

# NATIONAL AMERICAN INDIAN HERITAGE MONTH

November



# **75<sup>TH</sup> WORLD WAR II ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION PROGRAM**

The Department of Defense joins the nation in paying tribute to American Indians and Alaskan Natives who demonstrated selfless service and sacrifice in the Armed Forces and on the home front during World War II.

This presentation highlights American Indians and Alaskan Native military service in WWII, specifically the Tlingit code talkers, the Thunderbirds, Colonel Van T. Barfoot, and finally contributions on the home front by Mary G. Ross.

# MILITARY SERVICE DURING WORLD WAR II

American Indians and Alaska Natives served in large numbers after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Forty-four thousand from a total Native American population of 350,000 saw active duty.

Over 6,000 Alaska Natives served in the Alaska Territorial Guard.



# MILITARY SERVICE

In addition to the large number of men who took part in the war, many Native American women 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

On the home front, an estimated 40,000 American Indian men and women sought to serve their country, and they left their reservations to seek jobs in the defense industry.

Additionally, many bought treasury stamps and war bonds and made donations to the Red Cross. In fact, it is estimated American Indians bought approximately \$50 million in war bonds.

# CODE TALKER TRIBES

Navajo code talkers have long been recognized for the crucial part they played in WWII.

Until very recently, no one knew that Alaskan Tlingit code talkers used the Tlingit language in transmitting sensitive messages as well. It was another code that the enemy was never able to crack. Even the families of the Tlingit code talkers did not know of their secret service.

# CODE TALKERS



In November 2013, Congress awarded silver medals posthumously to Tlingit code talkers Robert “Jeff” David Sr., Richard Bean Sr., George Lewis Jr., and brothers Harvey Jacobs and Mark Jacobs Jr.

Tlingit code talkers, Harvey and Mark Jr. Jacobs.

# THE THUNDERBIRDS



One of America's most acclaimed WWII combat units was the 45th Infantry Division, known as the Thunderbirds for their distinctive insignia. This unit experienced 511 days of combat and fought at Salerno, Anzio, St. Maxine, and the Alsace. They 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).



# VAN T. BARFOOT - 1



After enlisting in the Army in 1940 and completing his training, Barfoot served with the 1st Infantry Division in Louisiana and Puerto Rico.

In 1941, he was promoted to sergeant and reassigned to the Headquarters, Amphibious Force Atlantic Fleet in Quantico, Virginia, where he served until the unit was deactivated. He then joined the 157th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Division, and was deployed to Europe.

## **VAN T. BARFOOT - 2**

During the Italian Campaign, Barfoot took part in a series of amphibious landings: the Allied invasion of Sicily, the invasion of mainland Italy at Salerno, and finally the landings at Anzio.

In May 1944, his unit had reached the town of Carano. When his company was ordered to attack, Barfoot, now a technical sergeant, asked for permission to lead a squad. He advanced alone through the minefield until he came within a few yards of a machine gun on the German flank. After taking out the gun with a hand grenade, he entered the German trench and advanced on a second machine gun, killing two soldiers and capturing three others.

# **VAN T. BARFOOT - 3**

When the Germans launched an armored counterattack later in the day, Barfoot disabled the lead tank with a bazooka and turned the German attack. He then advanced into enemy-held territory and destroyed an abandoned German artillery piece. As he returned to his own lines, he helped two wounded soldiers from his squad to the rear.

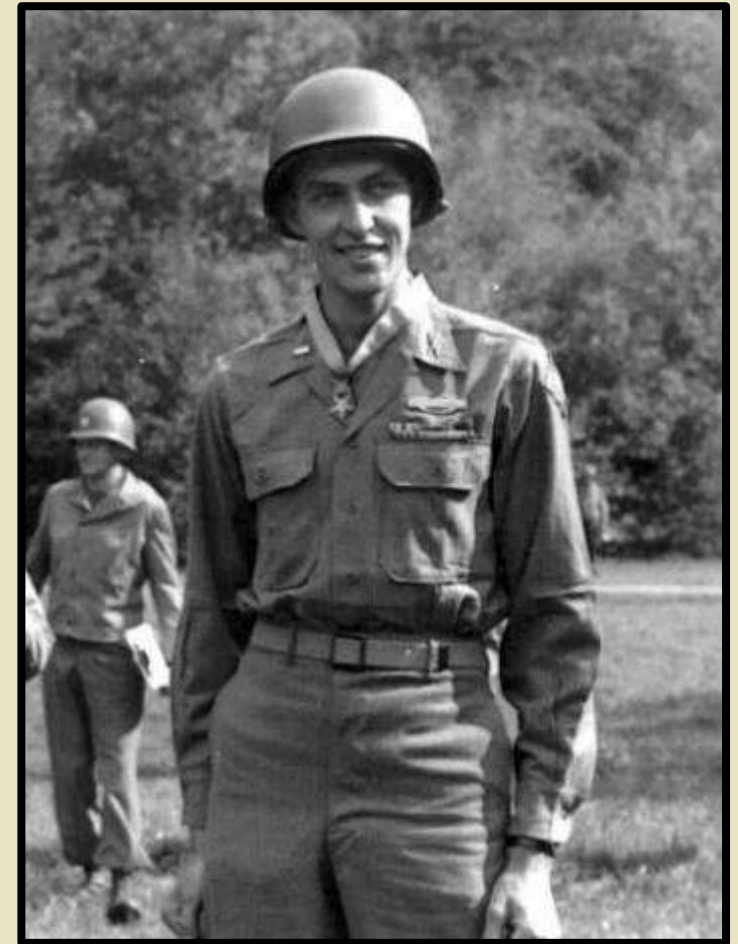
Due to his actions, Barfoot was commissioned as a second lieutenant. He was also nominated for the Medal of Honor. His division then moved into France and by September was serving in the Rhone valley.

# THE MEDAL OF HONOR

Notified that he would receive the Medal of Honor, Barfoot chose to have the presentation ceremony in the field, so that his soldiers could attend. He was formally presented with the medal on September 28, 1944, by Lieutenant General Alexander Patch.

Barfoot later served in both the Korean War and the Vietnam War and earned a Purple Heart.

He reached the rank of colonel before retiring from the Army.



# MARY GOLDA ROSS - 1



Mary Golda Ross attributed her successes to the rich heritage of her Cherokee people and the importance of tribal emphasis on education. From a young age, she gravitated toward mathematics and science. “I was brought up in the Cherokee tradition of equal education for boys and girls,” she said. “It did not bother me to be the only girl in the math class.”

# MARY GOLDA ROSS - 2

She completed high school by the age of 16. And, she graduated from the Northeastern State Teacher's College, a feat that less than two percent of women during this era accomplished.

Her degree in mathematics and her Cherokee cultural heritage led her to work as a statistician for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Later, she served as an adviser to Native American students at a boarding school in New Mexico. She then returned to school and received her master's degree from the Colorado State Teachers College, taking "every astronomy class they had."

# MARY GOLDA ROSS - 3

In 1942, Ross was one of a handful of female mathematicians hired by Lockheed Martin Aircraft Corporation. Her work was focused on developing the P-38 Lightning. The P-38 was one of the fastest airplanes designed at the time and the first military airplane to fly faster than 400 mph in level flight. Ross solved numerous design issues involved with high speed flight and issues of aeroelasticity.

After the war, Lockheed sent her to UCLA for a professional certification in engineering. She became the first Native American female engineer, and the first female engineer, in the history of Lockheed.

# CONCLUSION

American Indians and Alaskan Natives played an important role in the United States' Armed Forces during WWII. They served bravely and with distinction from the initial attack on Pearl Harbor to the last days of the Pacific campaign.

The nation remains forever indebted to WWII veterans, who not only forever changed the course of history, but who demonstrated selfless service and sacrifice in defense of global peace and security.

We remember their legacy by Honoring the Past, Securing the Future.



# End

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