



NATIVE AMERICANS

in the UNITED STATES NAVY

They strengthen the spirit of our Navy every day through their pride, devotion, honor, and wisdom. —VICE ADMIRAL GERRY HOEWING, CHIEF OF NAVAL PERSONNEL, NOVEMBER 2003

AMERICA'S
NAVY
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Since 1776, when George Washington began enlisting them for his fledgling Army, Navy, and Marines, Native Americans have contributed their fighting spirit and warrior ethos to help U.S. military forces defend America's national interests.



Many Native American seamen served on Continental and state vessels during the War of Independence. During the Civil War, as many as 20,000 Native Americans contributed to Union and Confederate forces as auxiliary troops both on land and at sea.

◀ *Opposite page:* Aviation Electronics Technician 3rd Class Randy Whitehorse troubleshoots equipment on an F/A-18C Hornet assigned to the Sidewinders of Strike Fighter Squadron 86 aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Nimitz* (CVN 68), November 2009.

Left: One of the first Native American sailors, William Terrill Bradby, a Pamunkey of Chickahominy (Lumbee) ancestry, served on “water duty” aboard several Union ships and as a torpedo boat pilot during the Civil War.

Despite being ineligible for the draft in 1917, up to 15,000 Native Americans enlisted and fought valiantly in the military, including the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, during World War I. In 1919 Congress awarded full citizenship to all Native Americans who had served in the Great War. Their valor and patriotism contributed to the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 (also known as the Snyder Act), which granted full citizenship and the right to vote to all Native Americans.

After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on 7 December 1941, a remarkable number of Native Americans enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces to defend their homeland. Tom Oxendine, a North Carolina Cherokee, became the first Native American to complete Navy flight training. He flew in dozens of major fleet engagements as part of the main striking force in the South Pacific and earned a Distinguished Flying Cross for rescuing a downed pilot while under enemy fire.

After becoming the first Native American to graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy (in 1917), Joseph James “Jocko” Clark, an Oklahoma Cherokee, achieved fame as a pioneer in naval aviation and carrier-attack strategy. Promoted to rear admiral during World War II, Clark earned renown as a carrier captain in the Atlantic and Pacific and as a task group



▲ Above: Rear Adm. Joseph James Clark, Commander, Carrier Division Four, aboard USS *Philippine Sea* (CV 47), 1949.

Right: The Space Shuttle *Endeavour* in orbit against the backdrop of Cook Strait, New Zealand, approaches the International Space Station with Cmdr. John Herrington aboard (see sidebar).





JOHN BENNETT HERRINGTON

After John Bennett Herrington, an Oklahoma Chickasaw, dropped out of college for low grades, two mentors guided him along a path to becoming the first Native American astronaut. One motivated him to go back to school and earn a bachelor of science degree in mathematics; the other persuaded him to pursue his dream of becoming an aviator by joining the Navy. After receiving a commission from the Aviation Officer Candidate School, Herrington soared from patrol plane pilot and instructor to test pilot. In 1998, aided by a master's in aeronautical engineering, he became the first Native American graduate of NASA's training program. Having logged more than 3,300 flight hours in more than 30 aircraft types, Commander Herrington launched on Space Shuttle *Endeavour* to the International Space Station on 23 November 2002, bringing with him some eagle feathers symbolic of his American Indian heritage. On this mission he became the first Native American to walk in space.

“If my heritage as a Chickasaw Indian and . . . what I do here will help motivate somebody who might not otherwise think they could achieve their dreams . . . that’s a good thing.”

◀ Cmdr. John Herrington at the Kennedy Space Center, Fla., November 2003.

commander in the Pacific. Nicknamed the “Patton of the Pacific” because of his flamboyant and daring actions in major World War II battles, this first Native American rear admiral made famous the slogan, “Get things done yesterday, today’s too late.” During his service as the Seventh Fleet commander in the Korean War, Admiral Clark’s innovative “Cherokee Strikes,” a stratagem for fast-carrier air support, boosted the morale of troops at the front line. The Navy promoted Clark to full admiral upon his retirement.

Another Oklahoma Cherokee, Commander Ernest E. Evans, was awarded a Medal of Honor posthumously for his “valiant fighting spirit, indomitable courage, and brilliant professional skill” as the commanding officer of USS *Johnston* (DD 557) during the Battle off Samar, Philippines, on 25 October 1944. Although severely wounded early in the action, Evans relentlessly attacked a heavily armed Japanese force to protect the carrier escorts of his task unit and keep the enemy ships from joining the ongoing Battle of Leyte Gulf. *Johnston* sank near the end of the fierce three-hour battle, and more than half of her crew was lost, including Evans. The heroic performance of *Johnston* and the other ships of her task unit made the Japanese believe they were facing a much larger force, causing them to turn away.



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Top: Lt. Cmdr. Ernest E. Evans Jr., commanding officer of the destroyer USS *Johnston* (DD 557), speaks at the ship’s commissioning in 1943. Armed with nothing larger than 5-inch guns and torpedoes, *Johnston*, center, attacked a superior Japanese force in the Philippines in 1944.



Bottom: The fleet ballistic missile submarine USS *Maryland* (SSBN 738) transits the Atlantic Ocean during its 55th strategic deterrent patrol in 2010. Capt. Jeffrey Trussler, an Oklahoma Cherokee, commanded the submarine from 2003 to 2006 (see sidebar).





JEFFREY TRUSSLER

Aided by a bachelor of science degree in mechanical engineering and a master's degree in managerial economics, Jeffrey Trussler, an Oklahoma Cherokee, was commissioned at Officer Candidate School in 1985. In 2008 Captain Trussler became Commander, Task Force 69 for the Sixth Fleet in Naples, Italy, overseeing all submarine and undersea warfare operations in the Mediterranean Sea. The former commanding officer of USS *Maryland* (SSBN 738), Captain Trussler served on three other submarines, completed the Nuclear Propulsion Engineer certification, joined the Pacific Fleet board that inspects nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers, and did two tours with the Navy Personnel Command. In 2006 he received an award from the Naval Submarine League for "Leadership and Excellence in Command." One of his leadership principles is: "You have to play the hand you're dealt"; that is, find out how to get the most from your team.

"If there's one thing I've learned in my 24 years of service it's that the success of an organization is based on its people."

◀ Capt. Jeffrey Trussler, c. 2008.



◀ *Far left: Corporal Henry Bake Jr., left, and Private 1st Class George H. Kirk, both Navajo code talkers, operate a portable radio set from a jungle clearing on the South Pacific island of Bougainville, December 1943.*

Left: Maj. Gregory Boyington commanded Marine Fighting Squadron 214 in World War II.

In nearly every island-hopping assault the Marines launched in the Pacific during 1942–1945, Navajo code talkers transmitted messages by telephone and radio in their native language—a code that baffled the Japanese. The code talkers’ finest hour came at Iwo Jima, where they directed naval gunfire and close air support to Marines on the island. U.S. military commanders credited the Navajos with saving the lives of countless troops and helping win at least five island battles.

Another Marine, naval aviator Major Gregory Boyington, an Idaho Sioux, shot down 26 enemy aircraft over the Solomon Islands during a four-month period in

1943–1944. After being shot down and surviving 20 months in Japanese prison camps, he received the Medal of Honor and Navy Cross.

More than 44,000 Native Americans fought with distinction during World War II, including 1,910 in the Navy and 874 in the Marines. Several dozen Native American women served in noncombat roles in the women’s reserve of the Navy known as WAVES. Between 10,000 and 15,000 Native Americans, including World War II veterans and new recruits, fought communist aggression in the Korean War (1950–1953).



SARAH SELF-KYLER

Lieutenant Commander Sarah Self-Kyler, a Choctaw, began her naval career at Annapolis, graduating in 1999. “At the Naval Academy, I was challenged in all facets of day-to-day life to constantly improve and lead both in the hall, on the athletic fields, and in various clubs,” she said in 2006. “USNA is truly a leadership classroom. In the Fleet, my opportunities have been exhilarating. I have served in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, participated in numerous multinational exercises, navigated countless seas, and traveled in 13 countries.” Following a successful tour at U.S. Third Fleet, in 2010 Self-Kyler became the public affairs officer for the aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise* (CVN 65) and the Carrier Strike Group 12 staff.

“It is our many cultures that make our Navy and our country so great. We each share our values and our strengths to defend a common freedom.”

◀ Lt. Cmdr. Sarah Self-Kyler, on the occasion of her reenlistment on 5 May 2009 at the Cabrillo National Monument in San Diego, Calif.



During the Vietnam War (1965–1975), about 41,500 Native Americans, more than 90 percent of them volunteers, fought courageously. Among those awarded Medals of Honor were two South Carolina Cherokees: Boatswain's Mate 1st Class James Elliott Williams, who as a river patrol boat commander led his PBRs in battle against the Viet Cong in South Vietnam's Mekong Delta; and Engineman 2nd Class Michael Edwin Thornton, a Navy SEAL, who rescued his severely wounded superior officer after carrying out an intelligence mission into enemy-held territory in the Mekong Delta.

In the early 1970s, as the Navy and Marine Corps expanded recruiting and equal opportunity goals for minorities and women, the number of Native American women entering the military grew. In 1981 Sandra L. Hinds became the first Native American woman to

◀ *Upper left:* Medal of Honor recipient Boatswain's Mate 1st Class James E. Williams was one of the Navy's most highly decorated veterans. During a three-hour battle on 31 October 1966, his outnumbered river patrol destroyed or damaged 65 Viet Cong vessels, routing the enemy force. The Navy honored Williams by naming a guided missile destroyer, USS *James E. Williams* (DDG 95), upper right, after him in 2004.

Lower right: Yeoman 2nd Class Verna Tabet Fender, a Native American from Isetla Pueblo Reservation, N.M., served in the Navy from 1954 to 1957.

Lower left: Lt. Michael E. Thornton received the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions as an engineman 2nd class (SEAL) in the Mekong Delta of South Vietnam on 31 October 1972. After a battle at an enemy-occupied river base, Thornton rescued his unconscious lieutenant, carried him to the water, and pulled him by his lifejacket seaward for two hours until a Vietnamese navy boat rescued them.



MICHAEL L. HOLMES

With a bachelor of science degree in mathematics, Michael L. Holmes, a North Carolina Lumbee, entered the Navy through the Aviation Officer Candidate School and was commissioned an ensign in 1973. At the time of his retirement from active duty as a two-star admiral in 2005, with more than 6,500 flight hours, Holmes was the highest ranking Native American in the armed services. During his 32-year naval career, he commanded two patrol squadrons and the patrol and reconnaissance forces of both the Pacific and Atlantic fleets. In his last tour he served as Commander, Patrol and Reconnaissance Group, responsible for manning, training, and equipping 17 patrol squadrons.

“Our nation is one of diverse people, cultures, and religions. Our strength lies in our similarities and in our differences. This common heritage is what makes America great.”

◀ Rear Adm. Michael Holmes speaks to Patrol Wing 11 personnel at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla., August 2005.

graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md. The new Native American recruits of the next two decades saw combat duty in Grenada, Panama, Somalia, and the Arabian Gulf.

By 2007 there were at least 165,200 American Indian and Alaska Native (Eskimo or Aleut) veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces, a proportion triple that of the non-Native American population. The reasons behind this disproportionate contribution are deeply rooted in

traditional Native American culture, which venerates the warrior spirit and love of country and cherishes the values of commitment, courage, honor, pride, strength, and wisdom—all military values as well.

These few profiles and images represent a fraction of Native American success stories in the Navy and Marines. Currently, more than 15,000 active-duty, reserve, and civilian members of the Navy's total force declare themselves American Indian or Alaska Native.



◀ *Left:* Midshipman Sandra Hinds, Class of 1981, was the first Native American woman to graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy. The Class of 1981 also included the first four Latina graduates.

Center: Naval Test Parachutist Misty Dawn Warren, a Choctaw, attended Basic Airborne School at Fort Benning in October 1998 and earned her Basic Parachutist Jump Wings. NASA selected her to test equipment fitted for female astronauts. She also participated in NASA's Space Shuttle Recovery Systems Surveillance Test Program in Houston, Tex.

Right: Chief Thomas "Two Feathers" Lewis, of the Meherrin Tribe, speaks to guests at the American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month celebration at Naval Station Norfolk, Va., November 2008.



KENNETH VARGAS

With a Choctaw mother and a Peruvian father, Kenneth Vargas is both Native American and Hispanic American. A former Marine, he became a Navy reservist while in college. After graduation, he gained his commission in 2000 and later earned a master's degree in engineering from the University of Texas, Austin. A citizen of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Vargas served as a Seabee Combat Warfare Officer and in 2009 was selected for promotion to the rank of lieutenant commander in the Civil Engineering Corps. Since 1996 he has been an active member of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society that works towards increasing American Indian and Alaska Native representation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

“Our way to serve our warrior spirit is to join the armed forces.”

- ◀ Lt. Kenneth Vargas presents the American flag next to the Eagle Staff at the opening of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society's national convention in Portland, Ore., October 2009.



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Above: Each November the Navy sponsors a variety of cultural celebrations to honor American Indian and Alaska Native heritage. Left to right, Chief Quartermaster Eileen Squires, of Iroquois and Sioux ancestry, performs a Northern Fancy Shawl dance at Naval Support Activity Mid-South, Millington, Tenn., 2009; Command Master Chief Carl L. Dassance, of the Ojibwa tribe, beats a ceremonial drum aboard the aircraft carrier *USS John F. Kennedy* (CV 67), 2006; Fireman Apprentice Andrea Barney says a Navajo prayer aboard the aircraft carrier *USS Harry S. Truman* (CVN 75) in the Arabian Gulf, 2004.

In the 21st century the Navy's leadership remains strongly committed to diversity. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Gary Roughead declared that the Navy "must embrace the demographic changes of tomorrow, and build a Navy that always reflects our country's makeup."

A person who is motivated and hardworking, and has the honor, courage, and commitment to serve, can achieve his or her dreams, regardless of race, creed, color, or ethnic origin.



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Upper left: Command Master Chief Jim Fairbanks, a Chippewa, right, of Naval Construction Battalion Center, Gulfport, Miss., gives Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Rick West a tour of the Seabee Heritage Center, April 2009.

Upper right: Force Master Chief Charles L. Dassance, an Ojibwa, assigned to Network Warfare Command, speaks with Sailors attending individual augmented training, December 2008.

Right: A Seahawk helicopter returns to the dry cargo and ammunition ship USNS *Sacagawea* (T-AKE 2), supporting the Haitian earthquake relief effort in January 2010. The Military Sealift Command ship is named in honor of the Lemhi Shoshone woman who acted as guide and interpreter for the Lewis and Clark expedition into the U.S. Northwest, 1804–1806.



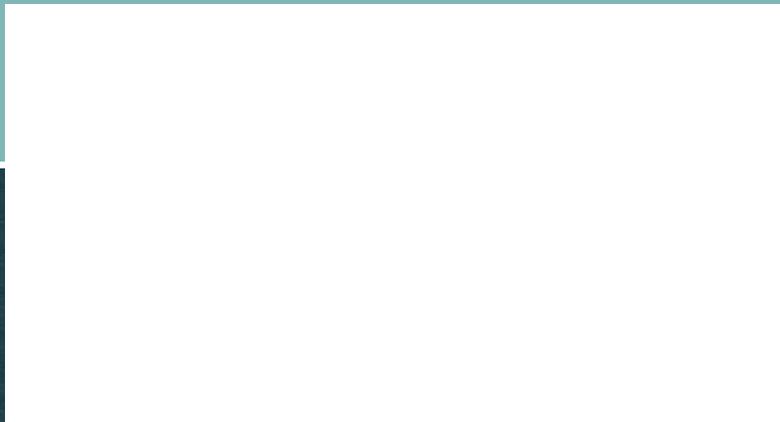
Front cover: Aviation Structural Mechanic 3rd Class Angelina M. Fernandez, a native of Russian Mission, Alaska, works in the hydraulics shop aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise* (CVN 65), October 2010. Fernandez's father is a Yupik Eskimo and her mother is of the Raven Tribe of the Tlingit Indians.

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