

## Historical Timeline of Sikhs in the U.S. Military

*The battle for civil rights is a long one, and many minority communities in the United States have struggled to achieve justice. What follows is a short timeline highlighting important markers in the Sikh American community's efforts to secure equal opportunity in the U.S. military.*

**1917** – [Bhagat Singh Thind](#) enlists in the U.S. Army during World War I. After the war, Thind challenged restrictive laws that prevented non-whites from attaining U.S. citizenship.

**1948** – As America struggles to end discrimination against African Americans, including segregation in the U.S. Armed Forces, President Harry Truman issues [Executive Order 9981](#), which states, "It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin."

**1981** – The U.S. Armed Forces abruptly limits religious expression in the U.S. military, and adopts a [ban](#) on Sikh articles of faith, preventing Sikh Americans from joining the military while wearing turbans and maintaining beards and unshorn hair.

**1986** – The U.S. Supreme Court upholds the U.S. military's [ban on Jewish yarmulkes](#) in the controversial *Goldman v. Weinberger* case.

**1987** – In response to the *Goldman* decision, Congress [passes a law](#) that allows military service members to wear neat and conservative religious apparel and asks the Department of Defense to develop regulations implementing the new law. The resulting regulations initially restrict the rights of Jewish service members but are ultimately [amended to protect the rights of Jewish service members](#). The regulations do not include protections for Sikh articles of faith.

**2009 – present** – In partnership with the law firm McDermott Will & Emery, the Sikh Coalition launches campaign to eliminate the ban on Sikh articles of faith in the U.S. Armed Forces. During this time, the Pentagon eliminates restrictions on the rights of women and gays and lesbians in the military but continues to limit the rights of devout Sikh Americans.

- [Letter to Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates](#), Jan. 2009
- [Letter to Inspector General of Army and DOD](#), Apr. 2009
- [43 Members of Congress Send Letter to DOD](#), Aug. 2009
- [6 U.S. Senators Send Letter to DOD](#), Aug. 2009
- [Army Accepts Maj. Kalsi](#), Oct. 2009
- [Army Accepts Capt. Rattan](#), Dec. 2009
- [Capt. Rattan Graduates from Army Training](#), Mar. 2010

- [Army Accepts Cpl. Lamba](#), Aug. 2010
  - [Maj. Kalsi Graduates from Army Training](#), Sept. 2010
  - [Cpl. Lamba Graduates from Army Training](#), Nov. 2010
  - [Maj. Kalsi Receives Bronze Star Medal](#), Aug. 2011
  - [Capt. Rattan Receives Army Commendation Medal](#), Sept. 2011
  - [Maj. Kalsi Testifies at U.S. Commission on Civil Rights](#), May 2013
  - [Cpl. Lamba Promoted to Rank of Army Corporal](#), Sept. 2013
  - [U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Sends Letter to DOD](#), Dec. 2013
  - [Maj. Kalsi Speaks at Congressional Briefing](#), Jan. 2014
  - [105 Members of Congress Send Letter to DOD](#), Mar. 2014
  - [New Army Rule Eliminates A Hurdle To Sikh Service](#), May 2015
  - [Progress For Ending Religious Discrimination in U.S. Military](#), June 2015
  - [27 Generals Demand Military End Religious Discrimination](#), Nov. 2015
  - [Sikh Receives Temporary Military Accommodation in Landmark Case](#), Dec. 2015
  - [Decorated Sikh Soldier Sues, Earns Legal Victory](#), March 2016
  - [New Lawsuit in Fight To End Religious Discrimination](#), March 2016
  - [CPT Singh Receives Long-Term Accommodation in U.S. Army](#), April 2016
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