



# RHUMB LINES

*Straight Lines to Navigate By*



November 19, 2010

## American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month

*"Over the course of my career, I've learned firsthand the value there is in having people of different backgrounds, different experiences working toward a common goal. And I see it as an absolute requirement if we are to take the Navy where it needs to go into the future."*

- Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Gary Roughead

In 1990, President George H. W. Bush approved a [joint resolution](#) designating November as National American Indian Heritage Month. Today, [National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month](#) is celebrated to recognize the intertribal cultures of Native Americans and to inform the public of the rich heritage, history, and traditions of American Indian and Native American peoples. According to the [U.S. Bureau of the Census](#), 4.5 million American Indians and Alaska Natives comprise 1.5 percent of the total U.S. population.

### Invaluable Service, Rich Traditions

Native Americans and Alaska Natives have served honorably in the United States Navy for more than 200 years and have made remarkable contributions to our [naval history](#) and the legacy of our nation.

- Native American seamen served on Continental and state vessels during the War of Independence. During the Civil War, as many as 20,000 Native Americans contributed to Union and Confederate forces as auxiliary troops.
- More than 44,000 American Indians served during [World War II](#), including [Lt. Cmdr. Ernest Evans](#), of Cherokee and Creek ancestry, who was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. In the Pacific from 1942–1945, [Navajo Code Talkers](#) transmitted messages by telephone and radio in their native language, saving the lives of countless troops and helping win numerous island battles.
- Naval Test Parachutist [Misty Dawn Warren](#), a Choctaw, was selected by NASA to participate in the Space Shuttle Recovery Systems Surveillance Test Program in Houston, Texas.
- Dr. Francis J. O'Brien, scientist at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center Division in Newport, and Legalman 1st Class Marcella Begay, leading petty officer for Region Legal Service Office Japan, received the [2010 Meritorious Service Award](#) from the Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE).

### Recognizing the Value of Diversity

The Navy supports organizations recognizing the accomplishments of Native Americans and Alaska Natives:

- The [American Indian Science and Engineering Society \(AISES\)](#) works to increase the representation of American Indian and Alaskan Natives in engineering, science and other related technology disciplines.
- The [Society of American Indian Government Employees' \(SAIGE\)](#) goal is to promote the recruitment, retention, development and advancement of American Indian and Alaska Native government employees.

### Key Messages

- The Navy proudly joins the nation in celebrating the heritage of American Indians and Alaska Natives.
- American Indians and Alaska Natives have made remarkable contributions to our national identity, and their traditions and values are woven into the American experience.
- Diversity and the inclusion of many experiences, talents, and viewpoints are essential to the Navy's mission and operational readiness.

### Facts & Figures

- Currently, more than 15,000 active duty, reserve, and civilian members of the Navy Total Force declare themselves American Indian or Alaska Native.
- According to the [Bureau of Indian Affairs](#), there are 565 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages.
- A showcase of American Indians and Alaska Natives from the Navy History and Heritage Command can be found at <http://www.history.navy.mil>.