

EDITORIAL

Our Illustrious Warriors

By Rick Runningbear



Those of us of Native heritage can be proud of the bravery of our ancestor and contemporary warriors. It has always been part of Native culture to show resolve and courage when defending the family and people at large against enemies.

The historic Cherokee warriors were not limited to men. There were some brave and capable women who went into battle with the male warriors. A good example of this is the case "Nanyehi" (Nancy Ward).

Nancy Ward was the last of the "Beloved Women" of the Cherokee. Born in 1738 she was a warrior along side her husband, Kingfisher, in the battle of Taliwa against the Muscogee tribe. He was killed in the battle, but she picked up his weapon and pursued the enemy and helped spur on the other Cherokee warriors to victory. Because of her courage she was given a place of honor in the tribal council and had great respect and influence from then on, both with her own people and the non-native settlers.

In more modern times, since the Civil War, Cherokees and other Natives have distinguished themselves for their courage in battle. They fought in both World Wars, the Korean War, the Viet Nam war, and more currently the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Although the story if Ira Hayes is sad in its outcome (he died young of alcoholism) he was adulated by many for his part in raising the flag in the heat of battle on the summit of Iwo Jima. He was driven down the streets in parades and visited the White House. He was a Pima Indian from the dry lands of Arizona.

In the World Wars, Navajo and Choctaw Natives were "code talkers". They were able to assist in the transmission of secret messages among different fighting units of the army, using their Native tongues and the enemy was never able to decipher this code.

Private First Class Joseph Oklahombi, a Choctaw Native, was a World War 1 hero. He singlehandedly stormed a German position containing more than 50 machine guns and heavier weapons. He held it for 4 days under a constant barrage of gas and explosives. When he returned to U.S. lines through 200 yards of barbed wired and continuous shellfire, he brought back 171 prisoners!

Major Lee Gilstrop of Oklaholma, trained 2000 Indians for the war. He stated: "The Indian is the best damn soldier in the Army! Their talents include bayonet fighting, marksmanship, scouting and patrolling. These warriors take to tough training like otters to water, their ancestors invented it!"

Over 25,000 American Indians served with distinction in Europe and the Pacific Theater in WWII. Six of these received the Congressional Medal Of Honor. Two of these were Cherokees: Lt. Jack c. Montgomery and Pfc. John N. Reese, Jr. Also there were Lt. Ernest Childers, a Muscogee, Lt. Van Barfoot, a Choctaw, Navy Commander Ernest Edwin Evans, a Pawnee, and Staff Sgt. John R. Crews a Choctaw. Another 34

Natives earned Distinguished Flying Crosses and 51 earned Silver Stars.

Cherokees and other Natives prefer to live in peace. But war has always been a reality, and historically, even before Native Americans were granted U.S. citizenship in 1924, many fought along side of U.S. soldiers to protect freedom.

We prefer to walk the White Path of peace. Sometimes we are called to walk the Red Path of war. Both paths call for integrity and courage. To walk the Peace Path can be as difficult to Walk the War Path. In a world filled with turmoil, it is a challenge to keep your heart filled with peaceful thoughts and intentions.

Yes, we are justly proud of our ancestors who distinguished themselves and those who paid the ultimate price in times of war. We can also hold our heads high as we consider those of our leaders who have led and guided us during times of peace.

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