HÉCTOR GARCÍA: FIGHTING FOR EQUAL EDUCATION

HOMETOWN: Mercedes, Texas

As a young child, Héctor García attended a segregated school for Mexican Americans in Mercedes, Texas. While serving in an integrated unit during the war, Héctor witnessed the suffering of Europeans and North Africans and vowed to devote his life to helping those in need. Following the war, Héctor founded the American G.I. Forum to fight against segregation and inequality and committed his life to bettering the living and working conditions of Mexican American families and laborers.

FRANCES SLANGER: FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM

HOMETOWN: Boston, Massachusetts

The child of a fruit peddler, Frances loved to read the English classics and write poems in her journal while on the rooftop of her family’s tenement building. Against her parents’ wishes, she applied to Boston City Hospital’s School of Nursing. Shortly after D-Day, Frances waded onshore the beaches of Normandy amid persistent shelling. She was one of the eighteen nurses of the 45th Field Hospital, who within their first day would receive seventeen truckloads of wounded soldiers. Stationed just yards away from the front lines of combat, Frances was killed when an enemy shell exploded near her tent.

BILL TERRY: FIGHTING FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

HOMETOWN: Los Angeles, California

Bill Terry grew up a star athlete on the basketball teams of Compton Junior College and UCLA. When war broke out, Bill passed all of the required exams to become a pilot. When it was discovered that he was African American, he was denied service. Not giving up, Bill applied for the segregated pilot program at Tuskegee Institute. When Bill became disillusioned by the discriminatory conditions of training, he and sixty other officers participated in an act of non-violent protest and entered a segregated white officer’s club. They were arrested and Bill was charged with a felony. It would take until 1995 for Bill to be granted a pardon and permitted to vote in an election.
GEORGE SAITO: FIGHTING FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

HOMETOWN: Los Angeles, California

When George lost his mother at an early age, he had to help his father raise his younger siblings in their home in Los Angeles, California. With the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Saito family was forced to leave the West Coast. They were incarcerated in Amache concentration camp in Colorado. Wanting to prove their loyalty to the United States, George and his younger brother, Calvin, volunteered for service in the Army. While overseas, Calvin was killed while attempting to take a hill in Italy. Three months later, while climbing the heavily forested hills in France, George was killed in his company’s fight to rescue the legendary “lost battalion.”

DOMINGO LOS BAÑOS: FIGHTING FOR DEMOCRACY ABROAD

HOMETOWN: Kalaheo, Kaua‘i

Domingo loved to play football with the neighborhood boys who also lived in the segregated Filipino camp on the sugar plantation fields of Kalaheo, Kaua‘i. He was senior class president at Kaua‘i High School when war broke out. As part of the First Filipino Infantry Regiment, Domingo snuck behind enemy lines to find valuable information. Seeing the hardships of the people living in Asia, Domingo became a teacher and spent many years of his life committed to bettering the education and living conditions of students in Thailand.

HAZEL YING LEE: FIGHTING FOR GENDER EQUALITY

HOMETOWN: Portland, Oregon

As a teenager, Hazel dreamed of flying. In her hometown of Portland, Oregon, Hazel’s career options after high school graduation were to work in a stockroom or as an elevator operator. Hazel pursued her dreams instead and received her pilot’s wings. Soon after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hazel joined the Women Air Force Service Pilots to ferry and test fly U.S. planes stateside. Hazel was one of the 38 women pilots to die for their country during the war.
CARL GORMAN: FIGHTING FOR THE RIGHT TO SPEAK

HOMETOWN: Chinle, Arizona

Carl came of age on the Navajo Indian reservation in Chinle, Arizona. At a reservation school, Carl was beaten for speaking his native language. During the war, the U.S. Marine Corps recruited Navajos for “special duty” – to develop a top-secret military code using their native language. Having used the Navajo code to save countless American lives during the war, Carl returned from service in the Pacific to help his people preserve and document their culture and tradition.