Peter M. Chow

The Chinese American Infantryman in Vietnam



Fig. 1 First Vice Commander of American Legion Post 628.

Peter M. Chow was born in Shanghai in 1950. He moved to Hong Kong when he was 10 years old in 1960. In 1966, Mr. Chow immigrated to New York. Three years later, the United States was recruiting for the Vietnam War. He was drafted by the U.S. Army and assigned to Fort Gordon, Georgia for basic military training at the age of 19. Soon after, he was assigned to the 1st Infantry Division in Augsburg, West Germany, where he participated in joint exercises between NATO and armies from other countries and acquired his survival skills.

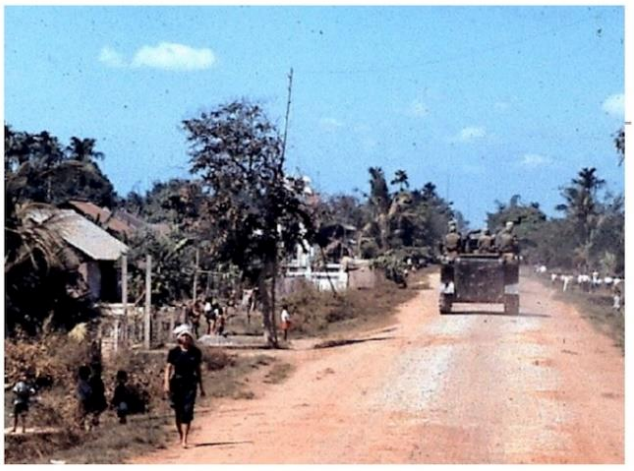


Fig. 2 M113 Armored Personnel Carrier in Vietnam village.

Mr. Chow arrived at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam on October 25th, 1970. After the usual Army "hurry up," Mr. Chow was assigned to the 5th Mechanized Infantry Division near Quang Tri city. Mr. Chow remembers looking at this large map of Vietnam with all the units and their locations. He immediately saw that the 5th Infantry Division was furthest north on the map and faced uniformed North Vietnamese army (NVA), instead of Viet Cong (VC) in South Vietnam. The Vietnamese Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was the frontier of the Vietnam War.



Fig. 3 DMZ Battle Field, Vietnam, Jan. 28, 1971.

DMZ Battle walking point incident: one day we were on the field patrol, and I saw the NVA soldier's soft cap, which immediately indicated a warning. Two second later, hundreds of bullets whizzed towards us. In a split second, I dropped to the ground and a UH-1 Iroquois "Huey" Helicopter had opened above us. The helicopter's door gunner tried to protect and save our lives and made sure no NVA enemies were around us. At the same time, we called for artillery and aircraft support; the PBR Attach Helicopter started firing towards NVA soldiers along with fighter jets that dropped bombs and missiles while artillery fired rockets on the ground. That battle almost killed me and still haunts me to this day.



Fig. 4 Quang Tri 5th Infantry Division Base camp

Quang Tri base camp ambush: My team and I were out on an ambush mission one night outside their base. As we moved down to position near a river and set up claymore mines in front of our sandbags, we were engaged with automatic weapons that fired across the river. I dove behind a sandbag as the bullets whizzed by my head. This was one of the most dangerous positions in the Vietnam War because of the high risk of being ambushed by the NVA.

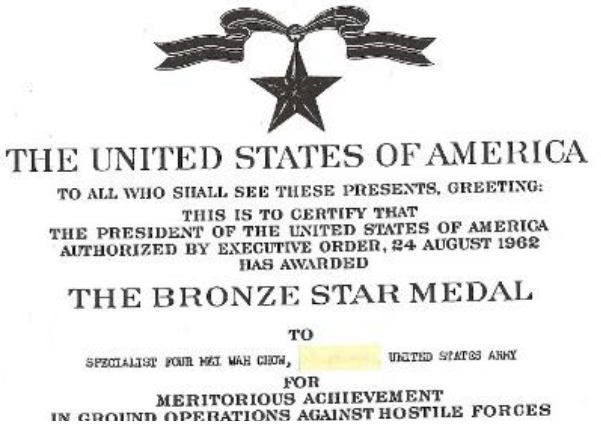
Khe Sanh Battles: During another mission, our entire 5th Division conducted a large-scale attack in the Battle of Khe Sanh – the main battlefield of the DMZ. I drove the M-113 armored personnel carrier vehicle and was almost hit by two 40-pound explosive mines. Once again, I almost got "killed in action."



Fig. 5 Mr. Chow driving the M113 Armored Personnel Carrier.

Rocket attack on our wood-made barrack, where soldiers lived on the base: one night, I walked out the back door of our barrack to take a leak. As I started to urinate, a 102-pound Soviet made 122-mm rocket hit our barrack' s roof. I was very lucky that night missing the hit.

The following year, Mr. Chow received a Bronze Star Medal, the highest heroic honor medal of the U.S. military for his outstanding performance, also including NDSM, VSM, MKM, and other military medals. He received an honorable discharge and returned to the United States safely from Vietnam.



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
AUTHORIZED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, 24 AUGUST 1962
HAS AWARDED

THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL

TO

SPECIALIST FOUR MEI WAH CHOW, [redacted] UNITED STATES ARMY

FOR
MERITORIOUS ACHIEVEMENT
IN GROUND OPERATIONS AGAINST HOSTILE FORCES

Fig. 7 Awarded the Medal of Bronze Star for meritorious achievement in ground operations against hostile forces in Vietnam by John G. Hill Jr. Brigadier General,1st Brigade Commander of 5th Infantry division.

It is without a doubt that the military has shaped his mindset. Life is war, and life fights unfairly. Mr. Chow despises the collectivistic nature of Chinese Americans: to keep a low profile, never speak up, and never fight back. He believes that people will step all over you if you do not stand up for yourself. As a soldier who has faced

many threats and adversity, his mindset to success is never-ending tenacity to fight for yourself and fight for respect. Mr. Chow wants more people to participate in the military, especially Asian Americans.

Throughout his life, Mr. Chow has a deep understanding of the difficulties of Chinese and Asian immigrants going abroad and establishing a foothold in the United States. The Covid-19 pandemic has made the social situation of Asian American communities in the United States more passive and has led to a substantial rise in anti-Asian sentiment and related violence, which threatens the safety of Asian American communities across the country. In 2019, Mr. Chow established The National Organization of Asian American Veterans (NOAAV), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, hoping to provide a fair and equitable service platform for the Chinese and Asian American communities and help cope with difficulties.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs invited Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in Los Angeles to initiate the LMU Digital Veterans Legacy Project (LDVL), asking LMU professors and students, as well as local high school students, to study the minority veterans buried in the Los Angeles National Cemetery (LANC) located in West Los Angeles. The project will establish a reliable research foundation and develop digital media programs, which includes social media posts, short videos, online tutorials, etc., for Americans to learn veterans' stories. Mr. Chow became the Advisory Board member of the LDVL project. He believes the project provides a great opportunity for Asian Americans to promote awareness of the services and contribution of Asian American soldiers to American society.

As a Chinese American veteran, Mr. Chow is honored. Asian American veterans have made outstanding contributions to defending American society and freedom. Mr. Chow believes that their experiences during military service in the United States must be shared through public education and media. Together, Mr. Chow hopes that all Americans can live in a harmonious and stable society, in peace and contentment.

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