



RHUMB LINES

Straight Lines to Navigate By



October 22, 2008

American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month

“Out of the Indian approach to life there came a great freedom, an intense and absorbing respect for life, enriching faith in a Supreme Power, and principles of truth, honesty, generosity, equity, and brotherhood as a guide to mundane relations.”

– Luther Standing Bear Oglala, Sioux

Formal Native American heritage recognition began in 1915, when Arthur C. Parker (Seneca) persuaded the Boy Scouts of America to set aside a day for the “First Americans.” In 1990, President George H.W. Bush issued a proclamation declaring November to be National American Indian Heritage Month. That proclamation is formally renewed each year, and includes recognition of both American Indian and Alaska Native peoples, often collectively known as “Native Americans.”

Invaluable Service, Rich Traditions

During National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month, we recognize intertribal cultures and the heritage, traditions and service of Native Americans.

- Historically, American Indian men and women have volunteered to fight in U.S. military campaigns at a per capita rate three times higher than other races.
- Today, the Navy recognizes the service of about 15,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives who serve in our active, reserve and civilian force.
- Rich and vibrant Native American customs and celebrations add untold value to our lives and our service. One example of this was when Capt. Ron MacLaren, a mobilized reserve officer [performed the Native American ritual of "smudging"](#) for his team's surroundings in Kuwait.

Empowering Our Diverse Navy

To maintain our position as an employer of choice for individuals across our diverse nation, we must continue to seek ways to empower individuals to succeed and to reach their maximum potential.

- The first Native American (Chickasaw) in space was Navy pilot Cmdr. John Bennett Herrington (Ret.), who recalled [mentoring as key to his success](#). Formal and informal mentorship provides career development counseling and contributes to overall recruiting and retention goals in both the military and civilian force.
- Encourage participation in professional development activities/ groups such as the [American Indian Science and Engineering Society \(AISES\)](#) or the [Society of American Indian Government Employees \(SAIGE\)](#).
- Seek opportunities to highlight diverse backgrounds that when combined make the Navy successful. Recognize the value of shared experiences and incorporate Navy history, American history and cultural learning into day-to-day operations.

Key Messages	Facts & Figures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Navy proudly joins the rest of the U.S. in the celebration of the contributions of Native Americans in the U.S. Navy and to our country. • We value diversity – it is an integral part of our mission and operational readiness. • Mentoring contributes to a good command climate, ensures a better understanding of professional responsibilities, aids in employee satisfaction and contributes to building and maintaining diversity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Powhatan class Fleet Ocean Tugs are named after Native American tribes, and include: USNS Catawba (T-ATF 168), USNS Navajo (T-ATF 169), USNS Sioux (T-ATF 171) and USNS Apache (T-ATF 172). • There are 562 federally-recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribal entities in the United States. • For more information, see Naval Historical Center’s “Native Americans and the U.S. Military” webpage: http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq61-1.htm