

# Vietnam War veterans honored in Chinatown by NY Governor

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*by Shirley L. Ng*



*Group photo of Vietnam War Veterans of Lt. B.R. Kimlau Chinese Memorial Post 1291 during the National Vietnam War Veterans Day ceremony in Chinatown. Photo by: Shirley L. Ng*

*New York – Chinese American Vietnam War veterans were honored on Saturday during a ceremony in Chinatown with a proclamation from New York’s Governor.*

Lt. B.R. Kimlau Chinese Memorial Post 1291 hosted a ceremony to commemorate National Vietnam War Veterans Day. Thirty-seven of their members who served during the Vietnam War were each honored with a proclamation signed by New York Governor, Kathy Hochul. The proclamations were presented to each veteran by Benjamin Pomerance, the Deputy Counsel from the New York State Department of Veterans’ Services on behalf of Governor Hochul who could not attend.

Since 2017, March 29 has become National Vietnam War Veterans Day by the Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act was signed by President Trump. In 2018, President Trump also signed the Chinese American WWII Congressional Gold Medal Recognition Act, which some members of Lt. B.R. Kimlau Chinese Memorial Post 1291 had gone to Washington DC to advocate for.



*Deputy Counsel from the New York State Department of Veterans' Services, Benjamin Pomerance presents Commander, Thomas (Tommy) Ong with his proclamation. Photo by: Shirley L. Ng*



*'New York State Proclamation signed by Governor Kathy Hochul was presented to each of the Vietnam veterans, members of Lt. B.R. Kimlau Chinese Memorial Post on Saturday. Photo by: Shirley L. Ng*

Pomerance said at the ceremony, “We need to do something that honors veterans of the Vietnam War era, in particular Asian American veterans of the Vietnam War. Again, it is many years and many decades over due to finally provide you with the proper thanks and proper welcome home for what you did for the United States of America,” Approximately 70 guests and veterans attended the afternoon ceremony.

Commander Tommy Ong told AsAmNews, “Among the 8.7 million Americans that served in the armed forces in the Vietnam War, 35,000 of those were Asian Americans. During the ceremony, he told the audience that Lt. B.R. Kimlau Chinese Memorial Post 1291 members are, “especially proud of their heritage.”

Richard Shin told AsAmNews he was drafted and stationed in Korea during the war.

*Richard Shin served in Korea during the Vietnam War. He received his proclamation from Deputy Counsel from the New York State Department of Veterans' Services, Benjamin Pomerance during the Chinatown National Vietnam War Veterans Day Ceremony. Photo by: Shirley L. Ng*



“I feel proud of myself because I served the country well. I served for two years. I don’t regret being in the army. Being from a poor family, if I stayed (at home) I may not have been able to go to college. After two years I was discharged. I used the GI Bill to finish my education,” he said.

Shin was able to attend graduate school and studied math and physics. He taught mathematics for two years at Stony Brook University.



*Tommy Leo proudly shows his proclamation with his wife beside him at the National Vietnam War Veterans Day ceremony in Chinatown. Leo suffers from PTSD and has other health conditions as a result of combat in the war by: Shirley L. Ng*

Annie Leo accompanied her father Tommy Leo, to receive his proclamation. She explained to AsAmNews that her father has PTSD and was exposed to Agent Orange from combat in the jungles of Vietnam. He still has shrapnel in his leg and walks with a cane.

The Vietnam War was very unpopular with Americans. Many protested against the US involvement in a civil war, despised the devastating images of innocent lives being killed and many also opposed the draft. When the US efforts in the war were defeated, the military men and women did not receive a hero’s welcome when they returned home. Authorities told them to not dress in a uniform that would convey they were military service men and women due to the hostility they may receive. The war lasted 20 years from 1955-1975, however, US involvement in the did not begin till 1965.

According to Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, 58,000 lost their lives and 1,580 are still missing from the war.

When AsAmNews asked Leo how he felt about receiving his proclamation from the Governor he said, “I am a jungle man. It took a long time to recognize us. It’s something, better than nothing.”

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