



# AN UNHERALDED CONTRIBUTION

HONORING AMERICA'S FALLEN FOREIGN-BORN  
SERVICE MEMBERS POST 9/11



In recent years many researchers have quantified the large role that immigrants play in strengthening the U.S. economy. For instance, that more than 40 percent of companies in the Fortune 500 have at least one founder who either immigrated to the United States or was the child of immigrants.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, foreign-born individuals have been found to be twice as likely to start a business as their native-born counterparts.<sup>2</sup>

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*Immigrants are making major, but often uncelebrated, contributions to America's military efforts.*

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The impact that immigrants are making in other areas of U.S. society, however, is sometimes less well understood. One area in particular where more study is needed is the contribution that immigrants are making to U.S. national security and the military. Many foreign-born residents carry a desire to serve, migrating from countries with rich histories of military tradition. In Mexico, for example, the army functions not only as a defense against external attacks but also as an indispensable aid to public works programs.<sup>3</sup> Many who choose to immi-

grate and seek citizenship hope to continue in this tradition of military service and reflect their patriotism inherent in their commitment to a new home. This is hindered, however, by the restrictions and limitations placed on which foreign-born residents are eligible for service. Today, with rare exceptions—and breaking with longstanding enlistment requirements—only immigrants who are permanent residents or U.S. citizens are allowed to join the military. The difficulty that this causes for many potential recruits is apparent in the numbers: currently, only 5 percent of all active-duty personnel are foreign-born.<sup>4</sup>

In this study, we explore the contribution that immigrants are making to U.S. security by quantifying how many immigrants have made the ultimate sacrifice—giving their lives to defend America on the battlefield. To obtain this figure, we examined publicly available casualty reports and obituaries from September 11, 2001 through 2013, as well as genealogical information for more than 6,000 fallen service members. This data has not previously been tracked or released by the U.S. military. Our research reveals that, as in many other aspects of our society and economy, immigrants are making major, but often uncelebrated, contributions to America's military efforts. Hundreds have given their lives on the battlefield in recent years, displaying the heroism and bravery that inspires so many Americans.

## KEY FINDINGS

**A substantial number of immigrants have lost their lives while on active duty since the September 11 attacks.**

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Our analysis finds that 4.2 percent of all military casualties between September 11, 2001 and the end of 2013 were foreign-born service members. During that period, of the 6,810 military casualties in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, 284 were foreign born, a figure roughly in line with their overall presence in the U.S Armed Forces.

**The Army accounted for the largest share of foreign-born military casualties.**

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Of the immigrants who died on deployment, a large majority—205 soldiers—were members of the U.S Army. The U.S. Marine Corps were also significantly affected, losing 66 foreign-born service members.

**The foreign-born service members who have lost their lives in recent years are from a diverse range of countries.**

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More than one in five of the immigrants who lost their lives between September 11 and the end of 2013 were originally from Mexico, making it the most common country of origin for fallen, foreign-born service members. That was followed by the Philippines and Jamaica, which accounted for 14.1 and 4.6 percent of all foreign-born military casualties respectively.

**The immigrants who lost their lives on deployment were often in positions of leadership.**

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Almost half of the immigrant casualties we examined were ranked E-5 or higher, indicating that they had reached the rank of sergeant or above. Some 5.2 percent of the foreign-born military casualties were officers.

In recent years, policymakers have increasingly come to appreciate the role that talented immigrants can play in the U.S. military. The Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest, or MAVNI program, which was started in 2008, has focused on recruiting temporary immigrants, a group previously ineligible for service, to fill valuable language and medical gaps.<sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup> MAVNI recruits have lower attrition rates than their non-MAVNI counterparts and have above average performance, according to a major study on their service.<sup>7</sup> To further reward foreign-born members of the military, the federal government created a program in 2009 that places permanent resident recruits and their families on an accelerated path to citizenship. These service members can become naturalized in basic training, and their families can become eligible for naturalization in the event of their death.<sup>8</sup>

U.S. policymakers, however, could do more to recognize immigrant service members and tap into the substantial immigrant talent already in America who may be willing and eager to serve.. MAVNI is still a temporary program that must be reauthorized every few years. It is also a small program, limited to just 3,000 recruitment spots in fiscal year 2015.<sup>9</sup> Given that fewer and fewer eligible Americans are able to qualify for the military, it is important that we do more to address the large number of immigrants who want to serve but lack the medical certifications or language skills required to participate in the MAVNI program. A study released by Mission: Readiness, a

group of retired military generals, admirals, and civilian military leaders, found that 75 percent of young Americans aged 17 to 24 are ineligible for military service due to criminal records, physical fitness barriers, obesity, and other factors.<sup>10</sup> Acknowledging the role that immigrants play in our armed forces—and finding ways to enable more to serve—is a necessary step toward strengthening our military and securing our freedom for generations to come.

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# PART 1

## THE OVERALL SHARE OF IMMIGRANT MILITARY CASUALTIES

During a time of crisis in the United States, Marine Cpl. Jose Angel Garibay, a Mexican immigrant, made the ultimate sacrifice for the country he called home. A legal permanent resident of the United States, Garibay's family members said he felt a close connection to his adopted country from practically the moment he arrived as small child. He expressed wanting to "defend the country [he planned] to become a citizen of" in a letter to one of his favorite high school teachers. It was little surprise to many around him when he chose to enlist in the U.S. Marine Corps. As an accomplished student and football player in high school, Garibay thrived in structured environments. He was also a team player, always willing to put his needs aside for the success of others. He enlisted in the Marines soon after his high school graduation.

Only weeks after American boots first touched ground in Iraq Garibay became the first casualty of war from Orange County, California. At the time of his death, Garibay was not yet a U.S. citizen. His mother, Simona, noted the discrepancy between her son's dedication to the United States and the common misconceptions surrounding Mexicans in America. "I always supported my son because it was his desire to go over there and serve," she said in one newspaper interview after his death, "He

was proud of the United States. There are [those] who discriminate against Mexicans but they don't realize that they give their lives too."

In this report, we explore the very topic that Simone Garibay brought up in interviews after her son's death: the important yet underappreciated role that immigrants have played serving America during recent conflicts. Immigrants in the United States have a long history of adding extensively to the nation's economic strength and overall wellbeing. From 1996 to 2011, for example, immigrants contributed \$182.4 billion more to the Medicare trust fund than was spent on their benefits—providing an invaluable subsidy to the program during the great recession.<sup>5</sup> Foreign-born Hispanics, in particular, contribute heavily to state and federal tax revenues, providing billions to federal entitlement programs like Social Security.<sup>11</sup> This trend extends to the role immigrants play in the United States Armed Forces: of the more than one million active duty military personnel in the United States, 65,000 are immigrants—or, approximately five percent of all active-duty personnel serving today.<sup>12</sup>

In recent years, enlistment in the U.S. military has come at a great cost for many American families. Between September 11, 2001 and December 31, 2013, 6,810 members of the U.S. military died in conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of these heroes have been the subject of moving tributes, particularly during annual Veteran's Day celebrations. To delve deeper, we

use publicly available data to determine the role that immigrants played sacrificing their lives to help preserve American security. We determine that those service members are an integral part of recent stories of service and sacrifice for America. Over the period examined in this report, there were 284 casualties, or 4.2 percent of all deaths in recent conflicts who were foreign-born service members. That figure almost equals the presence of immigrants in the U.S. Armed Forces overall.

Garibay is one of nearly three hundred immigrants who proudly served and died in recent military campaigns. Responding to a request from his family, Garibay was posthumously awarded U.S. citizenship in April 2003.<sup>13</sup> He is one of 111 service members who have been awarded U.S. citizenship posthumously.<sup>14</sup> In a statement during a resolution hearing, Former California State Senator Dean Florez supported the idea of giving all honorably discharged foreign-born service members, like Garibay, U.S. citizenship. He noted that immigrants in the armed forces “take the ultimate test many Americans never take: picking up arms for this country.”<sup>15</sup>

## PART 2

### EXAMINING COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF THE FALLEN

The United States is home to the largest immigrant population in the world. According to data from the 2013 American Community Survey, there were over 41.3 million immigrants in the United States—about 13 percent of the total population.<sup>16</sup> Mexico, India, and China represent the most common countries of origin among our foreign-born population.<sup>17</sup> In recent years, more new immigrants have come to America from Asia than any other region in the world, a marked change from earlier decades when immigrants from Central and South America dominated.<sup>18</sup>

The rich diversity of the American immigrant community was reflected in the data we examined on foreign-born military casualties since September 11. The 284 foreign-born service members who died in battle in recent years hailed from more than 68 different countries. These spanned the globe, from Liberia and Haiti, which each lost four nationals, to Thailand, Guatemala, and Pakistan, which each lost two. By far the most common country of origin, however, was Mexico, reflecting the unique role that country plays sending immigrants to the United States today. More than one in five of the foreign-born soldiers lost in battle from 2001 through 2013 were born in Mexico—the largest country of origin represented. Service members

from the Philippines and Jamaica followed, making up 14.1 and 4.6 percent of foreign-born military casualties respectively. In many cases, the percentage of immigrant casualties from a given country out-weighed the group’s overall representation in the foreign-born population of the United States, as demonstrated in Table 1 to the right.

Diversity, of course, is a key component to American military success. United States military personnel are stationed in almost 150 countries across the globe.<sup>19</sup> A Senate report from the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act expressed fears that the U.S. military lacked personnel with the skills and ability to communicate with the population in foreign locales.<sup>20</sup> The ability to communicate effectively with the local population during conflict is essential to effective military campaigns. In a 2009 policy memorandum, General Stanley McChrystal stressed the importance of all service members having a basic knowledge of the native language, with at least one member of each platoon being a proficient speaker. He urged his fellow soldiers to remember that, “Language skill...is as important as your other combat skills.”<sup>21</sup>

Immigrants in the military obviously play a critical role in bolstering the overall diversity and capabilities of on-the-ground soldiers and, in recent years, more enlistment channels have been opened to immigrant residents on temporary visas who possess sorely needed language or medical skills.<sup>22</sup> In 2008, for

**TABLE 1**  
TEN MOST COMMON COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN  
REPRESENTED AMONG FOREIGN-BORN MILITARY  
CASUALTIES, SEPTEMBER 2001-DECEMBER 2013

MEXICO	21.8%	28.8%
PHILIPPINES	14.1%	4.5%
JAMAICA	4.6%	1.7%
KOREA	4.2%	2.7%
CANADA	3.5%	2.0%
COLOMBIA	3.5%	1.6%
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC	3.5%	2.3%
MICRONESIA*	2.1%	0.0%
NICARAGUA	2.1%	0.6%
PANAMA	1.8%	0.3%

PERCENT OF FOREIGN-BORN CASUALTIES

PERCENT OF U.S. FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION, 2013

\* The most recent U.S. Census data on the size of the Micronesian population in the United States dates from 2000.

**FIGURE 1**  
**THE ORIGINS OF THE FALLEN: COUNTRIES OF BIRTH**  
**OF FOREIGN-BORN SERVICE MEMBERS WHO LOST**  
**THEIR LIVES IN BATTLE**

**TOTAL : 284**

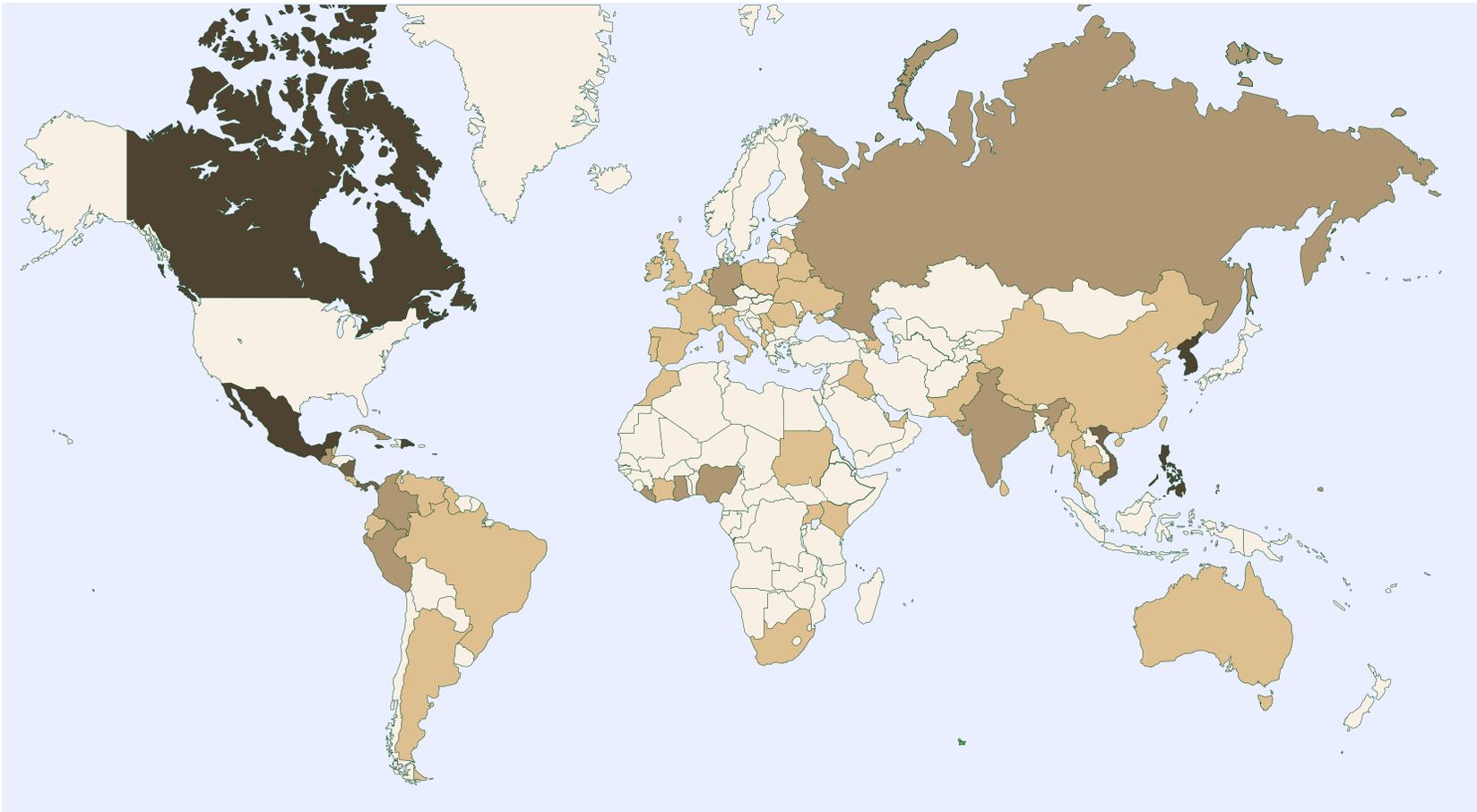
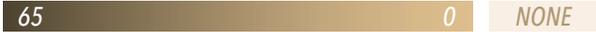
*Data from September 2001 to December 2013*

*Countries not Pictured:*

- JAMAICA
- DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
- MICRONESIA
- MARSHALL ISLANDS
- ANTIGUA

- PALAU
- TRINIDAD
- CAPE VERDE
- GUAM
- MARSHALL ISLANDS

*Number of Casualties:*



instance, the Department of Defense created the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest, or MAVNI program, which allows the military to recruit immigrants on temporary visas who have medical or dental licenses or who speak one of 49 in-demand languages.<sup>23</sup> Thousands of service members have since signed up through this channel. Expanding military enlistment regulations further so more immigrants could serve may bolster the effectiveness of the military in current and future conflicts.<sup>24</sup>

One officer who decided to use his talent and skill in service to our national security was Army Chief Warrant Officer Suresh Krause. In Sri Lanka, where Krause was born, the two official languages are Tamil and Sinhalese, both of which are considered “critical” languages for recruitment purposes by the U.S. Army.<sup>25</sup> Krause joined the U.S. military to contribute another skill that was a passion from an early age — flying — telling family members the Christmas before his death that he planned on serving as a pilot in the Army for 20 years.<sup>26</sup>

Krause’s story is similar to that of many talented and ambitious immigrants. He came to America at age 14 after being adopted by his aunt and uncle. As a young man, Krause tried to take advantage of the opportunity his parents gave him. Krause, who teachers describe as a “math genius,” displayed incredible talent in aeronautics, going on to graduate from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. After graduation, he became an officer in the U.S. Army, where he distinguished himself once again.

During his military career, Krause earned several prestigious awards, including the Army Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and NATO Medal, for his valor and leadership on the front lines.<sup>27</sup>

Krause was ultimately killed while piloting a Black Hawk helicopter in Kandahar, Afghanistan. His uncle, Brody Schmidt, described his decision to enlist as an act of gratitude for the nation that took him in. “This is not his native soil,” Schmidt said at the time, “But in his heart of hearts he bled U.S.A. blood.” Following his death, former Representative Mary Bono Mack helped Krause obtain his U.S. citizenship. “Simply becoming an American citizen wasn’t enough for Suresh,” Mack stated, “He wanted to defend his adopted home, as well... In the end, Suresh Abayasekara Krause was as American as you can get.”<sup>28</sup>

## PART 3

### IMMIGRANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO INDIVIDUAL SERVICE BRANCHES

Due to the nature of the conflicts in both Afghanistan and Iraq in recent years, the U.S. Army has borne the brunt of recent casualties, accounting for 73 percent of all service member deaths since 2001.<sup>29</sup> Our analysis of foreign-born casualties echoes this statistic. Of the 284 foreign-born lives lost in battle, 205, or 72.2 percent, were soldiers in the Army. Table 2 shows the breakdown of lives lost by foreign-born service members among the various military service divisions. Following the Army, the U.S. Marine Corps and Navy suffered 66 and 12 casualties of foreign-born military personnel, respectively. Only 0.7 percent of foreign-born military casualties in the period examined came from the U.S. Air Force.

Our figures also give a sense of the various levels of success that the branches of the American military have had in recruiting foreign-born service personnel in recent years. According to data from the U.S. Department of Defense, in fiscal year 2012, only 1.6 percent of new recruits to the U.S. Air Force were foreign-born, the lowest percent of any service branch. The U.S. Navy had the highest portion of immigrant recruits, at 4.1 percent of the total, followed by the U.S. Army at 3.9 percent.<sup>30</sup> Our data show that between September 2001 and the end of 2013, immigrant service members accounted for 5.2 percent

of all Navy casualties, and 4.3 percent of all Army casualties, thus overrepresented relative to their overall numbers in each branch.

Sgt. Pamela Osborne, who was born in Jamaica, is one foreign-born member who made her mark on the U.S. Army. Osborne moved to Miami at age 14 with two goals: to become a U.S. citizen and to serve her adopted country as a soldier in the military. She enlisted in 2001, shortly before September 11. “She loved what she did,” her husband has said. Even after being diagnosed with a medical condition that could have resulted in her leaving the military, she kept going. As she explained to her husband at the time, “I’m going to serve my country, to protect my country.”

Osborne passed away in the service of her fellow soldiers. On October 11, 2004, after spending the morning in church, Osborne headed out to deliver supplies to another enlisted service member and vehicle mechanic, Pvt. Anthony Monroe of Bismarck, North Dakota.<sup>31</sup> Both were killed when rocket fire hit their camp in Baghdad. “Sgt. Osborne was always ready to help soldiers,” one of her colleagues wrote on a tribute page after her death, “She was a credit to the United States, and I’m lucky to have known and served with her.”<sup>32</sup>

**TABLE 2**  
**FOREIGN-BORN MILITARY CASUALTIES BY BRANCH,**  
**SEPTEMBER 2001 - DECEMBER 2013**

BRANCH	A	B	C	D
NAVY	11	230	4.8%	3.9%
MARINES	66	1,468	4.5%	23.2%
ARMY	205	4,926	4.2%	72.2%
AIR FORCE	2	156	1.3%	0.7%
NATIONAL GUARD	0	29	0.0%	0.0%
TOTAL	284	6,809	4.2%	100.0%

A - FOREIGN-BORN CASUALTIES  
 B - TOTAL CASUALTIES  
 C - % OF BRANCH'S CASUALTIES THAT WERE FOREIGN-BORN  
 D - % OF FOREIGN-BORN CASUALTIES FROM BRANCH

## PART 4

### EXAMINING THE RANK REACHED BY FALLEN FOREIGN-BORN SOLDIERS

Of the immigrants who died in service to the U.S. Armed Forces, many were high-ranking service members in positions of leadership. Of the 284 foreign-born service members who died during the period we examined, 136 of them, or 47.9 percent, had reached the rank of E-5 or higher, the equivalent of a sergeant in the U.S. Army. Some 5.3 percent of the foreign-born service members who died in battle were officers. This included two fallen foreign-born service members who reached the rank of O-5, the equivalent of either lieutenant colonels in the Army, Marine Corps, or Air Force, or commanders in the U.S. Navy.

Achieving the rank of E-5 is an important accomplishment. At this level, a soldier is responsible for the training, development and mentorship of junior personnel. All those with a rank of sergeant or above are expected to set an example for their subordinates and at all times ensure their wellbeing. Promotion to a rank of E-5 or higher, unlike advancement in lower ranks, is based on competition. Consideration for this position weighs a variety of factors including: education, skill, physical fitness, and achievements attained throughout a soldier's career.

Army Sgt. 1st Class Tung Nguyen is one immigrant who died

**TABLE 3**  
**FOREIGN-BORN MILITARY CASUALTIES BY SERVICE RANK, SEPTEMBER 2001-DECEMBER 2013**

RANK	NUMBER	SHARE OF ALL FOREIGN-BORN CASUALTIES
E-1	4	1.4%
E-2	5	1.8%
E-3	55	19.4%
E-4	84	29.6%
E-5	65	22.9%
E-6	36	12.7%
E-7	15	5.3%
E-8	3	1.1%
E-9	2	0.7%
W-2	3	1.1%
O-1	1	0.4%
O-2	1	0.4%
O-3	7	2.5%
O-4	1	0.4%
O-5	2	0.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
TOTAL RANKED AT E-5 OR ABOVE	136	47.9%
TOTAL OFFICERS	15	5.3%

in service in recent years after a long and celebrated career in the U.S. Army. Nguyen joined the military shortly after graduating from high school. During his 20 years of service, Nguyen rose steadily through the ranks. In 1992, he qualified as a Green Beret, becoming a part of U.S. Army Special Forces, a prestigious unit designed for special and unconventional operations. He was given several other accolades as well, including two Meritorious Service Medals, two Army Commendation Medals, and four Army Achievement Medals.

Nguyen’s decision to serve led naturally from his experiences early in life. As a young boy living in South Vietnam, he was surrounded by a tradition of military service. He grew up hearing stories from the front lines of the Vietnam War, a battle in which many of Nguyen’s family members fought against communist forces. At the age of 11, Nguyen fled his native Vietnam, finding refuge and a stable home with a foster family in Tracy, California. Once there, his interest in serving his new country continued.

Nguyen died during a small arms fire in Iraq in 2006. Following his death Nguyen was awarded the Bronze Star, Purple Heart, Iraq Campaign Medal, and Combat Infantryman Badge posthumously. In his last conversation with his mother, while reflecting on his life, service, and accomplishments, Sergeant Nguyen continued to show a great level of dedication and gratitude to the United States. He ended the conversation thanking her for “letting him go to America.”

## CONCLUSION

This report documents the important contribution of foreign-born service members to the American conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Our analysis of publicly available data on military casualties since September 11, 2001, showed that foreign-born service member accounted for 4.3 percent of all military casualties in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars through the end of 2013, a figure almost equal to their overall representation in the U.S. Armed Forces. The immigrants who fought and died protecting the United States during those years came from diverse backgrounds and were often leaders in their fields. Immigrant service members who chose to dedicate their lives to ensuring the country's well-being supported every branch of the U.S. military. Many of these individuals did so with little public fanfare, often before they or their family members had been granted full citizenship by the country they served.

Looking forward, it is clear that the contributions of foreign-born soldiers should be included in discussions about immigration reform. Today, immigration reform advocates often point to the role that foreign-born individuals play in the U.S. economy as entrepreneurs, agricultural workers, and innovators. This report provides evidence that, despite the many limitations on who is eligible to join the military, immigrants make important contributions in the field of battle as well. Eliminating green card backlogs and providing more support to immi-

grant families trying to naturalize would be one way to honor the foreign-born veterans who have died serving our country. Such reforms could also improve American security by opening up military service to many new patriots eager to serve and contribute the valuable skills that will help keep our country safe—both in today's conflicts and into the future.

## METHODOLOGY

The data for this report was found through the online database, Honor the Fallen, from the Military Times. This source provided a list of every casualty dating from March 2003, the beginning of the Iraq War, to the present. Using the list of 6,810 names, we accessed publically available obituaries and casualty reports to ascertain the birthplace of the fallen soldiers. For some more difficult cases, additional data sources, such as U.S. Census records available through Ancestry.com, were used to determine birthplace.

In this report, foreign-born was defined as individuals born in a territory or circumstance in which they were not given U.S. citizenship at birth. Excluded from the foreign-born group were individuals born in American territories such as American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Northern Mariana Islands, and U.S. military bases outside of the continental United States. We also excluded individuals born abroad who were the children of U.S. citizens, and thus, able to access

citizenship shortly after birth. In an effort to be conservative in our findings, we counted individuals whose birthplace could not be determined in the native-born category.

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