

# America's Heroes

## Recognizing Hispanic- And Latino-American Veterans

(NAPSA)—More than 1.2 million of all living American veterans are Hispanic or Latino Americans. The Veterans History Project (VHP) of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress invites these brave men and women to share their unique stories of military experience.

Established by the U.S. Congress in 2000, VHP's mandate is to collect, preserve and make accessible the firsthand recollections of America's wartime veterans. The Project has collected more than 70,000 stories through a network of volunteers from across the country, making it the largest oral history project in the country.

VHP seeks to increase the number of veteran interviews from all minority communities, including Hispanic and Latino Americans, women veterans, and underrepresented service branches such as the Merchant Marines, Coast Guard, and National Guard and Reserve. Among the oral histories from these communities in the VHP collections are the stories of Raymond Ayon and Eva Jacques, both Hispanic Americans who served in the U.S. military.

In 1945, then 16-year-old Raymond Ayon was so fascinated with his older brothers' letters home during World War II that he dropped out of high school to enlist in the Merchant Marines. After being discovered as underage a year later, he returned to school, graduated, and enlisted in the Air Force in 1948. After training with a fighter bomber squadron, Ayon was later trained as a medical corpsman responsible



**Photo courtesy of the Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.**

for loading Korean War casualties onto transport planes bound for Japan.

When Eva Jacques enlisted to serve in World War II she was 4'11", one inch short of the minimum height requirement. But the Army Air Forces waived its height requirement and allowed Jacques to serve two years as an administrative aide in the Pacific Theater because she had three years of college under her belt and was fluent in Spanish and English.

Ayon's and Jacques' stories, along with thousands more, may be accessed on VHP's website at [www.loc.gov/vets](http://www.loc.gov/vets).

Learn how to participate in the Veterans History Project at [www.loc.gov/vets](http://www.loc.gov/vets) (click on "How to Participate") and download a Field Kit (a "how to record a story" booklet).