Native Americans in the United States Navy

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Commander John B. Herrington, a Chickasaw, shown here at the Kennedy Space Center, became the first Native American in space on 22 November 2002 on board Space Shuttle *Endeavour*.

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.

Freedom's Warrior, American Indian,

a World War II lithograph by Charles Wilson

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.

Joseph James “Jocko” Clark, a Cherokee, was the first Native American to graduate from the United States Naval Academy (1917) and to achieve the rank of full admiral. Clark earned renown as a pioneer in naval aviation and carrier-attack strategy, having served in World War II as a task group commander and in the Korean War as Commander Seventh Fleet.

Medal of Honor recipient (posthumous) Lt. Cmdr. Ernest E. Evans Jr., a half-Cherokee and one-quarter Creek from Oklahoma, vowed at the commissioning of USS *Johnston* (DD 557) at Seattle, Wash., in October 1943, “I intend to go in harm's way....I have a fighting ship and I will never retreat from an enemy force.”

A year later, Cmdr. Ernest Evans led USS *Johnston*, above, and joined the task unit's relentless attacks against a heavily armed Japanese force in the Battle off Samar, Philippines, on 25 October 1944. The heroic performance made the Japanese believe they were facing a much larger force, causing them to turn away. *Johnston* took a pounding during the 3-hour battle and sank; more than half the crew, including Evans, was lost.

Navajo code talkers—seen here marching in formation at Camp Pendleton, Calif., in the early 1940s—took part in nearly every amphibious assault of the Pacific war from 1942 to 1945. They transmitted messages in their native language, a code the Japanese failed to break.

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

Naval aviator Maj. Gregory Boyington, USMCR, an Idaho Sioux, received the Medal of Honor and Navy Cross for shooting down 26 Japanese aircraft in a 4-month period of World War II ending on 3 January 1944. After being shot down himself later that day, he survived 20 months in Japanese prison camps.

Yeoman 2nd Class Verna Fender, a Native American from Isleta Pueblo Reservation, N.M., served in the Navy from 1954 to 1957. She suffered serious injury during basic training at Bainbridge, Md., but after physical rehabilitation, completed her training and a 3-year enlistment in San Diego, Calif.

Boatswain's Mate 1st Class James Elliott Williams, a South Carolina Cherokee, received the Medal of Honor for heroic action as a river patrol boat commander in South Vietnam's Mekong Delta on 31 October 1966. He led his outnumbered PBRs in a fierce battle against the Viet Cong, destroying or damaging 65 enemy boats.

The guided missile destroyer USS *James E. Williams* (DDG 95), seen here shortly after commissioning in December 2004, is named after one the Navy's most decorated veterans, Boatswain's Mate 1st Class James Elliott Williams.

Lt. Michael Edwin Thornton, a South Carolina Cherokee, received the Medal of Honor for his heroic action as an engineman 2nd class (SEAL) in the Mekong Delta on 31 October 1972. After a battle near an enemy-occupied river base, he rescued his seriously wounded superior officer through a hail of fire and swam with him to safety.

Misty Dawn Warren, an Oklahoma Choctaw, was the 8th woman to be designated a Naval Test Parachutist. She also tested equipment fitted for NASA's female astronauts and supported NASA's Space Shuttle Recovery Systems Surveillance Test Program in Houston, Tex.

Sailors on board USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN 71) perform various checks to ensure the readiness of an F/A–18 Hornet at sea in December 2001. Native Americans on the carrier include Master Chief Fire Controlman Grove A. Calvert (Lakota), Air Traffic Controller 3rd Class Theda Roulston (Creek and Seminole), and Airman Emmelene Whitehorse (Navajo).

Midshipman Sandra L. Hinds, Class of 1981, was the first Native American woman to graduate from the United States Academy.

Airman Christopher W. Soce, a VAQ-131 Plane Captain and American Indian from Arizona, displays his Native American nose art while serving on the front lines, monitoring and enforcing Iraq's 37th Parallel during the final days of Operation Southern Watch in 2003.

Each November the Navy sponsors a variety of cultural celebrations to honor American Indian and Alaska Native heritage. Chief Quartermaster Eileen Squires, left, of Iroquois and Sioux ancestry performs a Northern Fancy Shawl dance at Naval Support Activity Mid-South, Millington, Tenn., 2009.

Rear Adm. Michael L. Holmes, a Lumbee from North Carolina, was the highest ranking Native American in the Armed Forces, until he retired from active duty in 2005. Here, as Commander, Patrol and Reconnaissance Group, he speaks to Patrol Wing 11 personnel at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla., August 2005.

Command Master Chief Carl L. Dassance, right, an Ojibwa, beats a ceremonial drum during the American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage celebration on board aircraft carrier USS *John F. Kennedy* (CV 67) in November 2006.

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

Interior Communications Electrician 2nd Class Alexander Manygoats explains the significance and symbolism of a Native American marriage basket at the 2006 American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month event on board USS *Carl Vinson* (CNV 70) at Northrop Grumman Newport News Shipyard.

Culinary Specialist 2nd Class Everett Jole, a New Mexico Navajo and a Seabee with 15 years in the U.S. Navy, takes care of supply stores for the Seabee battalion in Iraq, May 2008. He is a nephew of Private 1st Class Wilsie H. Bitsie, a deceased Navajo Marine code talker.

The Military Sealift Command dry cargo and ammunition ship USNS *Sacagawea* (T-AKE 2) moors at Naval Station Norfolk, May 2007. Her namesake is the Lemhi Shoshone woman who acted as guide and interpreter for the Lewis and Clark expedition into the U.S. Northwest region.

Capt. Jeffrey Trussler, an Oklahoma Cherokee, is Commander Task Force 69 for the U.S. Sixth Fleet in Naples, Italy, overseeing submarine and undersea warfare operations in the Mediterranean Sea.

Captain Trussler's career included command of the fleet ballistic missile submarine USS *Maryland* (SSBN 738). "If there's one thing I've learned in my 24 years of service," he said in 2008, "it's that the success of an organization is based on its people."

With a Choctaw mother and a Peruvian father, Lt. Kenneth Vargas is both Native American and Hispanic American. He served as a Seabee Combat Warfare Officer and in 2009 was selected for promotion to lieutenant commander in the Civil Engineer Corps. “Our way to serve our warrior spirit,” he said, “is to join the Armed Forces.” Here he presents the Stars and Stripes next to the Eagle Staff, opening the American Indian Science and Engineering Society’s national conference in October 2009.

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

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

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.

Lt. Cmdr. Sarah Self-Kyler, a Choctaw, began her naval career at the U.S. Naval Academy, Class of 1999. After completing a successful tour at U.S. Third Fleet, in 2010 she became the public affairs officer for the aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise* (CVN 65) and the Carrier Strike Group 12 staff.

Jubilant graduates of the United States Naval Academy Class of 2010 keep the “hat toss” tradition alive, marking an end to their graduation and commissioning ceremonies in Annapolis, Md. The class included 28 Native Americans.