

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: Chris Komai
(213) 448-1875 – ckomai52@gmail.com

NATIONAL VETERANS NETWORK, SMITHSONIAN, WITH HELP FROM NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, TO CREATE NISEI SOLDIER CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL DIGITAL EXHIBITION

TORRANCE, CA.—The National Veterans Network (NVN), in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution’s Asian Pacific American Center (APAC) and the National Museum of American History (NMAH) and with the financial support from the National Parks Service (NPS), has begun developing a state-of-the-art digital exhibition centered on the outstanding military service of Nisei (second generation Japanese American) during World War II, including those who served in combat, in supporting roles and as part of the Japan Occupation. The exhibition is inspired by the 2011 awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal to three Japanese American units: the 100th Infantry Battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat Team and members of the Military Intelligence Service (MIS).

In June of 2014, NPS agreed to provide a grant to the Smithsonian’s APAC to help fund the Congressional Gold Medal Nisei Soldier digital exhibition. The Smithsonian engaged the National Veterans Network to conceive and implement the project, while with consulting APAC on the design review and NMAH on the exhibition content. NVN has already held a community convening with veterans, activists, scholars and other interested parties to help create a list of the core themes for the digital exhibition.

In 2013, NVN and the Smithsonian organized a seven-city tour of the Congressional Gold Medal and its accompanying display. In February of 2014, the Congressional Gold Medal was returned to the Smithsonian with plans to display it permanently as part of National Museum of American History’s exhibition, **Price of Freedom: Americans at War**. NMAH averages over five million visitors annually.

“We are honored to be partnering with the Smithsonian Institution, America’s national museum, on the Congressional Gold Medal digital exhibition project,” stated Christine Sato-Yamazaki, executive director of the National Veterans Network. “We are grateful to the National Parks Service for its support as well. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ensure that the Japanese American World War II experience, including the forced removal of families from Hawaii and the mainland, the heroism of our veterans and the postwar civic engagement, will always be included as an integral part of U.S. history at our nation’s premier history museum. The National Veterans Network is proud to be working with the Asian Pacific American Center and the National Museum of American history on such an important story.”

When United States entered World War II after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, the government subjected people of Japanese ancestry in America to unfair and unlawful treatment, including declaring Japanese Americans “enemy aliens” and forcibly removing thousands of families from their homes and businesses on the West Coast and Hawaii. Ultimately, over 120,000 men, women and children were unconstitutionally incarcerated. Despite widespread prejudice and the false imprisonment of their families by the government, thousands of Japanese Americans from the territory of Hawaii and the mainland entered the U.S. military. While first the 100th Infantry Battalion and then the larger 442nd Regimental Combat Team fought with remarkable valor in Europe, earning a combined seven Presidential Citations, members of the MIS used their language and cultural skills as translators, interrogators and code breakers to shorten the war in the Pacific and then to facilitate the Occupation of Japan.

In the decades since the end of World War II, the stories of the Nisei World War II service in the face of overt prejudice have inspired great change, including the removal of discriminatory laws involving naturalized citizenship, housing and employment for all Americans. Japanese American veterans utilized the GI Bill to further their education to enter occupations once closed to them, while their children and grandchildren steadily increased their civic activism for themselves and other communities, which directly led to the petitioning the government for redress. National and regional organizations were founded to help document the Japanese American experience and to ensure the constitutional lessons from that unique chapter of U.S. history would be passed on to future generations.

The National Veterans Network is a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to educating the nation on the Japanese American World War II experience. NVN led a national campaign in 2009 to award the Congressional Gold Medal, the nation’s highest civilian honor, to the 100th, 442nd and MIS, who are the first and only Asian American recipients. NVN then planned the 2011 award ceremony in Washington, D.C. while working directly with the U.S. Mint on the design of the medal itself. NVN and the Smithsonian sponsored the seven-city tour of the Congressional Gold Medal to help create a greater awareness of this story. The display went to the National WWII Museum (New Orleans), Bishop Museum (Honolulu), Japanese American National Museum (Los Angeles), de Young Museum (San Francisco), Oregon History Museum (Portland), Chicago History Museum and Houston Holocaust Museum.

From now until early 2016, NVN will be consulting with the Congressional Gold Medal National Academic Advisory Council, a body organized for this project. NVN will work with the exhibition staff on planning and research for the digital exhibition, including the development of storylines, identifying existing regional resources and reviewing supporting materials. Plans include selection of an exhibit designer for an online and

physical exhibition and the creation of video segments to support the major themes. The digital exhibition is scheduled for completion in 2016. For more information on this exhibition, go to: <http://youtu.be/NI5HheyO7o>

“The Congressional Gold Medal digital exhibition will highlight the positive effects on U.S. history from the Japanese American experience,” Sato-Yamazaki explained. “We also plan to link the online exhibit to existing community resources. Since millions of people visit the Smithsonian digital outreach programs annually, these resources will provide historic context to the Japanese American experience for many students and educators.”

While National Park Service grant provides the bulk of the funding for this project, NVN is still fundraising to ensure the timely completion of the Congressional Gold Medal digital exhibition. To make a donation or for more information, go to www.nationalveteransnetwork.com. For more information on the National Veterans Network, email info@nationalveteransnetwork.com.

###