



RHUMB LINES

Straight Lines to Navigate By



October 19, 2009

National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month

"We must draw strength from the similarities between the Native American values: honor, truth and brotherhood; our Navy core values: honor, courage and commitment; and our common goal of sustaining Mother Earth."

– Mr. Jerome P. Rapin, Senior Executive Service, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians

National American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month began in 1915 to recognize the contributions the first Americans made to the United States. This year's theme is "Understanding Native American Heritage Now and Then."

Looking back: Native Americans have played vital roles in U.S. history, freedom and national security

- Native American tribal leaders have served proudly in the U.S. military, following in the footsteps of their forebears who distinguished themselves during the World Wars, Korean conflict, Vietnam, Persian Gulf, and Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.
- More than 12,000 Native Americans fought with distinction in World War I, and more than 44,000 fought in [World War II](#).
- Twelve [American Indians or Alaska Natives received the Medal of Honor](#) during the 1870s, three during World War II and two during the Korean War.
- In 1917, Adm. Joseph J. Clark became the first American Indian to graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy.
- [Navajo code talkers](#) took part in every assault the U.S. Marines conducted in the Pacific from 1942 to 1945 transmitting messages by telephone and radio in their native language -- a code the Japanese never broke.
- In 2002, retired Navy Cmdr. John Bennett Herrington, a NASA astronaut, flew on the Space Shuttle Endeavor as part of STS-113, the sixteenth mission to visit the International Space Station.

Looking at today and tomorrow: Native Americans continue their military service

- Currently, more than 15,000 active duty, reserve and civilian members of the Navy's Total Force declare themselves American Indian or Alaska Native. Each of these men and women provide diverse contributions that enable us to complete our missions.

Remaining connected to a vibrant culture and heritage

- American Indian and Alaska Native culture has made remarkable contributions to our nation's identity. Examples of their unique spiritual, artistic, and literary contributions, which serve to enliven and enrich our nation, can be found on the [Smithsonian's website](#).
- The Navy has long supported the [Society of American Indian Government Employees](#), an organization whose mission is to promote the recruitment, retention, development and advancement of American Indian and Alaska Native government employees.

Key Messages

- During this observance, it is important to understand and appreciate American Indian and Alaska Native heritage and the diversity it brings to this great nation.
- Leaders who embrace diversity, differing viewpoints and seek talent that embodies a broad range of life experiences, ensure naval readiness today and tomorrow.
- The Navy must reflect the face of the nation. Further, we want an officer corps that is reflective of the enlisted force it leads.

Facts & Figures

- The term Native Americans describes indigenous peoples from North America who can be found throughout the United States.
- Roughly 4.5 million American Indians and Alaska natives in the U.S. make up 1.5% of the total population. Most affiliate themselves as members of the 550-plus recognized tribes.
- For information on upcoming Navy diversity related events visit:
<http://www.npc.navy.mil/commandsupport/diversity>.