

## HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT: SIKH SERVICE IN THE U.S. MILITARY

**1917** First documented observant Sikh soldier, SGT Bhagat Singh Thind, serves in the U.S. Army during World War I.

**1948** As America struggles to end discrimination against African Americans, President Harry Truman desegregates the U.S. Armed Forces and mandates equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the military without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin.

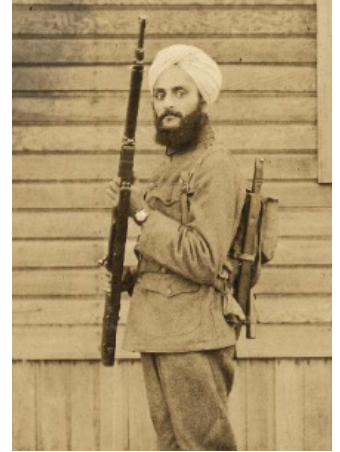
**1960-1975** Observant Sikh American service members serve in the Vietnam War.

**1981** The U.S. Army abruptly limits religious expression in the U.S. military by banning facial hair. This prevents Sikh Americans, Orthodox Jews, Muslims, and others from joining the military while wearing religiously mandated articles of faith and maintaining facial hair 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** Congress passes a law that allows military service members to wear religious apparel. While the regulations permit Jewish service members to wear yarmulkes under military headwear, they do not include protections for other religions to wear their articles of faith, despite evidence in the Congressional Record suggesting that Sikhs and other religions were to be accommodated by the law.

**1993** A bipartisan majority in Congress overwhelmingly passes the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). RFRA prevents the government from substantially burdening a person's free exercise of religion, "unless there is a compelling governmental interest that is exercised in the least restrictive means." Despite the law, barriers for Sikhs and other religious minorities serving in the U.S. military remain in place.



*Bhagat Singh Thind*