

# COUNCIL FIRE

## Council for First Inhabitants Rights and Equality

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### **Native American Military Service**

#### **Liberty and Justice for all**

Native men and women have long fought and died to defend this nation – and those words.

Their history of military service is the highest percentage of any ethnicity. They have served with honor for over two hundred years from George Washington and the Revolutionary War to today's war in Iraq.

Revolutionary War - Some Native American tribes served with the colonists and others with the British who promised to stop expansion of the settlers.

War of 1812 - During the War of 1812, Native Americans fought with American forces as well as with British troops. They were looking for a way to stop the growth and development of their homeland as settlers continued to move into their homeland.

Civil War - Known for their skill as trackers, the Union Army was quick to enlist Indians. Initially, three units were created to secure the Indian Territory, and then they were recruited as scouts. The Confederacy also recruited Indians to fulfill the same job for their side.

Lt. Col. Ely Parker, a Tonawanda Seneca chief, was a trained engineer who served as a Union officer. He became President Ulysses S. Grant's military secretary and the first Indian to be appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

Spanish American War - Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders recruited Native Americans to fight in Cuba during the Spanish American War. When General John J. Pershing went to Mexico after Pancho Villa during the early 20th century, he had Native American scouts as part of his troops.

Four Native American Catholic Sisters from South Dakota worked as nurses for the War Department during the Spanish American War (1898). The sisters were originally assigned to a military hospital at Jacksonville, Florida, but were then transferred to Havana, Cuba.

WWI - Although they were not yet citizens (Citizenship Act, 1924), more than 12,000 Native Americans volunteered to serve during WWI. Four men from the 142nd Infantry of the 36th Texas-Oklahoma National Guard were awarded France's Croix de Guerre and others were awarded the Church War Cross for courage. Toward the end of WWI, eight Choctaw Indians in the same unit took over field communications and, although surrounded by the German army, were able to send tactical messages in their native language - the famous Navajo Code-Talkers.

Fourteen Native American women served as members of the Army Nurse Corp, two of them overseas.

**Council FIRE isn't asking for a handout to Native communities  
We are standing up because these communities have earned it!**

WWII - Native Americans were eligible for the draft but instead enlisted for military duty in record numbers. More than 44,500 served in the European and Pacific arenas, "a greater per-capita rate than any other ethnic group."

By using the Navajo language to transmit sensitive strategic plans, troop strength, defensive coordination, and other information, the military plans remained secret. More than 400 Code Talkers were deployed throughout the Pacific from Guadalcanal to Okinawa. In the European Theater, seventeen Comanche code-talkers were part of the Army Signal Corps. "U.S. servicemen were fortunate that the attempt to replace the Navajo language with English did not succeed.

Here is a sample of the code system:

English Word	Navaho Word	Meaning
Corps	Din-neh-ih	Clan
Switchboard	Ya-ih-e-tih-ih	Central
Dive Bomber	Gini	Chicken Hawk
Torpedo Plane	Tas-chizzie	Swallow
Observation Plane	Me-s-jah	Owl
Bomber	Jay-sho	Buzzard
Germany	Besh-be-cha-he	Iron Hat

The code talkers are strongly associated with the Navajo, however it was pioneered by the Cherokee and Choctaw Indians during World War I. In World War II the Lakota, Meskwaki, and Comanche soldiers also served in this capacity – with extreme valor and sacrifice.

Nearly 800 Native American women served during WWII as medical or technical support staff.

Korean War - Experienced veterans from WWII and new recruits accepted the call to fight communist aggression in Korea. It is estimated that 10,000-15,000 Native Americans served.

Vietnam War - More than 50,000 Native Americans (ninety percent volunteers) served in the Vietnam War, and ninety percent (90%) of them were volunteers.

Gulf War - Approximately 3,000 Native American served during Operation Desert Storm.

Iraq War and Afghanistan - The first female soldier killed in Iraq was Hopi Indian Lori Piestewa. She is believed to be the first Native American woman to die in combat for her country. Piestewa died of injuries sustained when her convoy was attacked in 2003. Piestewa and five others are featured in "Voices," a new exhibit at the Women's Memorial highlighting and honoring Native American women warriors who have served their country.

is given for military heroism "above and beyond the call of duty." Five Native Americans were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor during the Twentieth Century, and Twelve more during the Nineteenth Century. At the end of the twentieth century, there were 190,000 Native American veterans.

Because none of the treaties ever made with the Indians has been kept by the United States government, people may wonder why Native Americans would choose to fight for a nation that has treated them in such a dishonorable way. Yet Native Americans consider themselves as part of their tribe AND part of America

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