

Veterans Affairs Office of Govt. Relations Outreach:

April 9-10, 2013 at Pala Casino

By Roy Cook

Pala Tribal land and Casino is the location of the Veterans Administration-Indian Health Service April 9-10, 2013 outreach to the Southern California Tribal Nations. I pre-registered as a Vietnam era veteran with service connected disability. I joined the Army (Airborne) in 1964 from Snookson (Tucson, Arizona) and listed Tribal affiliation as Oodham from Wa ak.

There were many informative workshops on past and current issues vital to the interest and services earned by our Warriors in many of the theaters of conflict and war over the years. American Indian communities have the highest volunteer military status in relation to size of population of any other culture group. There are over 200,000 Native American military veterans today. It is well recognized that, historically, Native Americans have the highest record of service per capita when compared to other ethnic groups.

More than 12,000 Native Americans served during World War I, though they weren't official U.S. citizens until 1924. More than 44,500 served in World War II, a greater per-capita rate than any other ethnic group. More than 50,000 served in Vietnam, 90 percent of them as volunteers.

Native Americans serving as of April 1, 2003

Source: Immigration Policy Center
and U.S. Defense Department

Army - 2,985 Eskimo - 98 Aleut - 79 = 3,162
Navy - 7,068 Eskimo - 116 Aleut - 199 = 7,383
USMC - 1,111 Eskimo - 30 Aleut - 31 = 1,172
USAF - 1,696 Eskimo - 30 Aleut - 22 = 1,748
US/Canadian Indians total = 12,860, plus
Eskimo - 274 & Aleut - 291 Total = 13, 425
Grand Total All Serving = 1,401,128

The reasons behind this amazing contribution are complex and deeply rooted in traditional American Indian culture. In many respects, Native Americans are no different from others who volunteer for military service. They do, however, have distinctive cultural values that drive them to serve their country. One such value is the warrior tradition. In part, the warrior tradition is a willingness to engage the enemy in battle. This characteristic has been clearly demonstrated by the courageous deeds of Native Americans in combat. However, the warrior tradition is best exemplified by the following qualities inherent to most Native American societies: courage, respect, generosity and wisdom.

Many traditional cultures recognize that conflict disrupts the natural order of life and causes a spiritual disharmony and many have a variation of purification ceremony that are a part of the return to Native American life in balance. To survive the chaos of war is to gain a more intimate knowledge of life. Therefore, military service is an acceptable avenue in Native American society.

This writer participated as military historian and Native American heritage writer, under the direction of Ernie Salgado and in collegial association representing the CALIE efforts to support the Vietnam Wall tribute to the 230 fallen tribal warriors on the Vietnam wall in Washington DC. Additionally I participated as the secretary and historian for the American Indian Warriors Association veterans group in San Diego. This Native American Veterans Benefit Summit gathering is of vital and significant interest to our Tribal members and Brothers in Arms.



Of particular note are the Veterans Benefit Summit Workshops attended:

1. Post traumatic stress disorder, understanding PTSD and Trans-generational PTSD.
2. Diabetes management.
3. How to request a headstone, marker or medallion.
4. Overcoming barriers in serving AI/AN Veterans.



Tuesday evening entertainment included the singing and Warriors dancing to the songs of Gourd dance. Inspiration for the songs, according to the Kiowa story, a Kiowa warrior, the lone survivor of a battle, is trying to find his way back to the tribe. On his way, he hears music and finds a Red Wolf, singing and dancing and holding a fan in one paw and a rattle in the other. Red Wolf feeds the warrior and tells him to take the songs back to the tribe. If you listen closely you will hear the call of the wolf at the end of the songs.



Today, most dancers are members of a gourd society. Many are Warriors and Military Veterans of many conflicts. They wear a bandoleer of metal beads and mescal seeds. Over their shoulders and tied to the other side in a cross body bandolier manner, they drape a wool blanket, red on one end, blue on the other. Some are plain and others are decorated with war ribbons and unit patches. In one hand, they hold a fan of feathers, and in the other a rattle, sometimes a gourd or metal can or saltshaker.



Additionally, the Luiseno Bird songs and dancers were excellently explained and gracefully presented. A man holding a gourd rattle was leading the singing. He stated that earlier and on special occasions a turtle-shell rattle is utilized. Both the sound of the gourds spinning and the singing were meditative and spiritual. All the songs had words. The young women stood up and danced. They held their feet together and their knees were somewhat bent, so that their dress reached the ground. They held their hands together in front of her, also as the women danced, some of the men stamped one foot on the ground while uttering each time a growl or grunt in encouragement of the song and dancers. Usually several women dance together on this occasion.

Native American Veterans, Airborne, All the way!