

Asian American-Pacific Islander Heritage Month: Miyako Yahata Tanabe, PT

Miyako Yahata Tanabe, PT, 1936-2022

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Miyako Yahata was born to Japanese immigrant parents on October 16, 1936, in Honoka'a, a small town on the northern shore of the island of Hawaii, in what was then the Territory of Hawaii. She grew up attending local schools and was active in the Methodist Church in her community. After graduating high school, she worked in Chicago for a summer at the Free Methodist Publishing House. She stayed on the mainland for college and attended Baker University, a school in Kansas affiliated with the Methodist Church, becoming the first member of her family to attend college. She earned a BS in history from Baker in 1958.

Yahata joined the United States Air Force in 1960 and by that fall had been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant, when she returned to Chicago and entered Northwestern University's physical therapy program. She earned her certificate in physical therapy in 1961. After graduation, she began her PT work at Wilford Hall Medical Center at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, which was known for the large number of surgeries performed there and for conducting the physical exams and medical care for America's astronauts. While at Lackland she met Air Force officer Frazier "Steve" Newell, and they were married in April 1962. In 1964 they had a daughter, named Miyako after her mother, who would follow her parents into the military—she graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1986 and became the first Japanese American woman to achieve the rank of brigadier general in the US Army Reserves.



Tanabe with her daughter, Major General Miyako Schanely, September 23, 2017. From [JAVA Advocate](#) (Fall 2017): 20.

After the birth of her daughter, Miyako Newell retired from the Air Force with the rank of captain. The family moved to the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C., where she continued to work as a physical therapist in nursing homes and hospitals, including Cafritz Memorial Hospital in Washington. She also had her own private practice for a time. Newell was an active member of the American Legion and the Japanese American Veterans Association (JAVA); she served on JAVA's Board of Directors and its Executive Council throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

Newell retired in 2000 and took up several hobbies, including hula dancing and the hammer dulcimer. In 2001 she married Harry Tanabe, a fellow Japanese American veteran who had performed counterintelligence work in the Pacific during World War II. After his death she moved to Watertown, New York, to be closer to family. She died there on May 15, 2022, at age 85.



Portrait of Miyako Yahata from the Baker University *Centurion* yearbook, 1958. Via Ancestry.com.

Selected References

"Official Obituary of Miyako Y. Tanabe." *Bruce Funeral Homes*. May 16, 2022.

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