientists and mathematicians, played crucial roles in successfully developing the atomic bomb during the Manhattan Project.
- Immigrants in the U.S. military are experiencing much greater obstacles when attempting to become U.S. citizens. The denial rate for military naturalizations increased from 7% in FY 2016 to 17% in FY 2019, a 143% increase in the denial rate, according to a National Foundation for American Policy analysis. Moreover, as a result of several policies, between FY 2016 and FY 2019 the number of immigrants in the military who naturalized dropped by 54%, from 8,606 in FY 2016 to 3,987 in FY 2019.

---

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

Given the aging of the U.S. population, immigrants will be an important source of future recruits to the U.S. Armed Forces. The Trump administration should consider reforming policies that have made it more difficult for foreign-born individuals to join the military and for immigrants in the military to become U.S. citizens. That can be done by restoring the MANVI program that allowed many foreign nationals to offer their special skills to the U.S. Armed Forces and reinstating the Basic Training Naturalization program.

What motivates immigrants to join the U.S. military? “I can’t speak for every immigrant, but for me it was to earn the right to call myself an American,” said Medal of Honor recipient Florent Groberg in an interview. “This country gave me the opportunity to come here and call myself an American. At the time, we were at war and I wanted to give back, to earn that I am a citizen. When my country is fighting an enemy, as a citizen it’s my duty to go out there and fight for this country. We’re as patriotic as anybody else.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Florent Groberg.

## PRESENT-DAY AND HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Today, approximately 80,000 immigrants serve in the U.S. Armed Forces, representing 6% of service members on active duty. The number is derived from the American Community Survey (2018) and a National Foundation for American Policy analysis of U.S. Armed Forces data.<sup>2</sup>

Currently, more than 1.5 million veterans of U.S. military service are immigrants or the children of immigrants. Approximately 539,000 immigrants are veterans, according to an NFAP tabulation of the March 2019 Current Population Survey.<sup>3</sup> Five percent of veterans who served after the September 11, 2001, attacks were immigrants and 10% were the children of immigrants.

**Table 1**  
**Current U.S. Veterans By Nativity (2019)**

<b>Time Period Served in U.S. Armed Forces</b>	<b>Immigrants</b>	<b>Children of Immigrants</b>
<b>Post September 11th (September 2001 or later)</b>	146,000	293,000
<b>August 1990 to August 2001</b>	114,000	168,000
<b>May 1975 to July 1990</b>	90,000	236,000
<b>Vietnam Era (August 1964 to April 1975)</b>	117,000	390,000
<b>February 1955 to July 1964</b>	45,000	196,000
<b>Korean War (July 1950 to January 1955)</b>	22,000	159,000
<b>January 1947 to June 1950</b>	2,000	37,000
<b>World War II and earlier (before January 1947)</b>	3,000	70,000
<b>TOTAL (ALL LIVING VETERANS)</b>	<b>539,000</b>	<b>1,550,000</b>

Source: National Foundation for American Policy tabulation of March 2019 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

Historically, immigrants have always played an important role in the American military. Two of General George Washington’s chief military aides during the American Revolution were Alexander Hamilton and Baron Friedrich von Steuben. Washington assigned Steuben to create discipline and professionalism in the beleaguered

<sup>2</sup> The 80,000 number was derived by using estimates of active duty military personnel contained in the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2018 American Community Survey (ACS). The 2018 ACS only reports on active duty personnel residents in the United States, of which 61,170 or 6.04% were immigrants. However, that number does not include members of the U.S. Armed Forces serving outside the United States. To arrive at a number that includes immigrants serving both inside and outside the country (i.e., a total number), NFAP made the assumption that the percentage of 6.04% foreign-born serving in the military in the U.S. holds also for those on active duty serving abroad and multiplied this percentage by the number of active duty personnel reported by the Defense Manpower Data Center for June 30, 2018, to arrive at approximately 80,000 immigrants serving today on active duty. [https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/rest/download?fileName=DMDC\\_Website\\_Location\\_Report\\_1806.xlsx](https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/rest/download?fileName=DMDC_Website_Location_Report_1806.xlsx).

<sup>3</sup> NFAP tabulation of the March 2019 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

---

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

Continental Army, which Steuben accomplished through drill and other methods. “They went from a ragtag collection of militias to a professional force,” according to historian Larrie Ferreiro. “[It was] Steuben’s ability to bring this army the kind of training and understanding of tactics that made them able to stand toe to toe with the British.”<sup>4</sup>

In the Civil War, entire regiments of immigrants served, and many of them died. Immigrants also proved important during World War I. “Foreign-born soldiers composed over 18% of the U.S. Army during World War I,” according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. “Almost one in five draftees was born overseas. Many immigrants also volunteered to serve in the military, often to prove their loyalty to the U.S. and demonstrate their patriotism for their new country. Some military units became known for their many immigrant members, such as the 77th Infantry Division which was nicknamed the ‘Melting Pot Division’ because the majority of its members came from New York City.”<sup>5</sup>

During World War II, more than 300,000 immigrants “enlisted or were inducted into the U.S. army between July 1, 1940, and June 30, 1945,” reported the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).<sup>6</sup> The number and proportion of immigrants would have been much higher during World War II but the 1924 Immigration Act established “national origins” quotas that resulted in dramatically lower levels of immigration into the United States. Between 1932 and 1936, the number of immigrants was less than 37,000 each year, compared to 805,228 in 1921, a decline of more than 95%. That affected the number of prime-age adult foreign-born men.

“The relative number of native-born persons and of foreign-born persons present in the armed forces during the war was affected by the age distribution of the two groups,” noted INS. “Among the foreign-born there were relatively few young persons and a large number in the older age groups.”<sup>7</sup>

The pool of foreign-born active-duty personnel was also limited by the internment of Japanese Americans, a portion of whom were immigrants, and rules on enemy aliens used against individuals born in Italy and Germany, which were later relaxed for those two countries. Immigrants from Italy and Germany were the second and third highest country of birth for foreign-born who enlisted or were inducted between July 1, 1940, and June 30, 1945. Canada was first, and Mexico, Poland and the Soviet Union were fourth, fifth and sixth.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Erick Trickey, “The Prussian Nobleman Who Helped Save the American Revolution,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, April 26, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, *The Immigrant Army: Immigrant Service Members in World War I*, last updated July 14, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Immigration and Naturalization Service, U.S. Dep’t of Justice, *Foreign-Born in the United States during World War II, with Special Reference to the Alien*, 6 MONTHLY REVIEW 43, 48 (1948).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

More than 100,000 immigrants became U.S. citizens during their military service in World War II. "Legislation enacted at the beginning of the war facilitated the naturalization of aliens in the armed forces and full use was made of this," according to the Immigration and Naturalization Service. "It was recognized that the alien serving in the armed forces who desired to become a citizen of the United States was entitled to special consideration in his citizenship application. Many noncitizens in the armed forces were deeply appreciative of the opportunity to become citizens of the United States. That they did become citizens in large numbers was an impressive indication of their loyalty to the United States."<sup>9</sup>

Nine immigrants were awarded the Medal of Honor for their actions in World War II. (See later section for the citations of these men.) The Medal of Honor recipients during World War II have surnames that indicate several men were the children of immigrants from Italy, Greece or other countries singled out for the restrictions of the 1924 law. That law used eugenics theory to argue that people from certain countries or regions were genetically inferior and, therefore, their immigration to the United States should be prohibited.

Immigrants, refugees and their children also played important roles off the battlefield during World War II. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, supreme commander of Allied forces in Europe, credits Andrew Higgins, the son of Irish immigrants, as "the man who won the war for us." Higgins designed and built the landing craft used by Allied troops to storm the beaches of Normandy, which, Eisenhower believed, made the Normandy landing possible.<sup>10</sup>

The building of the atomic bomb in the Manhattan Project during World War II would not have happened without a "who's who" list of refugee scientists who came to the United States after fleeing fascism. German-born refugee Isaac Einstein wrote the letter to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt that eventually led to the effort to build the bomb before Nazi Germany. Among the key figures in building the atomic bomb were George Kistiakowsky, a Russian emigre who designed the bomb's plutonium core, and Hungarian-born John von Neumann, who devised a computer language that turned mathematical procedures into a language to instruct the computer.<sup>11</sup>

Author Laura Fermi, whose father Enrico Fermi played a prominent role in developing the atomic bomb, wrote of the foreign-born scientists brought into the Manhattan Project: "The determination to defend America at all costs spurred the newcomers no less than the Americans, and the European-born may have come to this determination somewhat earlier than the native-born, driven by stronger personal emotions. The picture of their country under Nazi power in the event of a German victory was something the Americans could imagine only with difficulty." The refugee scientists had already witnessed the Nazi or fascist takeover of their countries. "It was not only gratitude to

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *D-DAY June 6, 1944: The Climactic Battle of World War II* (New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster), 1994, p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Laura Fermi, *Illustrious Immigrants* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 187-188, 290.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

the country that had offered them asylum or pride in their new citizenship but also the fear of dictators that drove them to work to the limit of their physical and mental endurance."<sup>12</sup>

**IMPORTANT POLICY ISSUES AFFECTING IMMIGRANTS IN THE MILITARY**

**Demographics and Technology:** To reach recruitment goals, the U.S. military requires a steady supply of qualified young people. In 2018, the U.S. Army failed to meet its recruitment goal. In 2019, the Army met its recruitment goal, though the goal was lowered so that it could be met.<sup>13</sup>

Immigrants will be increasingly important to America's population growth. "As the Baby Boom generation heads toward retirement, growth in the nation's working-age population (those ages 25 to 64) will be driven by immigrants and the U.S.-born children of immigrants, at least through 2035," according to Pew Research. "Without immigrants, there would be an estimated 18 million fewer working-age adults in the country in 2035 because of the dearth of U.S.-born children with U.S.-born parents."<sup>14</sup>

A National Foundation for American Policy analysis estimated that current administration policies will lower the annual level of legal immigration by 30% or more, or at least 350,000 a year, from the 2016 U.S. immigration level of 1,183,505. Key factors in determining the future, lower level of legal immigration include implementation of the administration's public charge rule, the travel ban against nationals of almost a dozen countries, and diminished refugee admissions. Fewer immigrants will mean slower growth in the U.S. labor force growth and lower long-term economic growth.<sup>15</sup> Fewer immigrants will also mean fewer available working-age adults from whom to recruit members of the U.S. armed forces. An April 22, 2020, [presidential proclamation](#) suspended the entry of most new immigrants for at least 60 days but could last indefinitely and would further reduce legal immigration levels.

Development of modern weapons requires a strong technical base. At U.S. universities, approximately 80% of full-time graduate students in computer science and electrical engineering are international students.<sup>16</sup> Many of these students would like to obtain H-1B visas and later lawful permanent residence and U.S. citizenship. Many native-born children who enter scientific fields are the children of immigrants. More than 80% of the finalists at the 2016

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 187-188.

<sup>13</sup> Corey Dickstein, "Army Meets Recruiting Goal for 2019 After Revamping How it Attracts Prospective Soldiers," *Stars and Stripes*, September 17, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Cilluffo and D'Vera Cohn, "10 Demographic Trends Shaping the U.S. and the World in 2017," Pew Research Center, April 27, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> *The Impact of Administration Policies on Immigration Levels and Labor Force Growth*, NFAP Policy Brief, National Foundation for American Policy, February 2020.

<sup>16</sup> *The Importance of International Students to American Science and Engineering*, NFAP Policy Brief, National Foundation for American Policy, October 2017.

---

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

Intel Science Talent Search were the children of immigrants.<sup>17</sup> The Trump administration has introduced many policies that make it more difficult for high-skilled foreign nationals and international students to work long-term in the United States and become permanent residents. One consequence of these policies is that the number of permanent residents and international students from India going to Canada has more than doubled since 2016.<sup>18</sup>

**MAVNI and DACA:** Actions by the Trump administration have restricted the potential pool of military recruits who are foreign-born. On September 30, 2016, a [memo](#) from the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness had the effect of freezing new enlistments under the Military Accessions Vital to National Interest (MAVNI) program. Trump administration officials did not resolve any issues with MAVNI but instead, in effect, ended the program. The Administration also has fought in court to prevent naturalization for many individuals who enrolled in MAVNI.<sup>19</sup> MAVNI allowed individuals in a lawful temporary status, such as F-1 student or H-1B professional, with highly sought medical or foreign language skills to enlist and receive citizenship for their service.

The Obama administration allowed individuals in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, young people who were brought to America when under the age of 16, to enlist in the U.S. military through MAVNI. By ending MAVNI, the administration eliminated a potential path to join the military for DACA recipients, who are not lawful permanent residents or U.S. citizens. The administration also ended DACA, although the legality of the termination is the subject of a case before the U.S. Supreme Court.

**Military Naturalizations Made More Difficult:** Under the Trump Administration, it is more difficult for immigrants in the military to become U.S. citizens. Attorney Margaret Stock, a retired Lieutenant Colonel in the Military Police Corps, U.S. Army Reserve, testified before Congress that the biggest obstacle for many immigrants is an October 2017 Department of Defense directive requiring an officer in the rank of O-6 to certify that an individual is serving honorably. “This requirement has caused significant delays and obstacles for service members.” She points out, for example, that in Alaska, in one Army reserve unit, “there is no officer in the rank of O-6, so that an individual seeking to get the form signed must reach out through his or her chain of command to an officer in a different state many thousands of miles away.”<sup>20</sup>

Stock and others note the Department of Homeland Security has not sufficiently trained USCIS adjudicators on military naturalizations and, in January 2018, ended the Basic Training Naturalization Initiative. Stock explains that the initiative allowed military recruits to file naturalization applications when reporting to basic training and then to

---

<sup>17</sup> Stuart Anderson, *The Contribution of the Children of Immigrants to Science in America*, NFAP Policy Brief, National Foundation for American Policy, March 2017.

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.cic.gc.ca/opendata-donneesouvertes/data/IRCC\\_M\\_PRadmiss\\_0002\\_E.xls](http://www.cic.gc.ca/opendata-donneesouvertes/data/IRCC_M_PRadmiss_0002_E.xls).

<sup>19</sup> Statement of Margaret D. Stock, On “The Impact of Current Immigration Policies on Service Members and Veterans, and Their Families” Before the Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship, October 29, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

become U.S. citizens after completing basic training. “The demise of this program has created havoc,” according to Stock.<sup>21</sup>

The statistics show immigrants in the military are experiencing much greater obstacles than in the past when attempting to become U.S. citizens. The denial rate for military naturalizations increased from 7% in FY 2016 to 17% in FY 2019, a 143% increase in the denial rate, according to a National Foundation for American Policy analysis. Moreover, as a result of several policies, between FY 2016 and FY 2019 the number of immigrants in the military who naturalized dropped by 54%, from 8,606 in FY 2016 to 3,987 in FY 2019.<sup>22</sup>

“As a result of these changes in DOD and DHS policy, it is now much easier for a civilian green card holder to naturalize under the ‘regular’ naturalization statutes than for similarly situated green card holders to naturalize through military service,” testified Stock. “Civilian applications are processed more quickly and are less likely to be denied. Civilians do not have to find an O-6 officer to authorize them to file their applications. As a result, immigration lawyers are now advising LPRs [lawful permanent residents] not to join the military because it will make their naturalization process more difficult.”<sup>23</sup>

A [class action lawsuit](#) filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) – *Samma v. Department of Defense* – “challenges the Trump administration’s 2017 policy making it difficult, if not impossible, for non-citizen U.S. military members to obtain expedited citizenship, as Congress has long promised them,” according to the ACLU.<sup>24</sup>

**Afghans and Iraqis Who Helped U.S. Troops:** During combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. forces have relied on Iraqis and Afghans who, at great personal risk, served as interpreters. The U.S. Congress recognized this risk and created special programs to provide lawful permanent residence to these individuals. Stock notes many Iraqis and Afghans have “struggled” to get Special Immigrant Visas, including waiting years for background checks. The number of Special Immigrant Visas issued to Afghans declined by 60% between FY 2017 and FY 2018.<sup>25</sup>

“The Trump administration is refusing to take in thousands of Iraqis who risked their lives helping American forces during the Iraq war, cutting the number of high-priority refugees allowed into the United States this year and drastically slowing background checks they must undergo,” reported the *New York Times* in November 2019. “Only 153 Iraqi refugees whose applications were given high priority were admitted in the fiscal year that ended in September – down from a high of 9,829 in the 2014 fiscal year, according to government data obtained by the *New*

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> NFAP analysis of USCIS data.

<sup>23</sup> Margaret Stock.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.aclu.org/news/immigrants-rights/they-were-willing-to-make-the-ultimate-sacrifice-for-the-u-s-but-trump-wont-let-them-become-americans/>.

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Stock.



---

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

*York Times*. An estimated 110,000 Iraqis are waiting to be approved as refugees based on their wartime assistance. But on Friday, the Trump administration capped the number eligible this year at 4,000.”<sup>26</sup>

The administration’s actions have drawn criticism and legal action. “A Trump administration proposal to fix a visa program that allows war zone interpreters to resettle in the U.S. has been rejected as ‘downright offensive’ by a refugee advocacy group,” reported *Stars and Stripes* in March 2020. “The government plan was submitted last week in federal court in response to a judge’s order to clear the backlog of interpreters waiting for visas, which in some cases goes back years. It proposes new deadlines for Special Immigrant Visa processing and recommends closing out long-stalled applications. But the International Refugee Assistance Program (IRAP), which filed a lawsuit in 2018 over the long waits faced by many SIV applicants, said the plan places the burden on applicants to speed up the process.”<sup>27</sup>

**Policy Recommendations:** The Trump administration should remove barriers to foreign-born individuals who want to serve in the U.S. military. Restoring the MANVI program would allow many foreign nationals, including H-1B visa holders and international students, to offer their special skills to the U.S. Armed Forces. The *Washington Post* reported on foreign-born physicians recruited under MANVI but unable to provide their skills to the U.S. military during the coronavirus pandemic because the Department of Defense has effectively blocked the individuals from serving and using their medical skills to help the U.S. armed forces.<sup>28</sup> DACA recipients should also be afforded the opportunity to join the military. Moreover, abandoning administration policies that will reduce legal immigration by 30% a year (or more) will help with America’s demographic challenges and improve everything from economic growth and the pool of potential military recruits.<sup>29</sup>

The administration can fix the problems plaguing military naturalization by restoring the Basic Training Naturalization initiative and removing bureaucratic obstacles that have reduced the number of military naturalizations, including the requirement that an officer in the rank of O-6 certify an individual is serving honorably. Admitting Afghans and Iraqis who assisted U.S. troops by removing obstacles that have prevented their entry would have significant bipartisan support in Congress.

---

<sup>26</sup> Lara Jakes, “Under Trump, Iraqis Who Helped U.S. in War Are Stalled in Refugee System,” *New York Times*, November 4, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> J.P. Lawrence, “US plan to fix visa delays for interpreters who helped troops deemed ‘offensive,’” *Star and Stripes*, March 12, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Alex Horton, “Immigrant doctors want to help the Army fight the coronavirus. The Pentagon won’t let them,” *Washington Post*, March 26, 2020.

<sup>29</sup> *The Impact of Administration Policies on Immigration Levels and Labor Force Growth*, NFAP Policy Brief.

## MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS: PAST AND PRESENT

Twenty-two percent (759 of 3,508) of Congressional Medal of Honor recipients have been immigrants, according to a National Foundation for American Policy analysis.<sup>30</sup> "Those who have received the Medal of Honor since it was established in 1861 as the nation's highest decoration are as different as the melting pot population of our country," according to a guide to Congressional Medal of Honor recipients.<sup>31</sup> There have been 59 Hispanic-American and 33 Asian-American Medal of Honor recipients, though not all of them were immigrants.<sup>32</sup>

**Table 2**  
**Immigrant Medal of Honor Recipients**

Number of Immigrant Recipients of the Medal of Honor	Percentage
759 (of 3,508) Medal of Honor Recipients	21.6%

Source: National Foundation for American Policy, Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

In December 1861, Senator James W. Grimes of Iowa introduced a bill, later signed by President Abraham Lincoln that established "medals of honor" for the Navy. In July 1862, President Lincoln signed another bill that authorized a medal of honor for the Army. "With this simple and rather obscure act Congress created a unique award that would achieve prominence in American history like few others," writes the Congressional Medal of Honor Society.<sup>33</sup>

To be awarded a Medal of Honor the actions a recipient performs must be beyond the call of duty and risk the individual's life. There must be eyewitness accounts and incontestable evidence the actions took place. While a recommendation to receive the award must be within two years for the Army or Air Force, and within three years for a Navy Medal of Honor, Congress may pass legislation to waive that requirement. In the past few decades, there have been several instances where intervention by Congress corrected an injustice or oversight by waiving the time requirement, including the cases of immigrants Alfred Rascon, Tibor Rubin and Leslie Sabo Jr.

"The Medal of Honor is the highest award for valor in action against an enemy force which can be bestowed upon an individual serving in the Armed Services of the United States."<sup>34</sup> On the pages that follow are descriptions of the actions of many immigrants who risked their lives for their adopted country.

<sup>30</sup> An analysis of data from the Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

<sup>31</sup> *United States of America Congressional Medal of Honor Recipients and Their Official Citations*, Columbia Heights, Minnesota: Highland House II, 1994, p. xi.

<sup>32</sup> Congressional Medal of Honor Society, Frequently Asked Questions.

<sup>33</sup> History, Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

<sup>34</sup> Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

## **FLORENT GROBERG (IMMIGRANT FROM FRANCE)**

Florent “Flo” Groberg immigrated from France to America at the age of 12. In addition to needing to learn English and adjust to life in a new country, two other events influenced his life’s path: the death of his uncle and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center.

Florent Groberg was close to his Uncle Abdou growing up. His uncle volunteered to join the Algerian Army but died at the hands of the terrorist group GIA (Groupe Islamique Armé). More than five years later – on the morning of September 11, 2001 – the memory of his uncle’s death came back to him. Groberg, then a freshman at the University of North Carolina–Wilmington, saw images of the World Trade Center burning. He vowed to enlist in the U.S. Army. “The terrorists had done this to my family in 1996 and now to my adopted country. There was no way that I was going to stand on the sidelines and not be a part of the solution,” he wrote in his book [\*Eight Seconds of Courage: A Soldier’s Story From Immigrant to the Medal of Honor\*](#).<sup>35</sup>

His father convinced him not to quit college. In July 2008, Flo Groberg joined the U.S. Army and went through basic training. After officer training, Groberg qualified and volunteered for Ranger School. He was one of only 69 soldiers in his original Ranger School class of 300 soldiers to graduate.

In February 2012, Groberg returned to Afghanistan for a second tour of duty. It would change his life. His job was “coordinating all air and ground movements” for Colonel James Mingus. His primary objective was “protecting important U.S. and Afghan officials as they traveled to and from meetings.”<sup>36</sup>

On the morning of August 8, 2012, Groberg’s mission was to lead a team providing security for a meeting of senior U.S. and Afghan military leaders in the Afghan city of Asadabad. After the helicopter landed at FOB (Forward Operating Base) Fiaz, Groberg’s “comfort level with the mission changed.” Instead of a 15-man team of U.S. soldiers protecting the perimeter for the “1,000-meter patrol to the governor’s compound,” he had “just two additional U.S. soldiers and an American contractor to engage the enemy “if our patrol came under attack, as well as five Afghan national Army soldiers.”<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Florent Groberg, *Eight Seconds of Courage: A Soldier’s Story From Immigrant to the Medal of Honor*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), pp. 14-15.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97-107.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

Groberg formed the group of 28 Americans and Afghans into the shape of a diamond, with Groberg at the front and those being protected, including U.S. and Afghan army officers, in the middle. After 300 meters, the group came to a bridge that needed to be crossed. Just then two men rode up to the bridge and jumped off their motorcycles.

More troubling, a man stumbled out of a building walking backwards – and parallel to the patrol. “At first glance, I couldn’t figure out if this guy was a threat . . . The only thing I knew for sure is that there was absolutely no way he was getting anywhere close to the boss [Colonel Mingus],” writes Groberg.

Groberg sprinted to the man and screamed, asking the man what he was doing. “With the situation becoming increasingly dire, I placed my hands on his chest to begin driving the young man back,” according to Groberg. “But my hands landed on a bulky package, which I instantly realized was a vest. All of my training and instincts led me to reach the logical conclusion: a bomb was attached to this young man’s body. Upon this realization, time truly stood still as my heart and my mind reached a silent accord. I was going to die.”

The terrorist’s thumb was on a “dead man’s trigger,” meaning the bomb would explode once the man released his thumb from the button. “In my final moments, using every ounce of strength that I had, I grabbed hold of the suicide bomber’s vest, and while chest to chest, started pushing the suspect away from the formation. No matter what, I would not stop until he was away from my fellow soldiers and our Afghan counterparts. When I realized that the suicide bomber still had not detonated his vest as I continued pushing, I decided to grab him, turn him around, and try to throw him as far as I could. . . . After I made my final push and let go, Sergeant Mahoney, who had boldly left the formation and run in my direction, reached the suicide bomber and pushed him downward. In slow-motion I saw the terrorist land at my feet. This time, death had almost certainly arrived.”

“Everything went black as a suicide bomber’s vest detonated, causing a massive cloud of fire and dust,” according to Groberg. “But as the thundering explosion shook the entire city, I heard and felt nothing. My body flew into the air.”

When Groberg woke up, he found himself on the bridge “probably 15 or 20 meters away from where the bomb had exploded.” He did not know where he was but his ears were ringing. He saw a large bone (the fibula) sticking out of his left leg and half his calf was gone.<sup>38</sup>

Over the next three years, Flo Groberg endured at least 33 surgeries and hundreds of hours of physical therapy to regain the use of his leg.

---

<sup>38</sup> Groberg, pp. 102-107.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

On November 12, 2015, in a White House ceremony, President Barack Obama awarded Florent Goldberg the nation's highest military honor, the Congressional Medal of Honor. During the ceremony, the president explained how Groberg's actions saved the lives of 10 or more members of the U.S. Armed Forces, including senior leaders, as well the lives of Afghan allies. "By pushing the bomber away from the formation, the explosion occurred farther from our forces, and on the ground instead of in the open air," said President Obama. "And while Flo didn't know it at the time, that explosion also caused a second, unseen bomb to detonate before it was in place. Had both bombs gone off as planned, who knows how many could have been killed."

Florent Groberg came to the United States as a boy. "Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, I was no longer a guy from France," writes Groberg. "From that day forward, I was an American."<sup>39</sup>

**TIBOR RUBIN (IMMIGRANT FROM HUNGARY)**

When Tibor Rubin was a boy growing up in Hungary, he never imagined he would survive a Nazi concentration camp and volunteer to be in the U.S. Army.

In March 1944, with word spreading of the German Gestapo arresting Jews, at the age of 13, Tibor Rubin was sent by his parents with 7 Polish Jews to escape to Switzerland. They didn't make it. By pilfering food whenever possible, Rubin barely survived a year in the Mauthausen concentration camp, where more than 119,000 people died before General George Patton and the U.S. Army's 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Division liberated Mauthausen and its associated camps in May 1945.

In 1948, after waiting three years, Tibor Rubin was admitted as a refugee to America. After working in a slaughterhouse and a grocery in New York City, Rubin attempted to join the U.S. Army. "You aren't a citizen. You can't read English. You hardly speak it," said a friend. But Rubin had a reply: "Ever since the Army saved me from the Nazis, I promised myself to pay them back."<sup>40</sup>

After being accepted, (following a number of unsuccessful attempts) he ended up in advanced infantry training in Japan and met a man assigned to his company, Master Sergeant Arthur Peyton, who hated Jews, non-whites and others. He would change Tibor Rubin's life.

When the Korean War began in June 1950, Rubin had no way to avoid Master Sergeant Peyton. "From the first day they made camp, Peyton continually 'volunteered' him for one dangerous detail after another," writes Daniel Cohen,

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel M. Cohen, *Single-Handed*, (New York: Penguin Group, 2015), pp. 98-99.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

author of *Single-Handed*. “The master sergeant repeatedly called on Tibor to scout the enemy, check the rear line for infiltrators, patrol forward lines and stand guard over the company vehicles. Tibor soon grew accustomed to the sound of Peyton hollering, ‘Get me that f-ing Jew!’”<sup>41</sup>

On July 23, 1950, Peyton ordered Rubin to guard a large cache of ammunition by himself while the rest of the company pulled out. Peyton ignored the objection from another sergeant.

Rubin prepared a one-man defense. Throughout the night, as North Korean soldiers attempted to overrun his position, Rubin fired machine guns, launched mortar shells and hurled hand grenades. “When daylight fully bloomed, Tibor was still launching grenades and bullets as fast as his rubbery arms allowed,” writes Cohen.<sup>42</sup>

In the full light of morning, Tibor Rubin made his way down the road on foot to his company. The commander, Peyton and others followed Rubin back to the position. “The far side of the hill was carpeted with dead and dying North Koreans,” writes Cohen. “Many were sprawled among the shredded remains of others, as if they had tripped and become stuck in their own ravaged flesh. . . . A pyramid of bodies was plowed just below an overhang, only 10 or 15 feet beneath the forward line of foxholes. . . . Tibor began to cry. He hadn’t pictured what the battlefield would look like, that death could appear in so many horrid forms.”<sup>43</sup>

According to Cohen, “The CO [company commander] instructed the staff sergeant to draw up the papers for a Medal of Honor and deliver them for his signature. After a review the commander would send the documents through the proper channels.” However, that was not the end of the story. The company commander died in action three days later and “Peyton never completed the paperwork and carried on like Tibor’s bravery on the hill had never happened. Later, when Briere asked him about the status of Rubin’s medal, he [Peyton] replied, ‘Not on my watch.’”<sup>44</sup>

A short time later, once more ordered on a one-man scouting assignment by Peyton, Rubin accepted the surrender of hundreds of North Korean troops. He was again recommended for the Medal of Honor – and again Sgt. Peyton refused to send in the recommendation.

Weeks later, Rubin manned a machine gun to keep Chinese soldiers at bay after another U.S. soldier had perished in battle. However, during a retreat, he and his fellow soldiers were captured.

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 122-23.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 133-40.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 142-43.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 143-46.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

Rubin spent more than two years in a Chinese prisoner of war camp and, using his experience in a Nazi concentration camp, he conducted almost nightly raids in fields and grain storage facilities to bring back food to share with fellow prisoners.<sup>45</sup>

Rubin's heroic actions were not recognized with a Medal of Honor for more than 55 years. It took the efforts of men who survived combat and the prisoner of war camp, as well as the Jewish War Veterans of the USA to convince Congress and the Army to right the wrong that had deprived Rubin of the honor. Fortunately, he lived to see the day and President George W. Bush awarded Rubin the Medal of Honor on September 26, 2005.

Rubin, a refugee from Hungary who survived the Holocaust and volunteered for U.S. military service, died at the age of 86, on December 5, 2015.

Many American soldiers returned from the Korean War and lived fruitful lives because of Tibor Rubin. The citation for the Medal of Honor closes with these words: "His brave, selfless efforts were directly attributed to saving the lives of as many as 40 of his fellow prisoners. Corporal Rubin's gallant actions in close contact with the enemy and unyielding courage and bravery while a prisoner of war are in the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Army."<sup>46</sup>

**ALFRED RASCON (IMMIGRANT FROM MEXICO)**

Alfred Rascon immigrated to America as a child. He grew up reading *Sergeant Rock* comic books and playing with plastic soldiers. After graduating high school, he joined the Army in August 1963, at the age of 17. He was not yet an American citizen.

Following basic training and several weeks of additional instruction, Rascon became a medic. After he completed jump school, he shipped off to Okinawa. By May 1965, he was in Vietnam.

March 16, 1966, changed the lives of Alfred Rascon and the members of his platoon. The events were part of Operation Silver City and took place in South Vietnam.

In Congressional testimony, Elmer R. Compton, a sergeant in Alfred Rascon's platoon, described what happened on that day:

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>46</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Tibor Rubin.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

On March 16, 1966, Al Rascon was with the Recon Platoon on a search and destroy mission known as Operation Silver City. My team had engaged a well-armed enemy force and the enemy had superiority and immediately pinned our fire team down. Through the intense fire of automatic fire and grenades, Rascon made his way to the point where my squad was pinned down and couldn't move in any direction.

Although wounded himself, Rascon continued to move forward to work his way to my position, attending to my wounds as well. After reaching my position, I could see that he was in great pain. As he began to patch me up, as I was placing M16 fire in the direction of the enemy, two or three hand grenades were thrown in our direction, the direction of Rascon and myself, landing no more than a few feet away. Without hesitation, Rascon jumped on me, taking me to the ground and covering me with his body. He received numerous wounds from that encounter, also. I truly do believe his actions that day saved my life. What more can a person do for God, country and his fellow man?

In closing, I think of the Military Code of Conduct, the first code, which goes I am an American fighting man. I serve in the forces which guard our country and our way of life, and I am prepared to give my life in its defense. The immigrants that I had the privilege to know and serve with upheld this code.

When I look at my wife, my son and my daughter, I cannot keep from thinking of one particular immigrant by the name of Al Rascon, and the contribution he made to me and my family on March 16, 1966. The heroic and gallant action of Al Rascon on that day, I believe, saved my life, as well as other members of my team.<sup>47</sup>

The wounds Alfred Rascon received that day were life-threatening. As he moved back and forth to save members of his platoon, Rascon became covered with blood from a bullet wound to his hip. After he threw himself down to protect a fellow soldier a grenade ripped off his scalp and damaged his face. "Your face was literally bleeding," a member of the platoon told him.

The Medal of Honor citation for Rascon states:

After the enemy broke contact, he disregarded aid for himself, instead treating the wounded and directing their evacuation. Only after being placed on the evacuation helicopter did he allow aid to be given to him. Specialist Rascon's extraordinary valor in the face of deadly enemy fire, his heroism in rescuing the wounded, and his gallantry by repeatedly risking his own life for his fellow soldiers are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.<sup>48</sup>

When Alfred Rascon was evacuated to the helicopter, a chaplain gave him last rites.

More than 30 years after Rascon's actions on that day, he was finally awarded the Medal of Honor. "I realize that when you're brought into this world, you don't have a choice. But I tell people I'm an immigrant by birth and an American by choice," said Rascon. "I'm very proud of that."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Testimony of Elmer R. Compton, "Examining Immigrant Americans' Contribution to the Armed Forces and National Defense," Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration of Senate Judiciary Committee, May 26, 1999.

<sup>48</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Alfred Rascon.

<sup>49</sup> Stuart Anderson, "The Inspiring Story of Immigrant Medal of Honor Recipient Alfred Rascon," *Forbes*, May 8, 2019.



*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

When asked about his courageous actions on the battlefield fighting for America and his fellow soldiers even though he had yet to become a citizen, Rascon said, "I was always an American in my heart."<sup>50</sup>

**LESLIE SABO JR. (IMMIGRANT FROM AUSTRIA)**

In 1970, in a strategic decision approved by President Richard Nixon, the United States expanded the Vietnam War into Cambodia. The decision was influenced by the state of the war and the North Vietnamese regularly attacking American and South Vietnamese troops and retreating into the safety of Laos and Cambodia.

Leslie Sabo Jr. was born in Austria to a Hungarian family. In 1950, the family immigrated to America when Sabo was younger than two years old. After completing high school and spending a short time at Youngstown State in Ohio, he was drafted.

Sabo's Bravo Company landed in Cambodia on May 5, 1970, and engaged in firefights the first three days. But those were a preliminary to the events of Mother's Day.

The mission on May 10, 1970, was to attack North Vietnamese locations and destroy supplies. Sabo and his friend George Koziol were part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon. After 3 pm, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Platoon and Bravo Company's 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon moved from the jungle into a clearing. As many as 400 to 500 North Vietnamese troops attacked the American soldiers. The North Vietnamese were in defensive positions, with tree covering. It became known as the Mother's Day Ambush.<sup>51</sup>

The soldiers of Bravo Company were surrounded and moved for cover. "As Sabo headed for the jungle's relative safety, he led a counterattack against an enemy element that was attempting to close the pocket and completely surround the Americans," writes Poole. "While Sabo would perform more spectacular acts of valor that afternoon, none would be more vital to the . . . defense of their position. . . . 'If it hadn't been for him holding his side of the perimeter almost single-handedly so I could reinforce his position, we would have been overrun,' [3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon leader Lieutenant Teb] Stocks said."<sup>52</sup>

Sabo risked his own life to save a soldier on the battlefield. "What I recall was that Les ran out in the direction of the wounded soldier just as a grenade was thrown in that area and he dove on the guy on the ground when the

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Eric Poole, *Company of Heroes: A Forgotten Medal of Honor and Bravo Company's War in Vietnam*, (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2015), pp. 153-156.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 156. Teb Stocks described Sabo's actions in a CBS interview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Nd6m-D1o-M>.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

grenade exploded,” according to Koziol. “I think Les got hit with the shrapnel on the back and the wounded soldier crawled to the tree-line.”

Poole notes that after saving the soldier, Sabo attacked. “He rushed the North Vietnamese trench with a grenade assault of his own and killed both enemy soldiers. By this time, late in the afternoon, several of Sabo’s fellow Second Platoon defenders were already injured or dead, and the beleaguered Bravo Company soldiers were running low on lead to throw at the North Vietnamese. Sabo, already injured from the earlier hand grenade attack, again exposed himself so he could strip ammunition magazines for Americans who’d been killed earlier.”<sup>53</sup>

The enemy fired at helicopters evacuating injured American soldiers. “Then Sabo did something extraordinary. Again,” writes Poole. “He stepped out from behind a small tree that for hours had been his only cover, and squeezed the trigger on his M-16, which he had set to full automatic. . . . Perhaps he made a calculation – with a 20-round magazine it would be only a few seconds before his weapon ran dry. Perhaps he knew it would be enough. Or perhaps Sabo just acted instinctively to protect his comrades. Whatever the case, Sabo’s attack stopped the enemy machine guns and allowed 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon to eliminate the single enemy soldier in the landing zone. It also gave the helicopter time to carry his injured friend from the battlefield.”<sup>54</sup>

“He got hit two or three times and still kept on going,” according to Mike “Tex” Bowman. “Sabo was able to clear the landing zone, but the 22-year-old soldier paid for that real estate in his own blood,” writes Poole. “For hours, after almost single-handedly preventing the North Vietnamese from wiping out dozens of American soldiers, Sabo was vulnerable while he reloaded. And when the enemy soldiers were able to poke their heads – and their weapons – back into the open, they took advantage of that opportunity. After Sabo stopped shooting, the enemy fired on him, in full view of Koziol, then en route to a field hospital. ‘I saw him when he dropped his rifle, dropped to his knees and fell face first into the dust.’”<sup>55</sup>

The next day, after the battlefield was cleared, they found Sabo’s body. Sabo and the others were placed in bags and loaded on a helicopter. “As [Rick] Brown and [Mike ‘Tex’] Bowman lifted the man whose sacrifice saved so many lives, Sabo’s body broke in half – in death, his body was beyond wounded, it was irretrievably damaged.”

More than 40 years passed before the Sabo was awarded the Medal of Honor, prompted by the work of Alton Mabb Jr., a columnist for *Screaming Eagle* magazine, Rep. Corrine Brown and the surviving members of the Mother’s Day Ambush.

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 169-70.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

On May 16, 2012, President Barack Obama awarded Leslie Sabo Jr. the Medal of Honor posthumously in a ceremony attended by his widow Rose Sabo Brown and surviving members of Bravo Company who fought with Sabo. Obama said, "Today is a solemn reminder that when an American does not come home from war, it is our military families and veterans who bear those sacrifices for a lifetime."

**IMMIGRANT MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS IN WWII, KOREA AND VIETNAM**

Below are other immigrant Medal of Honor recipients who exhibited great courage and sacrificed for their adopted country.

**WORLD WAR II****PEDRO CANO (IMMIGRANT FROM MEXICO)**

Pedro Cano, a private in the U.S. Army, born in La Morita, Mexico, received the Medal of Honor on March 18, 2014, for his heroic actions during World War II.

"Private Pedro Cano distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving with Company C, 8th Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division during combat operations against an armed enemy in Schevenhutte, Germany on December 2 and 3, 1944," reads his citation. "Armed with a rocket launcher, Private Cano crawled through a densely mined area under heavy enemy fire and successfully reached a point within ten yards of the nearest emplacement. He quickly fired a rocket into the position, killing the two gunners and five supporting riflemen. Without hesitating, he fired into a second position, killing two more gunners, and proceeded to assault the position with hand grenades, killing several others and dispersing the rest. Then, when an adjacent company encountered heavy fire, Private Cano crossed his company front, crept to within fifteen yards of the nearest enemy emplacement and killed the two machine gunners with a rocket. With another round he killed two more gunners and destroyed a second gun.

"On the following day, his company renewed the attack and again encountered heavy machine gun fire. Private Cano, armed with his rocket launcher, again moved across fire-swept terrain and destroyed three enemy machine guns in succession, killing the six gunners. Private Cano's extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army."<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Pedro Cano.

## **ROGER CRAIG (IMMIGRANT FROM SCOTLAND)**

Robert Craig, born in Scotland, received the Medal of Honor on May 26, 1944, for his “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life, above and beyond the call of duty,” in Sicily on July 11, 1943.

“2d Lt. Craig voluntarily undertook the perilous task of locating and destroying a hidden enemy machine gun which had halted the advance of his company,” his citation notes. “Attempts by 3 other officers to locate the weapon had resulted in failure, with each officer receiving wounds. 2d Lt. Craig located the gun and snaked his way to a point within 35 yards of the hostile position before being discovered.

“Charging headlong into the furious automatic fire, he reached the gun, stood over it, and killed the 3 crew members with his carbine. With this obstacle removed, his company continued its advance. Shortly thereafter while advancing down the forward slope of a ridge, 2d Lt. Craig and his platoon, in a position devoid of cover and concealment, encountered the fire of approximately 100 enemy soldiers. Electing to sacrifice himself so that his platoon might carry on the battle, he ordered his men to withdraw to the cover of the crest while he drew the enemy fire to himself.

“With no hope of survival, he charged toward the enemy until he was within 25 yards of them. Assuming a kneeling position, he killed 5 and wounded 3 enemy soldiers. While the hostile force concentrated fire on him, his platoon reached the cover of the crest. 2d Lt. Craig was killed by enemy fire, but his intrepid action so inspired his men that they drove the enemy from the area, inflicting heavy casualties on the hostile force.”<sup>57</sup>

## **MARCARIO GARCIA (IMMIGRANT FROM MEXICO)**

Marcario Garcia, born in Villa de Castano, Mexico, received the Medal of Honor on September 1, 1945, for his actions while a squad leader in Germany on November 27, 1944.

“Attacking prepared positions on a wooded hill, which could be approached only through meager cover, his company was pinned down by intense machine gun fire and subjected to a concentrated artillery and mortar barrage,” reads the citation. “Although painfully wounded, he refused to be evacuated and on his own initiative crawled forward alone until he reached a position near an enemy emplacement. Hurling grenades, he boldly assaulted the position, destroyed the gun, and with his rifle killed 3 of the enemy who attempted to escape.

---

<sup>57</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Robert Craig.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

“When he rejoined his company, a second machine gun opened fire and again the intrepid soldier went forward, utterly disregarding his own safety. He stormed the position and destroyed the gun, killed 3 more Germans, and captured 4 prisoners.

“He fought on with his unit until the objective was taken and only then did he permit himself to be removed for medical care. S/Sgt. (then private) Garcia's conspicuous heroism, his inspiring, courageous conduct, and his complete disregard for his personal safety wiped out 2 enemy emplacements and enabled his company to advance and secure its objective.”<sup>58</sup>

**ERIC G. GIBSON (IMMIGRANT FROM SWEDEN)**

Eric G. Gibson, born in Nysund, Sweden, received the Medal of Honor for “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty” displayed on January 28, 1944, in Italy. He performed the actions when he was a company cook. He died in battle.

“Tech. 5th Grade Gibson, company cook, led a squad of replacements through their initial baptism of fire,” according to the citation. “Placing himself 50 yards in front of his new men, Gibson advanced down the wide stream ditch known as the Fossa Femminamorta, keeping pace with the advance of his company. An enemy soldier allowed Tech. 5th Grade Gibson to come within 20 yards of his concealed position and then opened fire on him with a machine pistol. Despite the stream of automatic fire which barely missed him, Gibson charged the position, firing his submachine gun every few steps.

“Reaching the position, Gibson fired pointblank at his opponent, killing him. An artillery concentration fell in and around the ditch; the concussion from one shell knocked him flat. As he got to his feet Gibson was fired on by two soldiers armed with a machine pistol and a rifle from a position only 75 yards distant. Gibson immediately raced toward the foe. Halfway to the position a machine gun opened fire on him. Bullets came within inches of his body, yet Gibson never paused in his forward movement. He killed one and captured the other soldier.

“Shortly after, when he was fired upon by a heavy machine gun 200 yards down the ditch, Gibson crawled back to his squad and ordered it to lay down a base of fire while he flanked the emplacement. Despite all warning, Gibson crawled 125 yards through an artillery concentration and the cross fire of 2 machine guns which showered dirt over his body, threw 2 hand grenades into the emplacement and charged it with his submachine gun, killing 2 of the enemy and capturing a third. Before leading his men around a bend in the stream ditch, Gibson went forward alone to reconnoiter. Hearing an exchange of machine pistol and submachine gun fire, Gibson's squad went forward to

---

<sup>58</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Marcario Garcia.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

find that its leader had run 35 yards toward an outpost, killed the machine pistol man, and had himself been killed while firing at the Germans.”<sup>59</sup>

**ISADORE S. JACHMAN (IMMIGRANT FROM GERMANY)**

An immigrant born in Berlin, Isadore S. Jachman died fighting for America in World War II in Flamierge, Belgium, on January 4, 1945, less than 100 miles from the German border.

“When his company was pinned down by enemy artillery, mortar, and small arms fire, 2 hostile tanks attacked the unit, inflicting heavy casualties,” according to his citation. “S/Sgt. Jachman, seeing the desperate plight of his comrades, left his place of cover and with total disregard for his own safety dashed across open ground through a hail of fire and seizing a bazooka from a fallen comrade advanced on the tanks, which concentrated their fire on him.

“Firing the weapon alone, he damaged one and forced both to retire. S/Sgt. Jachman's heroic action, in which he suffered fatal wounds, disrupted the entire enemy attack, reflecting the highest credit upon himself and the parachute infantry.”<sup>60</sup>

**ARCHIBALD MATHIES (IMMIGRANT FROM SCOTLAND)**

Archibald Mathies, born in Scotland, received the Medal of Honor for “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at risk of life above and beyond the call of duty in action against the enemy in connection with a bombing mission over enemy-occupied Europe” on February 20, 1944.

“Sgt. Mathies was serving as engineer and ball turret gunner was attacked by a squadron of enemy fighters with the result that the copilot was killed outright, the pilot wounded and rendered unconscious, the radio operator wounded and the plane severely damaged,” reads the Medal of Honor citation. “Nevertheless, Sgt. Mathies and other members of the crew managed to right the plane and fly it back to their home station, where they contacted the control tower and reported the situation.

“Sgt. Mathies and the navigator volunteered to attempt to land the plane. Other members of the crew were ordered to jump, leaving Sgt. Mathies and the navigator aboard. After observing the distressed aircraft from another plane, Sgt. Mathies' commanding officer decided the damaged plane could not be landed by the inexperienced crew and ordered them to abandon it and parachute to safety.

---

<sup>59</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Eric G. Gibson.

<sup>60</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Isadore S. Jachman.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

“Demonstrating unsurpassed courage and heroism, Sgt. Mathies and the navigator replied that the pilot was still alive but could not be moved and they would not desert him. They were then told to attempt a landing. After two unsuccessful efforts, the plane crashed into an open field in a third attempt to land. Sgt. Mathies, the navigator, and the wounded pilot were killed.”<sup>61</sup>

**NICHOLAS MINUE (IMMIGRANT FROM POLAND)**

Nicholas Minue, born in Poland, received the Medal of Honor for his actions in Tunisia on April 28, 1943. He died in battle.

“When the advance of the assault elements of Company A was held up by flanking fire from an enemy machine gun nest, Pvt. Minue voluntarily, alone, and unhesitatingly, with complete disregard of his own welfare, charged the enemy entrenched position with fixed bayonet,” his citation reads. “Pvt. Minue assaulted the enemy under a withering machine gun and rifle fire, killing approximately 10 enemy machine-gunners and riflemen. After completely destroying this position, Pvt. Minue continued forward, routing enemy riflemen from dugout positions until he was fatally wounded. The courage, fearlessness and aggressiveness displayed by Pvt. Minue in the face of inevitable death was unquestionably the factor that gave his company the offensive spirit that was necessary for advancing and driving the enemy from the entire sector.”<sup>62</sup>

**DOUGLAS MUNRO (IMMIGRANT FROM CANADA)**

Douglas Munro, born in Vancouver, British Columbia, “gallantly gave his life for his country” during a battle at Guadalcanal. He is the only member of the Coast Guard to receive the Medal of Honor.

“[A]s Petty Officer in Charge of a group of 24 Higgins boats, engaged in the evacuation of a battalion of marines trapped by enemy Japanese forces at Point Cruz Guadalcanal, on 27 September 27, 1942,” according to his Medal of Honor citation. “After making preliminary plans for the evacuation of nearly 500 beleaguered marines, Munro, under constant strafing by enemy machine guns on the island, and at great risk of his life, daringly led 5 of his small craft toward the shore. As he closed the beach, he signaled the others to land, and then in order to draw the enemy's fire and protect the heavily loaded boats, he valiantly placed his craft with its 2 small guns as a shield between the beachhead and the Japanese.

---

<sup>61</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Archibald Mathies.

<sup>62</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Nicholas Minue.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

“When the perilous task of evacuation was nearly completed, Munro was instantly killed by enemy fire, but his crew, 2 of whom were wounded, carried on until the last boat had loaded and cleared the beach. By his outstanding leadership, expert planning, and dauntless devotion to duty, he and his courageous comrades undoubtedly saved the lives of many who otherwise would have perished. He gallantly gave his life for his country.”<sup>63</sup>

**PETER TOMICH (IMMIGRANT FROM AUSTRIA)**

Peter Tomich, born in Austria, received the Medal of Honor for his actions during the attack on Pearl Harbor.

“For distinguished conduct in the line of his profession, and extraordinary courage and disregard of his own safety, during the attack on the Fleet in Pearl Harbor by the Japanese forces on 7 December 1941,” reads the citation. “Although realizing that the ship was capsizing, as a result of enemy bombing and torpedoing, Tomich remained at his post in the engineering plant of the U.S.S. Utah, until he saw that all boilers were secured and all fireroom personnel had left their stations, and by so doing lost his own life.”<sup>64</sup>

**KOREAN CONFLICT****JOHN KELVIN KOELSCH (IMMIGRANT FROM ENGLAND)**

John Kelvin Koelsch, born in London, England, received the Medal of Honor for his actions as a helicopter pilot attempting to rescue U.S. soldiers during the Korean War.

“Although darkness was rapidly approaching when information was received that a marine aviator had been shot down and was trapped by the enemy in mountainous terrain deep in hostile territory, Lt. (J.G.) Koelsch voluntarily flew a helicopter to the reported position of the downed airman in an attempt to effect a rescue,” according to his Medal of Honor citation. “With an almost solid overcast concealing everything below the mountain peaks, he descended in his unarmed and vulnerable aircraft without the accompanying fighter escort to an extremely low altitude beneath the cloud level and began a systematic search.

“Despite the increasingly intense enemy fire, which struck his helicopter on one occasion, he persisted in his mission until he succeeded in locating the downed pilot, who was suffering from serious burns on the arms and legs. While the victim was being hoisted into the aircraft, it was struck again by an accurate burst of hostile fire and crashed on the side of the mountain.

---

<sup>63</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Douglas Munro.

<sup>64</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Peter Tomich.



*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

“Quickly extricating his crewmen and the aviator from the wreckage, Lt. (J.G.) Koelsch led them from the vicinity in an effort to escape from hostile troops, evading the enemy forces for 9 days and rendering such medical attention as possible to his severely burned companion until all were captured.

“Up to the time of his death while still a captive of the enemy, Lt. (J.G.) Koelsch steadfastly refused to aid his captors in any manner and served to inspire his fellow prisoners by his fortitude and consideration for others. His great personal valor and heroic spirit of self-sacrifice throughout sustain and enhance the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.”<sup>65</sup>

**VIETNAM WAR****LEWIS ALBANESE (IMMIGRANT FROM ITALY)**

Lewis Albanese, born in Venice, Italy, received the Medal of Honor “for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action at the risk of his life and beyond the call of duty” during combat operations in the Republic of Vietnam on December 1, 1966. He died during the battle.

“Pfc. Albanese's platoon, while advancing through densely covered terrain to establish a blocking position, received intense automatic weapons fire from close range,” according to his Medal of Honor citation. “As other members maneuvered to assault the enemy position, Pfc. Albanese was ordered to provide security for the left flank of the platoon. Suddenly, the left flank received fire from enemy located in a well-concealed ditch. Realizing the imminent danger to his comrades from this fire, Pfc. Albanese fixed his bayonet and moved aggressively into the ditch. His action silenced the sniper fire, enabling the platoon to resume movement toward the main enemy position.

“As the platoon continued to advance, the sound of heavy firing emanated from the left flank from a pitched battle that ensued in the ditch which Pfc. Albanese had entered. The ditch was actually a well-organized complex of enemy defenses designed to bring devastating flanking fire on the forces attacking the main position. Pfc. Albanese, disregarding the danger to himself, advanced 100 meters along the trench and killed 6 of the snipers, who were armed with automatic weapons. Having exhausted his ammunition, Pfc. Albanese was mortally wounded when he engaged and killed 2 more enemy soldiers in fierce hand-to-hand combat.

“His unparalleled actions saved the lives of many members of his platoon who otherwise would have fallen to the sniper fire from the ditch, and enabled his platoon to successfully advance against an enemy force of overwhelming numerical superiority. Pfc. Albanese's extraordinary heroism and supreme dedication to his comrades were

---

<sup>65</sup> Medal of Honor citation for John Kelvin Koelsch.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

commensurate with the finest traditions of the military service and remain a tribute to himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army.”<sup>66</sup>

**JON CAVAIANI (IMMIGRANT FROM ENGLAND)**

Jon Cavaiani, born in Royston, England, received the Medal of Honor for his actions in the Republic of Vietnam on June 4 and 5, 1971, while leading a platoon tasked with protecting a radio relay site in enemy territory.

“On the morning of June 4, 1971, the entire camp came under an intense barrage of enemy small arms, automatic weapons, rocket-propelled grenade and mortar fire from a superior size enemy force,” notes the citation. “S/Sgt. Cavaiani acted with complete disregard for his personal safety as he repeatedly exposed himself to heavy enemy fire in order to move about the camp's perimeter directing the platoon's fire and rallying the platoon in a desperate fight for survival. S/Sgt. Cavaiani also returned heavy suppressive fire upon the assaulting enemy force during this period with a variety of weapons.

“When the entire platoon was to be evacuated, S/Sgt. Cavaiani unhesitatingly volunteered to remain on the ground and direct the helicopters into the landing zone. S/Sgt. Cavaiani was able to direct the first 3 helicopters in evacuating a major portion of the platoon. Due to intense increase in enemy fire, S/Sgt. Cavaiani was forced to remain at the camp overnight where he calmly directed the remaining platoon members in strengthening their defenses.

“On the morning of June 5, a heavy ground fog restricted visibility. The superior size enemy force launched a major ground attack in an attempt to completely annihilate the remaining small force. The enemy force advanced in two ranks, first firing a heavy volume of small arms automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenade fire while the second rank continuously threw a steady barrage of hand grenades at the beleaguered force. S/Sgt. Cavaiani returned a heavy barrage of small arms and hand grenade fire on the assaulting enemy force but was unable to slow them down. He ordered the remaining platoon members to attempt to escape while he provided them with cover fire.

“With one last courageous exertion, S/Sgt. Cavaiani recovered a machine gun, stood up, completely exposing himself to the heavy enemy fire directed at him, and began firing the machine gun in a sweeping motion along the two ranks of advancing enemy soldiers. Through S/Sgt. Cavaiani's valiant efforts with complete disregard for his safety, the majority of the remaining platoon members were able to escape. While inflicting severe losses on the advancing enemy force, S/Sgt. Cavaiani was wounded numerous times. S/Sgt. Cavaiani's conspicuous gallantry,

---

<sup>66</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Lewis Albanese.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

extraordinary heroism and intrepidity at the risk of his life, above and beyond the call of duty, were in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit upon himself and the U.S. Army.”<sup>67</sup>

**JESUS S. DURAN (IMMIGRANT FROM MEXICO)**

Sgt. Jesus S. Duran, born in Juarez, Mexico, received the Medal of Honor on March 18, 2014, for his actions during the Vietnam War.

“Specialist Four Jesus S. Duran distinguished himself by acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty while serving as an acting M-60 machine-gunner in Company E, 2d Battalion, 5th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) during combat operations . . . on April 10, 1969,” according to his citation. “That afternoon, the reconnaissance platoon was moving into an elaborate enemy bunker complex when the lead elements began taking concentrated ambush fire from every side. The command post was in imminent danger of being overrun. With an M-60 machine gun blazing from his hip, Specialist Four Duran rushed forward and assumed a defensive position near the command post.

“As hostile forces stormed forward, Specialist Four Duran stood tall in a cloud of dust raised by the impacting rounds and bursting grenades directed towards him and thwarted the enemy with devastating streams of machine gun fire. Learning that two seriously wounded troopers lay helplessly pinned down under harassing fire, Specialist Four Duran assaulted the suppressive enemy positions, firing deadly bursts on the run. Mounting a log, he fired directly into the enemy’s foxholes, eliminating four and cutting down several others as they fled. Specialist Four Duran then continued to pour effective fire on the disorganized and fleeing enemy.

“Specialist Four Duran’s extraordinary heroism and selflessness above and beyond the call of duty are in keeping with the highest traditions of military service and reflect great credit upon himself, his unit and the United States Army.”<sup>68</sup>

**JOSE FRANCISCO JIMENEZ (IMMIGRANT FROM MEXICO)**

Jose Francisco Jimenez, born in Mexico City, Mexico, for his actions on August 28, 1969 during the Vietnam War. He died in battle.

“L/Cpl. Jimenez’ unit came under heavy attack by North Vietnamese soldiers concealed in well camouflaged emplacements,” reads his Medal of Honor citation. “L/Cpl. Jimenez reacted by seizing the initiative and plunging

---

<sup>67</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Jon Cavaiani.

<sup>68</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Jesus S. Duran.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

forward toward the enemy positions. He personally destroyed several enemy personnel and silenced an antiaircraft weapon.

“Shouting encouragement to his companions, L/Cpl. Jimenez continued his aggressive forward movement. He slowly maneuvered to within 10 feet of hostile soldiers who were firing automatic weapons from a trench and, in the face of vicious enemy fire, destroyed the position. Although he was by now the target of concentrated fire from hostile gunners intent upon halting his assault, L/Cpl. Jimenez continued to press forward. As he moved to attack another enemy soldier, he was mortally wounded. L/Cpl. Jimenez' indomitable courage, aggressive fighting spirit and unfaltering devotion to duty upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the U.S. Naval Service.”<sup>69</sup>

**PETER C. LEMON (IMMIGRANT FROM CANADA)**

Peter C. Lemon, born in Toronto, Canada, received the Medal of Honor for his actions during the Vietnam War on April 1, 1970.

“Sgt. Lemon (then Sp4c.), Company E, distinguished himself while serving as an assistant machine gunner during the defense of Fire Support Base Illingworth,” according to his citation. “When the base came under heavy enemy attack, Sgt. Lemon engaged a numerically superior enemy with machine gun and rifle fire from his defensive position until both weapons malfunctioned. He then used hand grenades to fend off the intensified enemy attack launched in his direction.

“After eliminating all but one of the enemy soldiers in the immediate vicinity, he pursued and disposed of the remaining soldier in hand-to-hand combat. Despite fragment wounds from an exploding grenade, Sgt. Lemon regained his position, carried a more seriously wounded comrade to an aid station, and, as he returned, was wounded a second time by enemy fire.

“Disregarding his personal injuries, he moved to his position through a hail of small arms and grenade fire. Sgt. Lemon immediately realized that the defensive sector was in danger of being overrun by the enemy and unhesitatingly assaulted the enemy soldiers by throwing hand grenades and engaging in hand-to-hand combat. He was wounded yet a third time, but his determined efforts successfully drove the enemy from the position.

“Securing an operable machine gun, Sgt. Lemon stood atop an embankment fully exposed to enemy fire, and placed effective fire upon the enemy until he collapsed from his multiple wounds and exhaustion. After regaining consciousness at the aid station, he refused medical evacuation until his more seriously wounded comrades had

---

<sup>69</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Jose Francisco Jimenez.

*Military Contributions and Sacrifices of Immigrants*

been evacuated. Sgt. Lemon's gallantry and extraordinary heroism, are in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service and reflect great credit on him, his unit, and the U.S. Army."<sup>70</sup>

**LASZLO RABEL (IMMIGRANT FROM HUNGARY)**

Laszlo Rabel, staff sergeant, U.S. Army, was born in Budapest, Hungary. He received the Medal of Honor for his actions on November 13, 1968. He lost his life during the combat on that day.

"S/Sgt. Rabel distinguished himself while serving as leader of Team Delta, 74th Infantry Detachment," reads his Medal of Honor citation. "At 1000 hours on this date, Team Delta was in a defensive perimeter conducting reconnaissance of enemy trail networks when a member of the team detected enemy movement to the front."

"As S/Sgt. Rabel and a comrade prepared to clear the area, he heard an incoming grenade as it landed in the midst of the team's perimeter. With complete disregard for his life, S/Sgt. Rabel threw himself on the grenade and, covering it with his body, received the complete impact of the immediate explosion. Through his indomitable courage, complete disregard for his safety and profound concern for his fellow soldiers, S/Sgt. Rabel averted the loss of life and injury to the other members of Team Delta. By his gallantry at the cost of his life in the highest traditions of the military service, S/Sgt. Rabel has reflected great credit upon himself, his unit, and the U.S. Army."<sup>71</sup>

**CONCLUSION**

What motivates immigrants to join the U.S. military? "I can't speak for every immigrant, but for me it was to earn the right to call myself an American," said Florent Groberg. "This country gave me the opportunity to come here and call myself an American. At the time, we were at war and I wanted to give back, to earn that I am a citizen. When my country is fighting an enemy, as a citizen it's my duty to go out there and fight for this country. We're as patriotic as anybody else."<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Peter C. Lemon.

<sup>71</sup> Medal of Honor citation for Laszlo Rabel.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Florent Groberg.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stuart Anderson is Executive Director of the National Foundation for American Policy, a non-profit, non-partisan public policy research organization in Arlington, Va. Stuart served as Executive Associate Commissioner for Policy and Planning and Counselor to the Commissioner at the Immigration and Naturalization Service from August 2001 to January 2003. He spent four and a half years on Capitol Hill on the Senate Immigration Subcommittee, first for Senator Spencer Abraham and then as Staff Director of the subcommittee for Senator Sam Brownback. Prior to that, Stuart was Director of Trade and Immigration Studies at the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C., where he produced reports on the military contributions of immigrants and the role of immigrants in high technology. He has an M.A. from Georgetown University and a B.A. in Political Science from Drew University. Stuart has published articles in the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and other publications. He is the author of the book *Immigration* (Greenwood, 2010).

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR AMERICAN POLICY

Established in 2003, the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan public policy research organization based in Arlington, Virginia, focusing on trade, immigration and related issues. Advisory Board members include Columbia University economist Jagdish Bhagwati, Cornell Law School professor Stephen W. Yale-Loehr, Ohio University economist Richard Vedder and former INS Commissioner James Ziglar. Over the past 24 months, NFAP's research has been written about in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and other major media outlets. The organization's reports can be found at [www.nfap.com](http://www.nfap.com).  
Twitter: [@NFAPResearch](https://twitter.com/NFAPResearch)