

**YOUNG OAK KIM, 86; WW II & Korean War Hero, Uniter of LA Asian Communities**  
 By Myrna Oliver, LA Times



Retired Army Col. Young Oak Kim, one of the most celebrated heroes of World War II and the Korean War, who later became LA's elder statesman and link among Korean, Japanese and other Asian American communities died of cancer on December 29, 2005 at the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

Kim was a major founder of the Los Angeles Japanese American National Museum, Korean American Museum, Korean Health Education Information & Research Center, Korean American Coalition, Korean Youth & Culture Center, and Center for the Pacific Asian Family.

He also co-founded the 100<sup>th</sup>/442<sup>nd</sup>/MIS WWII Memorial Foundation and Go For Broke Educational Foundation and led efforts to build the Go For Broke monument in Little Tokyo, completed in 1999, which honors the primarily Japanese American members of WWII's combined 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion and 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team.

Born in Los Angeles in 1919 to immigrant Koreans, Kim grew up on Bunker Hill, where his parents ran a grocery store at Temple and Figueroa Streets. He worked in the store as a boy in the 1930's, an era when Asian groups were not on good terms with one another, particularly Koreans and Japanese because of Japan's occupation of Korea..

Yet Kim, who saw himself foremost as an American, overcame those ethnic prejudices. "I welcome the new immigrants of all countries," Kim told The Times in 1987. "By having that attitude, I think I'm faithful and true to the American dream...I'm proud of my ethnic roots. I've always been proud of my ethnic roots. "But at the same time, I feel I'm basically American. I fought for America....I also fought for the Korean people."

When WWII broke out, Kim was drafted and (after Officers Candidate School at Ft. Benning, GA) was assigned to the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion – one of only two Koreans in the outfit. He said the assignment occurred because his superiors at Ft Benning did not know the difference between Korean, Japanese and Chinese.

When he reported to duty at Camp Shelby, MS as a newly minted 2nd Lieutenant, his battalion commander offered him a transfer, saying "The men here are all Japanese, and Koreans and Japanese don't get along." "But we're not Japanese or Korean, Kim replied. "We're Americans. And we're all fighting for the same thing."

He talked to the officers in the unit about changing the negative view of Asians held by many Americans. "We realized we had to do well in combat. Only by doing well in combat would we be in a position to try to effect some of these changes." Kim told the Times in 1987.

The units did better than well. "In hindsight, we were wildly successful," Kim told the Times. "I'm talking

**YOSHIKI TAMURA past member of the South Bay Chapter JACL Board of Directors**



Yoshiaki Tamura, 85 years old, a past member of the South Bay JACL Board of Directors passed away on October 26, 2005 of cardiac arrest. Yosh was born in Sunnyvale, CA and attended UC Berkeley where he majored in engineering and mathematics. His professional career was spent in the U.S. defense sector and he worked at the think tank of Aerospace Corporation in El

Segundo on the Defense System Communications Satellite Project. While on the South Bay JACL board, Yosh was chair of the Chapter U.S.-Japan Relations Committee. Tamura was an avid karaoke singer and specialized in Japanese enka. He had the unusual ability to easily memorize songs. Yosh is survived by his four sons, Michael, Gregory, Jeffery, and Douglas. His final resting place is Green Hills Memorial Park, Rancho Palos Verdes beside his wife, Yeiko who predeceased him in 1998.

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(Young Oak Kim – continued)

about as a combat unit, and in effecting changes we wanted to make nationally..

On June 26, 1944, in Italy, Lt. General Mark Clark awarded Kim the prestigious Distinguished Service Cross for his heroic efforts in obtaining intelligence that helped the Allies break through at Anzio Beach and eventually capture Rome. According to the medal citation, Kim (and Irving Akahoshi): "went behind German lines at Cisterna...captured 2 Germans and brought them back past several enemy outposts to obtain information needed by the Allied command."

Kim won over 20 medals, which are stored in a box in his garage. Included are: 2 Silver Stars, 3 Purple Hearts; a French Croix de la Guerre and an Italian Cross of Valor. Added in Feb 2005 was France's highest award, the Legion of Valor for his efforts to liberate French towns towards the end of WWII.

After WWII, Kim returned to LA but because of the Korean War, he reenlisted in 1950 As a Major, he was the first Asian American to command a U.S. regular combat battalion and led his unit in pushing the enemy back from the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel – enabling the creation of the buffer zone.

In Oct 2005 South Korea awarded Kim its highest military honor. The Taeguk Order of Military Merit.

After Korea, Kim spent another 20 years in the Army. He attained the rank of Colonel in 1965 and was posted in the U.S., Europe and South Korea. In 1972, when he retired to LA. He earned a degree in history from Cal State Dominguez Hills. Married and divorced twice, Kim is survived by three stepsons, a sister and two brothers.

Funeral services were held at the Santa Monica United Methodist Church. Kim will be buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (Punchbowl) in Honolulu.

Instead of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Go For Broke Educational Foundation or the Center for Pacific Asian Families.

Adapted from LA Times. Jan 4, 2006, page B8 obituaries.