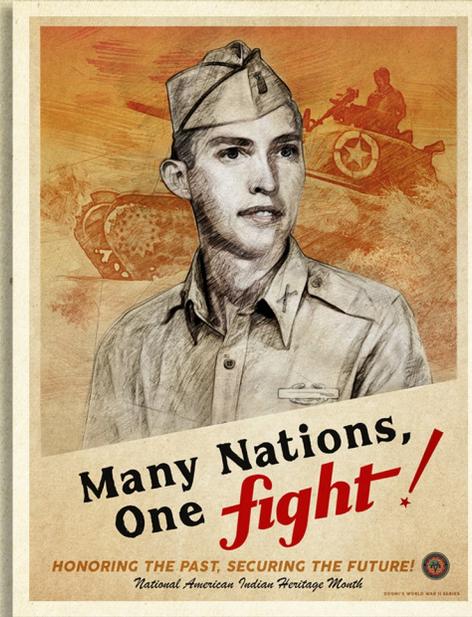


CULTURAL
AWARENESS

OBSERVANCE

NATIONAL AMERICAN INDIAN HERITAGE MONTH



FACTS

The Department of Defense joins the nation in paying tribute to American Indians and Alaskan Natives who demonstrated selfless service and sacrifice in the U.S. Armed Forces: Army, Army Air Forces, Marine Corps, Navy, Coast Guard, National Guard, and the home front during World War II.

American Indians and Alaska Natives, served in overwhelming numbers after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Forty-four thousand of a total Native American population of 350,000 saw active duty. Over 6,000 Alaska Natives served in the Alaska Territorial Guard. For their service they earned many distinguished medals and honors including: Purple Hearts, Distinguished Flying Crosses, Bronze Stars, Silver Stars, Air Medals, Distinguished Service Crosses, and three Congressional Medals of Honor—the highest military award granted in the country.

One of America's most acclaimed WWII combat units was the 45th Infantry Division, known as the Thunderbirds for their distinctive insignia. They saw 511 days of combat, and fought at Salerno, Anzio, St. Maxine, and Alsace, crossed the Rhine, helped take Munich, and liberated the Nazis' infamous Dachau death camp.

Many American Indians served in the 45th, including three who received the Medal of Honor: Jack Montgomery (Cherokee), Ernest Childers (Muscogee [Creek]), and Van T. Barfoot (Choctaw).

In addition to the large number of men who took part in the war, there were many Native women who served in the Armed Forces as members of the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), WACS (Women Army Corps), and Army Nurse Corps.

On the home front an estimated 40,000 Indians left their reservations for the very first time and sought jobs in the defense industry. Women took over many of the roles that the men previously handled becoming farmers, mechanics, lumberjacks, delivery personnel, and other jobs needed to be handled on the home front.

"Our debt to the heroic men and valiant women in the service of our country can never be repaid. They have earned our undying gratitude. America will never forget their sacrifices."

PRESIDENT HARRY S. TRUMAN