



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:
01 May, 2022

May is Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month.

For over thirty years, May has been federally designated for our country to celebrate the accomplishments and contributions that our AAPI community has made to our country and to our Coast Guard.

As the Coast Guard's international missions grow, a need for language experts has been pushed to the forefront. One of FAPAC-USCG's members, LTJG Olivia Chang, is helping the service to accomplish that goal and bridge the barrier of the language gap. LTJG Chang represents one of only ten certified Mandarin speakers in the Coast Guard. FAPAC-USCG recently had the opportunity to catch up with LTJG Chang before she set off to the South Pacific for an Interpreter assignment:

(Q) Being from Kentucky, what was it like growing up? How did you keep in touch with your heritage and language?

"Growing up in rural Kentucky was interesting because we were the only Asian family in a small rural town. In my elementary school, I was the only Asian student, but I was rarely bullied for my race or ethnicity. In fact, people were mostly curious about why I had rice in my lunchbox instead of bread. Perhaps things would be different if we had stayed there today, but I'm grateful we had a friendly community during our ten years there..."

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...As for keeping up with my language and heritage, that was no issue since my dad didn't speak English and we went up to New York City to visit family every so often. We eventually moved to New York City, where I joined the gaggle of cousins who went to Chinese school every Saturday morning."

(Q) What interested you in the Coast Guard and the Coast Guard Academy?

"Like many others, I was interested in the Coast Guard over the other services because it has a humanitarian and environmental mission. My father and uncle served in the Taiwan Army, so that planted an idea in my head to join the military. I wanted to go to the Coast Guard Academy after participating in the Academy Introduction Mission in high school and CGA Scholars Program."

(Q) What motivated you to become an interpreter for the Coast Guard

"I wanted to use my language skills to interpret for the Coast Guard because it challenges me to learn unique vocabulary and opens up some cool opportunities. There are not many Mandarin interpreters in the Coast Guard, and solicitations for this skillset are pretty common."

(Q) How do you maintain your proficiency in Mandarin?

"I maintain proficiency in my Mandarin mainly by calling home and speaking to my parents. I also frequent Chinatown on the weekends for food and groceries, which exposes me to different dialects and new people. I actually have a slight Taiwanese accent when I speak Mandarin since my dad is from Taiwan. Finally, I changed my Netflix and Hulu settings to have a Chinese voiceover with English subtitles when possible to further brush up on my listening and vocab skills."

(Q) What is the best/most memorable experience you've had serving as an interpreter?

"I've done interpretation work four times in my career so far, and I think the coolest experience was jumping on a C-130 last minute to interview Taiwanese fishing vessels off the coast of Florida. It was very interesting to see what kind of information was needed and how the questions should be worded to get the best and most concise answer. It also felt like very meaningful work because we were not only collecting human intelligence but also carrying out the Coast Guard's marine and environmental protection mission."

(Q) What would you say to others considering going through the process?

"The process of getting a language proficiency is actually pretty simple- find your local ESO to set up a time for a DLPT (Defense Language Proficiency Test) and make sure your score is put into Direct Access and CGBI. This will allow you to show up on the roster whenever a list of interpreters is pulled for a certain language. You'll need to maintain this proficiency annually, and the test is a five-hour multiple choice event so make sure to bring water and snacks. Study up on reading and listening, especially since some sections contain different accents and forms of writing. I also want to add that it is much easier to learn a language when you are immersed in it at home, so do not get discouraged if you're trying to pick up or re-visit a language."

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(Q) With Asian Americans being the fastest growing demographic in the United States, the Coast Guard has a lot to benefit from the languages, cultures, and experiences that the AAPI community has to offer. What would you say to members of the AAPI community looking to enlist or earn a commission with the United States Coast Guard?

"From my experience, when joining the Coast Guard, I would encourage members of the AAPI community to use affinity groups, such as FAPAC, as a support system for guidance throughout their career. Even though the AAPI community is rapidly growing in the United States, less than 3% of our workforce identifies with the AAPI community(1). Especially with recent incidents of Asian American hate crimes, representation within our community is more important than ever to show that we will not be pushed down and are capable of accomplishment."

1.
<https://www.mycg.uscg.mil/News/Article/2519440/fapac-uscg-helps-the-coast-guards-asian-american-pacific-islander-community-be>

Thank you LTJG Chang for sharing your experiences with us!

FAPAC-USCG is continuously amazed by the hard work and dedication of our members. If you or someone you know are interested in becoming an interpreter for the Coast Guard, we encourage you to reach out to your Educational Services Officer (ESO).

Looking to improve your language skills or in need of a mentor? Connect with us through our website at uscgfapac.org and we can help to connect you!



LTJG Chang in the Pagat Caves in Guam.



As the only non-profit organization dedicated to the Coast Guard's Asian American and Pacific Islander community, FAPAC-USCG works to drive systems of change necessary to strengthen our community and improve diversity within the Coast Guard, while remaining focused on sustaining a service culture where everyone is included, valued, and respected.