

Vietnam Akíčita: Lakota and Dakota Military Tradition in the Twentieth  
Century

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## **Dedication**

To all the Native veterans. Thank you for letting me tell your story.

## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines the impact of military tradition among Native Americans, embracing many of the twentieth-century wars but with particular emphasis on Vietnam. In total over 42,000 Native Americans served in Vietnam. For the majority of this dissertation, I have centered the experiences of Lakota and Dakota veterans. In using the Lakota and Dakota as a microcosm, I demonstrate how military service has innovated throughout the twentieth-century but also how Indigenous people have strategically used it to continue culture, language, and traditions in everyday life. A variety of factors influenced the high per capita rates of Native service in the twentieth century. For some Native soldiers, military service provided the opportunity to continue and connect with earlier warrior traditions. Those connections included the protection of traditional homelands, their People, and their communities as well as for the survival of their cultural traditions. Other Native veterans turned to the military as an opportunity to leave their isolated and impoverished reservations communities. This dissertation combines oral interviews, autobiographies, Native literature, vinyl records, and powwow music to demonstrate the complexities of Native military service and move beyond stereotypical assumptions.

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## **Introduction: “That feather is our flag of our common People.”**

At the 2019 Sinte Gleska University Wounspe Wowapi Yusustapi or commencement ceremony, Butch Felix, the emcee of the event, stated, “In honor of the class of 2019 . . . we call upon our Red Leaf Singers, to bring our graduates in. And again, we’ll make the big circle all around [the auditorium] that comes back down the middle [of the folded chairs]. We make the circle to make a little more sacredness to our event today and ensure the success of our graduates.”<sup>1</sup> Felix, a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe and a Vietnam Veteran, stood in front of the Wakinyan Wambli Multipurpose Building, a large auditorium and basketball court on the Sinte Gleska campus. As Felix stopped speaking, the Red Leaf Singers began drumming, slowly building up the beat until it resembled a heartbeat. “Nazinpo, nazinpo (stand, stand),” Felix directed the crowd in Lakota before switching back to English, “This [song] is our traditional Pomp and Circumstance.” Roughly translating the lyrics that the Red Leaf Singers were singing, Felix asserted, “Graduates take courage. The Red Road is difficult but do the best you can. We sing this for you.”<sup>2</sup> As the drum picked up, the honor guard at the beginning of the grand entry began stepping to the beat and started moving slowly in a circle.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Butch Felix in Sinte Gleska University, 2019 SGU Graduation – 47<sup>th</sup> Wounspe Wowapi Yusutapi 36<sup>th</sup> GED Wounspe Wowapi Yusutapi, August 2019, YouTube video, 2:54:34, August 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sl-Z-iUeY2U&t=1974s>. Unless Lakota or Dakota language was in italics in its original form, I will not be putting it in italics. My personal belief, as a Dakota person, is that italics make the language look foreign when it is the original language of the People and Land that I am writing about.

<sup>2</sup> Butch Felix, Sinte Gleska University, 2019 SGU Graduation.

<sup>3</sup> This introduction with the Sinte Gleska commencement ceremony was influenced by discussions with another scholar working on militarization and the powwow named Justin de Leon. In particular, Chapter 6 of his dissertation, which is a forthcoming article by the same name, Justin de Leon, “Sovereignty Navigations: Lakota Powwows and Militarization,” in *Borderlands* Vol 19, No. 2, 2020.

Felix, now standing behind the podium in front of the graduates, continued, “Our Sicangu Lakota warriors leading the way with our grand entry.”<sup>4</sup> The first two rows of men leading the honor guard were adorned in military camouflage pant fatigues and matching navy-blue shirts, their short sleeves resembling the American flag with one stripe and two stars. Each veteran wore badges, hats, and bandanas that indicated the war they served in, each individual carrying a flag that represented one of the nine South Dakota tribal nations. The third row consisted of veterans carrying flags designed to acknowledge Native veterans from the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and any prisoners of war during the twentieth-century engagements. Marching in the fourth row, was an all-Native Vietnam veteran’s society from the Rosebud Sioux Tribe and other surrounding communities, wearing matching red shirts with bold white lettering that stated the Wild Horse Butte Tokala Ki. They carried half a dozen American flags. Among the soldiers in the front row was Ronnie Cutt, a 2019 Sinte Gleska University (SGU) graduate, carrying the SGU student lance, a long staff decorated in eagle feathers and the colors of the university. Midas Goodhammer, a long time SGU faculty member, carried the SGU Wapaha.

The grand entry progressed through the left side of the SGU auditorium, keeping beat with the drumming and slightly turning right at the front to gradually form a circle around the auditorium. As the circle began to form, Felix announced the individuals in the grand entry. This included the Rosebud Sioux Tribal President, Rodney Bordeaux, SGU President Lionel Bordeaux, representatives from Black Hills State, the University of South Dakota, and South Dakota State University, led by their President Barry Dunn, a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. As the honor guard passed the front of the stage, Felix

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

expanded more on the song lyrics and why the song was being sung, "Our song is encouraging our graduates to do the best that you can. The people depend on you, which is our cultural way. Somebody always needs help. We must meet that need."<sup>5</sup>

After his explanation, the more than sixty graduates of Sinte Gleska, each draped in red or yellow stoles, began emerging from the doorway between the bleachers. These graduates were comprised of Sinte Gleska's main campus in Mission, South Dakota and also their satellite campuses near the Yankton Sioux Reservation almost 200 miles away in Wagner, South Dakota and the Lower Brule Reservation, about 90 miles north of Rosebud.<sup>6</sup> Their accomplishments ranged from one-year certificates, associate degrees, four-year nursing degrees, graduate degrees, and more than a dozen GED degrees. After several minutes, the grand entry came full circle with the soldiers now leading the students up the middle row of folded chairs. The drumming and singing continued as the soldiers two-stepped towards the front of the stage and the students moved towards their seats.

The drumming slowly came to an end and the lead veteran of the honor guard shouted, "Order, halt," and each of the veterans stopped their movements. Felix asked all in attendance to give the graduates a round of applause, asking all the dignitaries to take their seats on the stage. Felix then requested that Fred Little Bald Eagle present a traditional prayer for the graduates before continuing with the agenda for the day. After the prayer, Felix returned to the stage and announced that a flag song would be sung to "pay tribute to the red, white, and blue that flies over the land, where the bones of our ancestors are buried."<sup>7</sup> Before the song, Felix told a story about Sinte Gleska or Spotted Tail, the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> This includes Ihanktowan Community College and Lower Brule Community College, both of which are sponsored and accredited through Sinte Gleska University.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

namesake of the university, who went to treaty negotiations in the 1860s.<sup>8</sup> As American cavalry soldiers struggled to erect a flagpole in the center of the treaty negotiations to hang the American flag, Sinte Gleska asked the soldiers to wait. He then took out an arrow and tied an eagle feather to it, raised the bow and shot the arrow and eagle feather into the top of the flagpole, stating, “Now they can put their flag up there. That feather is our flag of our common People.”<sup>9</sup>

Felix elaborated more on the American flag, reminding people that in 1876 after the Battle of the Little Bighorn, the grandmothers picked up the American flag from the ground claiming it as theirs and vowing that it would never again touch the ground. “Many of us, you can see here, we all served in the armed forces. World War I clear up to the present day to preserve this flag and protect the land and the freedoms that we so freely enjoy.”<sup>10</sup> After his comments, the great-great-grandson of Sinte Gleska, Charlie Spotted Tail, came up and sang the Lakota Flag Song. As Spotted Tail began the Wapaha Olowan or Flag Song, the lead honor guard yelled, "Order, ten-hut, present arms," and every Native veteran in the honor guard raised their flags. Per Lakota tradition, after the Wapaha Olowan, the Red Leaf Singers began immediately singing a Veteran's Song, while the honor guard lowered and tilted their flags, dancing in place. Felix asked any individual in the audience if they had a veteran – a father, uncle, auntie, grandfather – to dance along as well. Almost everyone in the auditorium moved along with the beat. After the Veteran's Song, Felix asked the audience to sit. He then announced each of the veteran's by name, their military branch, and where they served. Each of the veterans proudly raised their flags

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<sup>8</sup> It is unclear which treaty negotiations Felix is referring to but possibly the Treaty of Fort Laramie negotiations, which was signed in 1868.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

as Felix announced their name. The veteran's service ranged from the Korea War and Grenada to Iraq and Afghanistan with a majority of the veterans being veterans of the Vietnam War. Felix excused the honor guard, informing the crowd that they would now be heading to the Rosebud Sioux Fair in the nation's tribal headquarters of Rosebud, South Dakota, where they would lead the grand entry at the powwow there. In total, the Sinte Gleska commencement grand march ceremony lasted only 40 minutes but demonstrated the vast and continued influence of Native veterans on the Rosebud Sioux tribal community.<sup>11</sup>

Beginning in 1972, one year after Sinte Gleska University opened its doors for the first time, the Wounspe Wowapi Yusustapi was created to honor and acknowledge the accomplishments of Sinte Gleska graduates. This event, now in its 47<sup>th</sup> year, also served as an opportunity to showcase the numerous accomplishments and sacrifices of South Dakota Native American veterans. For individuals unfamiliar with Native events, the context may seem odd or confusing. Why would Native Americans, who found themselves at the end of the twentieth century being forcibly relocated to reservations after more than four centuries of settler colonial aggression for their land, fight for the United States? Nevertheless, Felix outlined why the American flag was prominent in so many Native events. Native people, after the outcome of the Battle of Little Bighorn and the defeat of General George Armstrong Custer and his Seventh Cavalry, claimed the flag as their own. In the end, they took that American flag, and like so many other things, made it a part of their culture. They did not fight for the red, white, and blue, but rather for the continuation of their culture and traditions under the watchful eye of the American government. As Felix so eloquently

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

expanded on, Native people fought for the land, their People, and, and most importantly, their survival, both culturally and physically, under a settler colonial system.

This dissertation examines the impact of military tradition among Native Americans, embracing many of the twentieth-century wars but with particular emphasis on Vietnam, which has been understudied. The military tradition among Native people has been a topic explored by many historians, especially Native military service in World War I and World War II, but the Vietnam War has long remained overshadowed. Even when military service has been examined, it has been assessed from a limited perspective. As Lakota scholar Delphine Red Shirt observed about Lakota oral traditions, “the focus generally in oral literary research has been on the study of *content* and not *process* in Lakota oral traditions.”<sup>12</sup> The same can be said about historical literature on Native American veterans. Scholars have focused on the act of military service and its role in serving the settler colonial state instead of examining the process in which Native people incorporated military service into their culture to continue it. The content portion includes statistics, stories of heroic deeds, and Native participation in specific battles and wars, all of which are important in presenting Native American service; nevertheless, framed as indicators that Native people assimilated into American culture and fought only for the settler colonial state. In focusing on the process, this dissertation underscores that military service was not a unique, ironic, or successful assimilation project, rather it served as a form of ingenuity that remade United States military service distinctively Indigenous.

In all, as historian Tom Holm, himself a Cherokee Vietnam veteran has documented, more than 42,000 Native American veterans served in Vietnam. A majority

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<sup>12</sup> Delphine Red Shirt, *George Sword's Warrior Narratives: Compositional Processes in Lakota Oral Tradition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), vii.

of these veterans, some figures estimate as high as 90%, volunteered for Vietnam. More than 250 Native soldiers died during the Vietnam War with 230 during the major escalation years, 1965-1973.<sup>13</sup> Because neither the federal government nor the United States Armed Forces tracked individual tribal affiliation, it is extremely difficult to track total individual tribal representation in the Vietnam War. Nonetheless, the fact that more than a dozen Lakota and Dakota veterans participated in the Sinte Gleska commencement ceremony, it can be assumed that a significant number of Native Vietnam veterans were from the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota tribes in South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Canadian provinces. I give special emphasis to the veterans, stories, songs, and histories analyzed in this dissertation come from the nine tribal nations in South Dakota. As a result, most identify as Lakota and Dakota; however, there were no fine lines in many of these veteran's ancestry. When possible, I will document how the veteran identified, whether that is specific to a tribal location or simply identifying as Lakota or Dakota. Though the term Sioux has become seemingly outdated, many Lakota or Dakota veterans identified with that term, which incorporated the entire Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota tribes.

For the majority of this dissertation, I have centered the experiences of Lakota and Dakota veterans. I have done this for several reasons. For one, I am a Dakota historian, and I have witnessed and interacted with Native veterans, in particular, Lakota and Dakota Vietnam veterans, in a variety of settings, including powwows, commencement

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<sup>13</sup> Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1996), 10-11. Holm's RCS Survey, presented in part later in this introduction, cited that 80% of veterans surveyed, volunteered. The 90% estimate is commonly cited when discussing Vietnam veterans, but limited statistics make it difficult to find an accurate number. Based on my research, I would estimate that the number is not lower than 80%.

ceremonies like Sinte Gleska's, and various community events on and off South Dakota reservations. These personal experiences have pushed me to reflect on twentieth-century military service among the Lakota and Dakota in different ways, which include expanding the Native military service archive beyond federal and BIA archives into oral histories, Native music, and literature. Using Lakota and Dakota Vietnam veterans as a microcosm for military service demonstrates how military service operated and innovated throughout the twentieth century. To broaden the scope of experience, I also incorporated the experiences of other Native Vietnam veterans. This allows me to illustrate shared experiences among all Native veterans.

Those shared experiences include complex relationships and understandings about racism, colonialism, and oppression. The most recurrent theme throughout this dissertation is the “same, same” narrative. The Lakota and Dakota oral histories and interviews in Chapter 2 articulated that “same, same” narrative repeatedly – in other words Lakota and Dakota veterans struggled to reconcile with the fact that they were supporting the United States in attempting to colonize the Vietnamese, who they often related to physically and culturally. The “same, same” paradigm is again featured in the eight autobiographies in Chapter 3. These autobiographies contained contributions for Native veterans from eight distinct tribal nations, with several of the veterans acknowledging they came from multiple tribal lineages. It is again presented in the Native literature in Chapter 4, where many Native authors, reiterated the complexities of fighting the Vietnamese.

Native American patriotism displayed through military service, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 1's focus on historical methodology, has often been framed as a path for assimilation into mainstream society. This dissertation complicates and challenges

that assimilation narrative. For many Native soldiers, military service was not about subjugation to the United States; rather it was premised under the protection of their traditional homelands and reservation communities. If these soldiers were "patriotic," it was first for their Native communities, land, and culture. This dissertation also promotes the ingenuity of Native people in continuing their traditions under that premise of United States patriotism. They have and will never stop being Native. An examination of Native military service demonstrates how Native veterans used it to continue their traditions and culture. Native patriotism can be seen at train depots during World War I and World War II when they greeted Native veterans with honor songs and dances that were banned under federal law at the time and innovated from pre-reservation culture. That innovation can be later seen almost a century later at commencement ceremonies, such as the Sinte Gleska commencement ceremony, powwows, and events.

I have chosen Vietnam for the reasons stated above, but also because Native Vietnam veterans have remained overshadowed in the historical record. The Vietnam War is emphasized throughout this dissertation, but I have also chosen to contextualize it with examinations of military service in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and even more contemporary service, such as the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. One distorts, it is not possible to discuss Native Vietnam service without mentioning the influence of earlier generations of Native veterans, weaving together intergenerational experiences and continued commitment to serve. These Native soldiers strategically used military service in World War I and World War II, not only to reaffirm their sovereignty, but also to innovate and continue Lakota and Dakota language, songs, dances, and culture.

This dissertation, while focusing on the experiences of Lakota, Dakota, and other Native veterans before, during, and after Vietnam, explores the many ways that military culture among Native people has been used to continue culture and language in everyday life. Military culture, for many tribes, was celebrated by entire communities. The Sinte Gleska commencement, for example, included Native veterans but also included a Grand March entry modeled from the Wild West type shows in the late twentieth century to showcase Native veterans.<sup>14</sup> The commencement ceremony incorporated a network of Lakota and Dakota songs previously used to honor Native veterans.

As will be demonstrated, many of these songs were developed from pre-reservation songs and redeployed to include World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and other twentieth-century military engagements. This type of military tradition and culture has been documented in a variety of sources including Native American literature, music, oral histories, and is seen in everyday forms of Lakota and Dakota life ranging from high school and college graduations, basketball tournaments, rodeos, and powwows. Thus, Sinte Gleska honored its graduates, who are seen as future leaders of the community, like its Native veterans.

These forms of everyday acknowledgment validate Lakota and Dakota military service and have engrained military service in the United States Armed Forces into Lakota, Dakota, and many other tribe's cultures. That acknowledgment reiterates the importance of military service but also creates distinctions about how Native people survived and continued traditions under settler colonial occupation. Military tradition, as has been

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<sup>14</sup> For more information on Wild West Shows and also how Native people incorporated them into their traditions see, Coll Thrush, *Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

limitedly examined by other scholars, cannot be observed simply as contributions to American society, specific battles, or statistics, but rather must be looked at holistically. Like the Dakota phrase, *mitakuye owasin* – that is “all my relations or relatives” – everything in Lakota and Dakota culture is interconnected. Military service, therefore, must be seen as something that is weaved into everyday life and is physically, culturally, and spiritually integral to what it means to be a Lakota or Dakota in the present day.

### **Vietnam Akičita**

*Vietnam ohitika thehika. Dakota hokšina mitakoda ota ekta waŋkapedo.*

**“It’s tough and bad in Vietnam. Dakota boy, a lot of friends are laying over there.”<sup>15</sup>**

The general public's perception of Native Americans about warfare is often the stereotypical Plains Indian, riding a horse and fighting the United States Cavalry during the Indian Wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For most Americans, the Battle of Little Bighorn appeared to be the last wave of Native American resistance against the onset of settlers and the United States Army marching West. Native Americans: after the Battle of Little Bighorn, seemed to vanish into the past only to remain in the minds and imaginations of Americans in popular culture like James Fenimore Cooper's, *The Last of the Mohicans*, or the more than a dozen John Ford's Western films. This meant that perceptions of Native Americans, unfortunately, lived on in stereotypical, problematic, and often racist ways. Even contemporary historians, especially those that are non-Native, have participated in the myths that Native people disappeared after their late-twentieth-century

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<sup>15</sup> This song was presented to me by my father, Kenneth Little, a well-known Dakota singer from the Standing Rock Reservation. It was written by his late nephew, my cousin, Kenny Merrick, a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. My father did not provide a title, if it had any, but referred to it as a Vietnam Veteran's Song.

resistance.<sup>16</sup> The late Dakota historian Vine Deloria challenged these assumptions in his foundational book, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, articulating, “The deep impression made upon American minds by the Indian struggle against the white man in the [nineteenth] century has made the contemporary Indian somewhat invisible compared with his ancestors.”<sup>17</sup> In defiance of those stereotypical assumptions, Native people survived into the present and along the way have served in every major United States twentieth and twenty-first-century engagement.

A variety of factors have influenced the high per capita rates of Native service in the twentieth century. For some Native soldiers, military service provided the opportunity to continue and connect with earlier warrior traditions. Those connections included the protection of traditional homelands, their People, and their communities as well as for the survival of their cultural traditions. Other Native veterans turned to the military as an opportunity to leave their isolated and impoverished reservations communities. The military, thus, provided a steady paycheck and a variety of benefits including the G.I. Bill, which promised veterans the opportunity to earn educational assistance after the completion of their military service. Still others, like Dennis W. Rucker, a Yankton Vietnam veteran presented in Chapter 3, saw the military as a career, serving in the Army and National Guard for more than 20 years. The draft also influenced many Native veterans into volunteering for Vietnam. The draft relied on birthdates and initials, rather than socioeconomic status, however, many veterans, both Native and non-Native perceived

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<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Elliott West’s *The Last Indian War: The Nez Perce Story* (Pivotal Moments in American History) (Oxford University Press, 2011); Bill Yenne’s *Indian Wars: The Campaign for the American West* (Westholme Publishing, 2008); or S.C. Gwynne’s *Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History* (Scribner, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988 [1968]), 12.

it as often relying on socio-economic status, thus believing they were vulnerable to conscription into the military. Native veterans also likely associated the draft with low socio-economic status due to their inability to gain draft deferments, the most obvious being the educational draft deferment. Native veterans, especially those on isolated reservations, had much more limited access to higher educational opportunities. The fear, and sometimes even the shame, of being drafted influenced many individuals to volunteer. Other veterans volunteered to choose a specific military branch. Choosing a specific military branch provided veterans with more agency over their length of service as well as where they were possibly sent during Vietnam. Lastly, several veterans featured in this dissertation acknowledged volunteering for Vietnam to earn respect from both Native and non-Native people and to protect the legacy of the United States and the American flag. As demonstrated at the Sinte Gleska commencement ceremony, the American flag often had complex meanings for Native people. Each of these factors will be explored more thoroughly throughout this dissertation, especially in Chapters 2 and 3.

The enlistment of Native soldiers in the United States first began as an assimilationist experiment in the late nineteenth century by Major William H. Powell and Major General John M. Schofield. Powell spent years fighting the Lakota and ultimately believed that their "natural instincts" might suit them well in the Army and speed up the assimilation process. He eluded to those instincts, "They are not a producing people . . . They are warlike in nature and are very fond of all paraphernalia of war."<sup>18</sup> Schofield concurred, "having listened for years to the recital of heroic deeds of his ancestors, he longs to follow their example . . . There is in their mind no employment worthy of an

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<sup>18</sup> William Powell, quoted in "Warriors in Ranks: American Indian Units in the Regular Army, 1891-1897", ed. Robert Lee, *South Dakota History* 21 (Fall 1991): 267.

Indian brave but that of a soldier. They eagerly enlist in the service of the United States as scouts under army officers, and their efficiency as such has been proven on multitudes of occasions.”<sup>19</sup> Powell and Schofield believed military service would provide Native people with the opportunity to demonstrate those "natural instincts" and would assist in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century assimilation practices. Powell and Schofield also hoped that the cost of enlisting Native people in the Army was ultimately cheaper than fighting them.<sup>20</sup> Their experiment, due to a variety of factors including boredom and the long time spent away from their family and communities, failed. Many of the original enlistees eventually disobeyed their commanders and returned home to their communities.<sup>21</sup>

World War I and World War II proved important in the redeployment and continuation of Native American military tradition in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries as well as into the present. During World War I, over 17,000 Native Americans registered for the selective service with more than 9,000 Native soldiers serving in the Great War.<sup>22</sup> Because they were not yet American citizens, many Native people were denied the opportunity to volunteer in World War I.<sup>23</sup> One of the reasons for these denials was the belief that military

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<sup>19</sup> John M. Schofield quoted in “Warriors in Ranks: American Indian Units in the Regular Army, 1891-1897”, ed Robert Lee, *South Dakota History* 21 (Fall 1991): 271.

<sup>20</sup> The Indian Wars of the Twentieth Century have often been estimated in the billions. Thus, having Native people

<sup>21</sup> Robert Lee, “Warriors in Ranks: American Indian Units in the Regular Army, 1891-1897,” ed Robert Lee, *South Dakota History* 21 (Fall 1991): p 299-302.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Starita, *The Dull Knives of Pine Ridge: A Lakota Odyssey* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995), 203. The estimates range for the number of Native soldiers that served in World War I. Joseph K. Dixon, who conducted brief surveys with more than 6,000 Native soldiers from World War I. His surveys are analyzed by the late Susan Applegate Krouse in *North American Indians in the Great War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007). Chapter 1 examines their experiences and p. 24 provides the 6,000 figure.

<sup>23</sup> Regardless of citizenship status, Native people and soldiers were scrutinized to a constant force of settler colonialism and assimilation methods. The impact of settler colonialism should be factored into all studies about Native veterans, not just their citizenship status.

service would dismantle twentieth-century assimilation efforts. Native soldiers, in other words, might succumb to their previous "savage" ways on the battlefield. Beyond providing Native soldiers on the frontlines, Native communities purchased more than 25 million dollars in war bonds during the war, an astronomical number considering the high poverty rates on many Native reservations.<sup>24</sup>

World War II further established military service as a tradition among Native veterans. At least 25,000 Native Americans served during World War II. That number included at least 2,000 Lakota and Dakota veterans from North and South Dakota.<sup>25</sup> The community of Little Eagle, South Dakota, located on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, had 22 men from its population of 300 people serve in World War II.<sup>26</sup> In addition to sending their Lakota and Dakota men, several Lakota tribes including the Pine Ridge Reservation affirmed their status as a sovereign nation by declaring war against Germany and other Axis Powers.<sup>27</sup> According to Bernstein, the Lakota and Dakota represented less than one-tenth of the general Native American populations in the United States in the 1940s but comprised more than one-fifth of the Native casualties during World War II. That included more than 100 Lakota and Dakota deaths out of the 550 Native Americans killed in action during World War II.<sup>28</sup> These statistics, which have been documented mainly by three scholars (Franco, Townsend, and Bernstein), serve as important estimates in the sacrifices the Lakota and Dakota during World War II. Their use

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<sup>24</sup> Starita, *Dull Knives*, 203.

<sup>25</sup> Kenneth William Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 61-62.

<sup>26</sup> Townsend, *World War II*, 62.

<sup>27</sup> Jere' Bishop Franco, *Crossing the Pond: The Native American Effort in World War II* (Denton, Texas: The University of North Texas Press, 1999), 67.

<sup>28</sup> Alison R. Bernstein, *American Indians, and World War II: Toward a New Era in Indian Affairs* (Norman, Oklahoma: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 61.

of statistics are important indicators of the high rates of Lakota and Dakota service during World War II; nevertheless, I will challenge and critique each of these scholars in Chapter 1, in part because of the way they wrote about military service as something that assimilated Native soldiers rather than continued and innovated their traditions. As I will argue and we can see through the Sinte Gleska commencement ceremony, the influence of World War I and World War II continued and ultimately redeveloped military traditions among the Lakota and Dakota.

World War I, World War II, and the Korean War have been studied extensively; however, Native contributions to the United States military more broadly have been understudied. To date, there remain no major scholarly contributions to Native military service in the Korean War. However, Native Vietnam veterans repeatedly cited older brothers, fathers, and cousins service in Korea as an influence on why they chose to service in Vietnam. Service in Korea by older siblings persuaded Vietnam veterans decisions into which military branches they chose to volunteer and serve in. The Korean War and general military service enlistment during non-military engagements, such as Grenada, in the twentieth century indicated that it was more about serving their People and protecting the land rather than engaging in combat or participating in a battle. This challenged assumptions that military service required heroic deeds or needed a demonstration of stereotypical perceptions that Native people were innate, savage fighters. In other words, it was more important that Native soldiers served than performed valiant, courageous deeds. Their service would be observed and recognized no matter what role they performed during any war.

Unlike early twentieth century wars such as World War I and World War II, which were often seen as "good" wars against foreign enemies that threatened the humanity of the world, Vietnam was controversial. Veterans returning home from the war were often protested against, spit on, and criticized for their participation in the war. Many historians have documented the Vietnam War as a working-class war, in which soldiers of color and lower socio-economic white soldiers, were the main individuals who served, died, and fought in Vietnam. In total, 2.8 million soldiers served in Vietnam, including 42,000 Native American soldiers, resulting in the death of more than 58,000 American soldiers.<sup>29</sup> These working-class soldiers lacked the resources to gain deferments against the draft and were forced into combat roles.

For Native soldiers, who made up 1.4 percent of troops sent to Vietnam, the pressure of the draft likely influenced individuals that did not believe in the war or military service into volunteering. As Tom Holm documented, "During the Vietnam War the total Indian population of the United States was less than one million persons. American Indians thus made up nearly 1.4 percent of all troops sent to Southeast Asia, while Indians in general never constituted more than 0.6 percent of the total population . . . in the same time period."<sup>30</sup> Holm's valuable work remains the only historical analysis on Native service during Vietnam, over 20 years after it was published. As a Cherokee Vietnam veteran, Holm had insight and access to Native veterans that many non-veteran or non-Native authors lacked. His Readjustment Counseling Service interviews, which include interviews with 170 Native veterans, provided detailed observations into the reasons

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<sup>29</sup> James Ebert, *A Life in a Year: An Infantryman in Vietnam* (London: Greenhill, 2004), 1.

<sup>30</sup> Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 123.

Native veterans served. It also analyzed the Native veteran's life after the war. *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls*, thus, created a framework for me and other future scholars writing about Native veteran's experiences before, during, and after Vietnam.

Harold Barse, a Sioux, Kiowa, and Wichita Vietnam veteran served as a counselor for many of these veterans and helped Holm create the survey. Barse ultimately hosted a national powwow in Anadarko, Oklahoma as a way for Native veterans to connect, in particular, citing his concerns for the fact that so many Native veterans accessed his or other support services after the war. The survey, listed below in Table 1, articulated the many reasons that Native veterans served in Vietnam. According to the survey, Native veterans cited respect from their communities and tribal tradition as the main reasons for their service. Duty to country remained a strong reason for their service; however, as I demonstrate in this dissertation, those reasons could (and likely) were much more complex than out of respect for the American flag, government, or continent. In comparison, historian Christian Appy, whose books include a strong focus on African American service in Vietnam, surveyed African Americans about their reasons for serving in Vietnam. 47.2 percent of African Americans cited the pressure of the draft, 40.2 percent claimed personal and self-advancement, and 6.1 percent argued they served for American patriotism.<sup>31</sup>

**Table 1: Native American Reasons for Vietnam Service in Percentages<sup>32</sup>**

	<b>Very Important</b>	<b>Somewhat Important</b>	<b>Not Too Important</b>	<b>Not Important at All</b>
Duty, Country	44.1	31.2	13.5	11.2

<sup>31</sup> Christian Appy, *Working Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press), 47. The remaining African American percentages marked None of the Above (6.6 percent).

<sup>32</sup> Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 118-119. The interview used reasons that 170 Native American veterans responded to in 1981. I recreated this chart for my Master of Arts thesis titled, "Sioux Warriors and the Vietnam War," which was defended in 2014.

Financial Reasons	20.6	29.4	27.6	22.4
Respect from Indian People	35.3	27.1	17.6	20.0
Respect from Non-Indians	15.3	23.5	25.3	35.9
Tribal Tradition	43.5	31.8	12.9	11.8

This dissertation expands on the work of Holm in a variety of ways, especially in thinking about the term “tradition.” Holm stated, “Indians took these traditions, syncretized them with service in the American armed forces, and essentially developed a ‘newer tradition.’”<sup>33</sup> Holm’s work connected Native military tradition to earlier traditions but mostly emphasized Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the experiences of Native veterans during and after Vietnam. His inclusion of hundreds of Native veterans from various tribal Nations, while important, did not elaborate on individual tribal tradition, and when it did, often grouped them into regions such as Plains Indians. Taking the Lakota and Dakota as a focus in this dissertation demonstrates how rather than creating new traditions, the Lakota and Dakota actually redeployed their traditions to fit into these concepts, altering traditions slightly, but in the end, never really losing sight or connection to those earlier traditions.

One of Holm’s goals for his work was to feature Native veteran’s experiences, survival, and even sometimes their tragic death, by diving into Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other trauma from the war. Holm stated, “Their story substantiates what has long been apparent and what tribal societies know so well: that warfare takes a grievous emotional toll on those who survive the battlefield. It also adds dimension to the concept

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<sup>33</sup> Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 23.

that understanding the role of warfare in a culture leads to a better understanding of those we ask to sacrifice their lives in battle.”<sup>34</sup> Holm succeeded in presenting a variety of experiences that supported his use of statistics from the RCS Survey; however, the voices of Native veterans are somewhat limited in his analysis. Statistics remain powerful indicators of the high numbers of Native veterans during Vietnam, and sometimes why Native veterans served during Vietnam.

The use of oral interviews, histories, biographies, autobiographies, and Native and non-Native literature in this dissertation will create a more holistic approach to the reasons Native veterans served while magnifying how traditions were incorporated into military service. Detailing the Sinte Gleska commencement ceremony at the beginning of this introduction serves as just one example of the many ways that Native veterans, especially in Lakota and Dakota country, are honored throughout the United States. This dissertation will promote the many distinctive ways that not only honor Native veterans but also encourage military service among Native people into the present and for future generations. Each of the following chapters described below is designed to build on each other for a more well-rounded analysis of Native veterans with special emphasis on Lakota and Dakota Vietnam veterans.

### **Chapter Breakdown**

*Kǎowákatay okíčhize. Vietnam ohítka do. Dakota hokšina khuwá nážinyanpi.*

**“Across the sea, there’s a war. Be brave in Vietnam. The Dakota soldier/boy chased/surrounded them.”<sup>35</sup>**

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<sup>34</sup> Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> This song was also presented to me by my father, Kenneth Little. The author of the song was Matthew Two Bulls from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

Chapter 1 explores the historiography of Native veterans in World War I, World War II, and Vietnam. Most scholarly attention has focused on military service as a new tradition among Native people or as something that indicated Native American assimilation into the settler colonial state. The scholars writing about Native military service, most of which were non-Native with limited connections to real Native people or their communities, relied on federal, military, and government archives to create their analysis and ignored the actual voices of Native veterans. As a result, many of these studies emphasize government documents written by non-Native government agents to tell their stories. The use of governmental and federal documents allowed historians to create narratives that Native people were backward and outside of mainstream society. Thus, their historical narratives concentrate on what military service did for Native people instead of asking why and how Native people redeployed military service to fit into their culture and traditions. More recent scholars, like French historian Thomas Grillot, have started to think outside of the traditional archives – that is government and federal documents – to examine Native military service. Grillot used oral histories, winter counts, and Native American monuments to examine "Indian patriotism" in World War I. Grillot stated, "Native American participation in the U.S. war effort has received scholarly attention since the 1990s, but it is mostly the war experience itself that has been studied, not patriotism per se."<sup>36</sup> The inclusion of Native voices, allows Grillot to provide a more nuanced view of Native soldiers, military tradition, and patriotism among Native communities. By breaking down the historiography on Native veterans, the first portion of Chapter 1, serves as a

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<sup>36</sup> Thomas Grillot, *First Americans: U.S. Patriotism in Indian Country after World War I* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2018), 8.

roadmap for historians, especially non-Native ones, to write better histories about Native military service.

The second portion of Chapter 1 briefly focuses on reframing the historical record to include a Lakota and Dakota archive. Relying on Lakota and Dakota including a cursory examination of early twentieth century Dakota language newspapers, I provide a more complete history of Native tradition, culture, and epistemologies. By examining these sources, in Chapter 1, I challenge future historians to move away from exclusively using traditional archives and resources and adding valuable perspectives from living Lakota and Dakota people. My framework urges historians to be more inclusive in any scholarly study on Native people. A major reason that these sources have been underexamined is that historians lack the skills to comprehend the Dakota language, something that should be encouraged (and possibly required) for future non-Native scholars working on Native history. It is a standard expectation that historians have a basic understanding of the languages of the people that they are studying, especially those studying ancient history. Historians studying Native history, myself included, need to start incorporating language resources into their analysis. This would bring new insights and more accurately reflect Native people and their history. Historian Noenoe Silva concurs with this assessment in *Aloha Betrayed*, “it is still possible to obtain a doctorate in history specializing in Hawai’i and not be required to learn the Hawaiian language or use Hawaiian-language sources.”<sup>37</sup> I will briefly examine Dakota language newspapers in the second portion of Chapter 1. For future studies on military service, Dakota and Lakota language could change the way that

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<sup>37</sup> Noenoe K Silva, *Aloha Betrayed Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 3.

the Lakota and Dakota viewed military tradition in the early twentieth century and redeployed it through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In Chapter 2, I use Native Vietnam veterans' oral histories and interviews located in the University of South Dakota Oral History Center in Vermillion, South Dakota and the South Dakota State Archives in Pierre, South Dakota. These two collections have a combination of 20 to 25 oral interviews from Lakota and Dakota Vietnam veterans. I use these Native veterans' oral histories to articulate their reasons for serving in the military, as well as their experiences before, during, and after Vietnam. As I demonstrate in this chapter, the voices of Native veterans are severely lacking in many historical studies. Using Native veteran's voices provides more accurate representation and articulates the complexities that many veterans encountered during their service.

The existence of interviews from South Dakota Public Broadcasting Systems and the USD Oral History Center is a valuable archive that captures a cross-section of Native veteran's experiences that were collected over 40 years starting in the early 1980s. The national push to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War has created a new and well-deserved movement to interview and document the stories of the Vietnam War. This includes interviews from both Vietnamese and American soldiers. As a result, dozens of interviews and documentaries from and about Native veterans throughout the United States have been produced in the last three years. Vietnam veterans' stories have finally begun to be included more substantially in the American historical record. The interviews from these three collections will allow me to present a fuller account of the experiences of Native Vietnam veterans, but this dissertation is by no means an all-encompassing history that represents all Native Vietnam veterans. Instead, it highlights

these collections to produce detailed accounts into what Native veterans said about their experiences before, during, and after Vietnam.

The oral histories I use in Chapter 2 demonstrate the complexities that Native soldiers encountered during Vietnam. Many veterans, for instance, cited the difficulty in fighting against the Vietnamese, in which they recognized the similarities in fighting a group of people who resembled them, both physically and culturally. Native veterans also noted the difficulty in serving for a settler colonial nation. Their voices also underlined life after Vietnam in ways that Holm's predominantly statistical analysis was not able to do. Their stories exhibited struggles with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the lack of resources available for Native veterans after returning home. Nevertheless, they validated the many ways that Native veterans were honored and affirmed when they returned home to their respective communities.

Chapter 3 expands on the oral histories in Chapter 2 by analyzing eight memoirs of Native American veterans. In contrast to oral histories, autobiographies produced more detailed stories about Native veteran experiences before, during, and after Vietnam. More importantly, these autobiographies provided a chronological narrative that described childhood experiences that included overcoming racism and constant negotiations of what it meant to be Native in the twentieth century. The autobiographies featured in Chapter 3 documented the life-long experiences of Native veterans from eight distinct tribal nations and serve as a microcosm for other tribal experiences and how they articulated Native military service.<sup>38</sup> These autobiographies thoroughly documented the many stereotypes that Native veterans faced during Vietnam including being called Chief and other

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<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that several of the veterans featured individuals who had multiple tribal affiliations but usually resonated with one specific tribe.

stereotypical names as well as problematic assumptions that Native people were more innate, savage fighters. Like the oral histories, almost all of the autobiographies illustrated their struggles with fighting the Vietnamese, who they often related to culturally and physically.

The autobiographies I use in this chapter, which were written over 20 years from the 1990s to the present day, establish the veterans as individuals who survived the war and ultimately impacted their communities with their leadership and even helped expand tribal sovereignty. Dwight W. Birdwell, for instance, used the G.I. Bill to earn his law degree and became a tribal judge for the Cherokee Nation. Both the autobiographies and oral histories confronted stereotypes that Native veterans succumbed to their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and used alcohol and drugs to cope with their trauma.

Chapter 4 surveys fiction to exhibit how Native American authors have written about and incorporated Native American veterans and military service into their texts. Several of these authors were themselves, Native American veterans, while others were raised witnessing the impact of Native veterans on their communities. The late Jim Northrup, in particular, is centered in this chapter. Northrup, an Ojibwe Vietnam veteran, wrote fictional prose, literature, and short stories based on his experiences before, during, and after Vietnam. Prominent non-veteran authors, like Louise Erdrich and Linda Hogan, also used Native veterans as characters in their works. Each of these works pronounced the complexities of Native veterans serving for a settler colonial nation but also elaborated on life after the war, which included struggles with PTSD and the use of alcohol and drugs to deal with their trauma. While many articulated the typical paradigm of the struggling veteran, they often designated veterans as survivors.

Like the oral histories and autobiographies, these fictional narratives expressed similar conclusions about Native veterans relating to Vietnamese soldiers and families. Native literature, unlike historical works, moved away from assimilation narratives and allowed Native authors to portray how military service was intertwined into Native American culture. Native authors, for instance, demonstrated military service beyond the battlefield and included their roles as community leaders that included serving as the honor guard for powwows and the role of veteran's songs in honoring military service. This chapter also incorporates some literature written by non-Natives, who often focused on the stereotypical assumptions about Native soldiers being superior war machines. The biggest example of this is David Morrell's novel *Rambo: First Blood*, portrayed by Sylvester Stallone in the Hollywood blockbuster film series that recently released its fifth film. These stereotypical narratives are important to analyze to determine and challenge how Native veterans have been inaccurately depicted in popular culture. By contrasting Native and non-Native literature, this chapter challenges non-Native authors to rethink their inaccurate and stereotypical writings.

Chapter 5 contextualizes how Lakota and Dakota veterans and honor songs affirmed military service among Native veterans. The Lakota Flag Song, for example, demonstrates how Native singers and songwriters, many of whom were veterans, continued military traditions under the premise of honoring the American flag. As demonstrated in the Sinte Gleska commencement ceremony, the Lakota Flag Song is centered in many Native events; however, it has different meanings that were concealed under Lakota and Dakota language. This chapter, in particular, looks at how Lakota and Dakota people embraced recording technology to continue the military tradition through

powwow music. These musical traditions were connected to earlier traditions that predated reservation life and exhibited Indigenous ingenuity to continue traditions under the watchful eye of reservation agents and government officials. Powwow music, especially in the form of veterans and honor songs, allowed Native veterans to emulate expectations of military service through the drum. Chapter 5 also organizes powwow music, song lyrics, and language as a new Lakota and Dakota archive that has played an important role in language and cultural revitalization.

As a Dakota historian and as someone who has grown up in and around a variety of Native communities, in this dissertation I bring a perspective and background that has been sorely lacking in many histories written about Native military service. That is not to imply that a history written by a Native person automatically makes their work more “authentic” or better, but it does provide insight into cultural traditions and histories that non-Native authors rarely have access to. I have grown up personally witnessing the impact of Native veterans on my own and other Native communities. Veterans have been placed at the forefront of Native communities, something I observed as a child and young adult. My father, a Standing Rock Dakota veteran, served in the Army during the Vietnam War but was never sent overseas. He continued military traditions after his service by learning, singing, and honoring Native veterans with traditional veterans and honor songs. Due to these insights, I have been better able to connect the dots to expand military service beyond war experiences to cultural traditions such as Native literature, powwow culture, and even events like the Sinte Gleska commencement ceremony, which I attended in person. Events like these are not singular but rather everyday occurrences that happen at almost every Lakota or Dakota community event.

This dissertation documents the experiences of Native veterans, especially the Lakota and Dakota, but like all histories, is of course incomplete. I make almost no mention of the role of Native women, at home or in the military, during any twentieth-century military engagements, which would ideally be included in this story. Native women have played key leadership roles in sustaining their communities, traditions, and culture. A more thorough examination of Native communities during major twentieth-century engagements and wars would reflect those leadership roles. The role of gender, both traditional and current, is something that needs to be critiqued and analyzed in the future. Native communities had certain expectations and roles for community members. Those expectations, especially Native masculinity, changed throughout the twentieth century and has been influenced by hundreds of years of colonization.

In recent years, several historians and scholars have begun examining Native military history from different lenses and perspectives. Ryan Booth, a Ph.D. candidate in history at the University of Washington and an Upper Skagit tribal member, examines Native American scouts in the United States Army. His dissertation, tentatively titled "Crossed Arrows: The US Indian Scouts, 1866-1947," will have a cross-comparison between Indian scouts in British Army and Native American scouts in the United States Army.<sup>39</sup> Sarah Sadlier, Cheyenne River Lakota and a Ph.D. student in the Harvard history department, plans to write a dissertation that traces several Lakota or Dakota generations, their families, and the impact of military service on each of those individuals.<sup>40</sup> Justin de

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<sup>39</sup> Ryan is currently a Ph.D. candidate and a 2019 Fulbright-Nehru Fellow in India looking at their archival collections.

<sup>40</sup> Sarah is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Harvard history department but also began studying at the Harvard Law School. She plans to alternate between law school and the history department; thus, her dissertation will be an ongoing process.

Leon, a Research Fellow at the University of Notre Dame, explores how Lakota challenge and navigate settler colonialism. His book manuscript entitled *Resurgent Visual Sovereignty: Indigenous Representation and Praxis* also examine Indigenous creative and traditional approaches to sovereignty.<sup>41</sup> These three scholars indicate an uptick in the study of Native American veterans and military service.

This dissertation, first and foremost, documents the experiences of Native Vietnam veterans. It is also an attempt to challenge scholars and historians, especially those that are non-Native, into rethinking and rewriting twentieth-century Native history. Native veterans, for a variety of reasons, have rarely been written about in the historical record. This dissertation seeks not only to change that but also to promote the brilliance of Native survival, both physically and culturally, into the present. As Tom Holm reflected in 2017, "Native veterans saw their service in a different light, a conception of self that reflected their cultural values as opposed to their political values. They thought of themselves as tribal warriors, an idea that carries meaning for Native Americans that is very different from its meaning for the larger American society." He continued: "the best way to explain the notion of warriorhood in tribal societies is to look at it in terms of relationships rather than roles . . . a warrior is part of a community and is not segregated in a base or camp. Members of the community view the warrior as a relative who takes part in battle not only to protect the community but also to restore justice and serve the people in other ways."<sup>42</sup> Thus, this dissertation not only focuses on Native military service but also their role as protectors in Native communities. That service included continuing the military tradition

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<sup>41</sup> Justin will be submitting this book manuscript to publishers in 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Tom Holm, "Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls Revisited: The Research, the Findings, and Some Observations of Recent Native Veteran Readjustment," *Wicazo Sa Review* 32, no. 1 (2017), 119.

as well as protecting language, culture, history, and tribal sovereignty for future generations.

## Chapter 1: Native American Military History

The boy's father's home is situated on a very high hill, so that for a long time before we reached it we could see the great crowd of Indians who had gathered to pa [sic] their last tribute. Long before we reached the home we could also see Old Glory floating from a tall flagpole that had been set up since the news of his death had reach [sic] the reservation. Each of the five young men who were pall-bearers had qualified for military service, though some had been rejected on account of physical unfitness and others had not yet been examined. Each one of them, however, had pinned to the lapel of his coat streamers of red, white, and blue, and they rode on swift Indian ponies behind the automobile which carried the body of the young soldier. Over this car floated a very large flag. In front of the procession rode another young Indian brave carrying Old Glory also. It was so impressive in its complete demonstrate of loyalty that one could not keep back the tears.

*Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, Bulletin 15, 1927*<sup>43</sup>

This quotation, from a pamphlet produced by the Department of the Interior: Office of Indian Affairs in 1927 labeled, "The American Indian in the World War," highlighted the participation of Native Americans in World War I. By reflecting on this particular story, featuring an unnamed deceased soldier from the Rosebud Reservation, the Department of the Interior projected an unrelenting patriotism towards "Old Glory," the red, white, and blue, and the United States of America. In addition to promoting patriotism, the four-page pamphlet emphasized the cunning bravery of Native American's from various tribes throughout the United States, some named and some unnamed. The pamphlet reassured its readers that military service assimilated Native Americans into mainstream society. One particular Indian school superintendent noted: "I do not know of a single case where it has not benefitted the Indian to such a degree that it is plainly noticeable and commented on by the whites of his community."<sup>44</sup> Another report concluded:

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<sup>43</sup> "The American Indian in the World War," by the Department of the Interior: Office of Indian Affairs, Bulletin 15, 1927, Edward E. Ayer Collection, Ayer 5, U582, no. 12, Newberry Library Archives, Chicago, Illinois, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> "American Indian in the World War," p. 3-4.

One Cheyenne, typical, no-account, reservation Indian with long hair went to France, was wounded, gassed, and shell-shocked. Was returned, honorably discharged. He reported to the agency office square shoulder, level-eyed, courteous, self-reliant, and talked intelligently. A wonderful transformation, and caused by contact with the outside world. He is at work.<sup>45</sup>

The pamphlet concluded that these particular examples were, “but a few instances of the patriotism and bravery of the (approximately) 12,000 Indians who were engaged in the World War.”<sup>46</sup>

It is unclear if this four-page pamphlet was intended for a Native American or non-Native audience. It is also uncertain if any of the individuals listed in the pamphlet were actual Native soldiers, and if so, whether or not they survived the war or passed away afterward. A variety of factors suggest that the Office of Indian Affairs likely produced this pamphlet as propaganda to serve its own needs. In highlighting Native American military service, for one, and in particular strong support of the American flag, the pamphlet promoted that Native American veterans seemingly accepted their defeat by the United States Army at the end of the twentieth century. This suggested that Native people like the Lakota, who found themselves as the onslaught of the Seventh Cavalry at the Wounded Knee Massacre less than forty years before, would never fight for the United States unless they had come to terms with their own military defeat and/or perhaps if they truly believed in the magnitude of American patriotism. The pamphlet used multiple examples, like those presented above, that projected unwavering and unquestionable support and dedication towards the United States. Secondly, the pamphlet promoted the perceived assimilation of Native American World War I veterans into American society. As many of the examples demonstrated, Native veterans returned home from the war “better” citizens

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 4.

than before the war. Lastly, the pamphlet highlighted the possibilities that military service provided Native American veterans, which was not only important in keeping the Office of Indian Affairs budget intact but also to demonstrate that the early twentieth-century assimilation policies were succeeding.

At the same time that this pamphlet emphasized assimilation, it also reinforced stereotypical characteristics about Native people. James M. Elson, for instance, listed as deceased (possibly killed during the war), was noted for “guiding sentry squads to an isolated post in No Man’s Land and for guiding patrol to outskirts of Briouilles, securing information of enemy occupation, and showing exceptional skill, courage, and coolness under fire.”<sup>47</sup> One of the more famous exploits included that of Alfred G. Bailey, Cherokee, who snuck into German territory unaided and killed two German machine gunners, also taking down a third. Although the pamphlet never explicitly stated, it implied that both Elson and Bailey's ability to sneak into enemy territory was directly related to their Native American heritage. Thomas E. Rogers, an Arikara from the Fort Berthold Reservation was characterized as "a volunteer for the most dangerous missions" and acknowledged by the President for being an excellent scout who captured the enemy barehanded.<sup>48</sup> The pamphlet, in sum, focused entirely on Native military exploits during World War I and then if they survived, their assimilation into American society. It also emphasized the animalistic characteristics of Native soldiers.

It is along these avenues that many historians have chosen to frame historical studies on Native American military service during World War I and World War II. Twentieth-century military historians, for the most part, have focused on Native American

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 1. It just says “deceased” and does not give any details into his death.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

*military service as a form of assimilation into American culture.* In relying almost entirely on the traditional archive – that is the BIA and other governmental documents written and collected by government and reservation agents -- these military officials, as well as other individuals invested in the assimilation policies of Native Americans, and historians have produced scholarship that reinforces the notion of the static, unchanging Indian. In focusing on the ways that twentieth-century American military service bridged the gap between a white and Indian world, historians emphasized the impact of military service in "modernizing" – aka assimilating – Native American cultures, ways of life, and traditions into white society. Thus, these historical studies have focused more on what military service has done (or can do) for Native people instead of analyzing why Native veterans served in the military. Writing about Native military service, in particular military service during the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, becomes a more difficult task because of the way historians have framed and characterized Native American military service in stereotypical, assimilationist, and problematic ways. This chapter interrogates the way that historians have written about military service.

This chapter will also analyze the language used in the historical works of Native veterans. Native soldiers who failed to meet the stereotypical and inaccurate portrayals of twentieth-century popular culture – often characterized by Northern Plains regalia and headdresses, dark skin, and long hair – were cast as "less than Indian" or assumed to be already assimilated. By reconsidering historical approaches to Native military scholarship, I will challenge the often stereotypical, assimilationist, and simplistic viewpoints of many of these late twentieth-century historians. In a sense, these historians, many of whom were raised with the Hollywood portrayals of Native people, have condensed the military

traditions of over 574 tribes into one fairly monolithic historical interpretation. As legal scholars, David Dye and Franklin Keel acknowledged, "Dramatic portrayals of indigenous warfare color and shape contemporary views of conflict and violence, and how indigenous people defended their culture, lives, property, and territory."<sup>49</sup> Keel and Dye focused specifically on the depiction of Native American violence and warfare in art, education, popular culture, and the entertainment industry. Historian R. Scott Sheffield breaks down the depiction, appropriation, and use of the Native American image during World War II. As Sheffield demonstrated, both the Canadian government as well as Germans used the Native American image as propaganda to promote a variety of characteristics for Native people including the fierce, stoic warrior.<sup>50</sup>

Popular culture and the entertainment industry, particularly Hollywood, have contributed immensely to the inaccurate and stereotypical assumptions about Native Americans. Because these limited portrayals focused on late nineteenth-century Native American resistance to America expansion, Native military service members throughout the twentieth century were frequently categorized as savage, stoic, fierce, and violent warriors. While some Native veterans embraced these portrayals, others struggled to overcome these limited notions of what they were expected to represent. As a result, Native soldiers, due to their perceived understanding of the wilderness, were often placed in high-risk environments, resulting in high casualty rates of Native Americans throughout all twentieth-century wars.

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<sup>49</sup> D.H. Dye and M.F. Keel, "The Portrayal of Native American Violence and Warfare: Who Speaks for the Past?" in R. Chacon and R. Mendoza (eds), *The Ethics of Anthropology and Amerindian Research* (Springer: New York, NY), 58.

<sup>50</sup> R. Scott Sheffield, *The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the "Indian" and the Second World War*. (Vancouver, British Columbia: UBC Press, 2004).

## *Literature Review*

Historians have most often focused their historical analysis on Native American battles and resistance against an all-encompassing settler colonial state, ultimately culminating in their loss and/or removal from their traditional homelands. As such, there are dozens of books written about the Battle of Little Bighorn, Geronimo's final resistance, the Cherokee Trail of Tears, and the Wounded Knee Massacre. Many of these histories can be considered popular histories designed more for entertainment and leisure enjoyment than critical analysis. In contrast, there are less than ten major scholarly works on Native American United States military participation in World War I and World War II. The lack of scholarly Native military literature becomes even more apparent when examining the Korean War and Vietnam War as well as another twentieth-century military participation.<sup>51</sup>

For many historians, Native American military service during World War I and World War II operated as a new, unique, and ironic tradition. After all, why would Native people fight for a country that spent the second half of the nineteenth century systematically murdering them? According to these scholars, for Native Americans to achieve those same goals, they must first acknowledge their defeat at the hands of the United States federal government before shedding their cultural and traditional ways of life to become American. Historians often asserted that Native people's military service was as an indicator of assimilation, acculturation, and transition into mainstream society. These histories mirrored the paternalistic nature and language of twentieth-century federal government assimilation policies. Instead of focusing on Native patriotism, cultural tradition, and distinct military service as a factor in upward social mobility or defense of

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<sup>51</sup> To date, there are no works written about Native American military participation in the Korean War.

their traditional homelands, historians have elaborated on Native military service as a *process* in which they could be assimilated into the American mainstream. Military service, in the eyes of many of these historians, provided Native people an opportunity to demonstrate their “natural” instincts. Native people were, according to many of these histories, were destined to be great warriors, reminiscent of their ancestors.

When writing about military history, or any form of Native history, scholars frequently situate Native Americans as individuals always outside of American society. This is in contrast to their African American and Chicano counterparts, who remain part of the American mainstream and often considered to be secondary citizens but citizens, nonetheless, that is capable of pursuing the American Dream. These scholarly works on African Americans and Chicano have focused on military service for its fulfillment of United States citizenship and the presumed rights associated with it. Historian Lorena Oropeza, whose work analyzes both Chicano resistance to the Vietnam War as well as Chicano military service during it, acknowledged, “government leaders, military representatives, and social critics throughout the twentieth century proclaimed military service a powerful avenue toward furthering equality for ethnic and racial minorities alike.”<sup>52</sup> Likewise, James Westheider argued that African Americans used Vietnam as “an opportunity to prove their patriotism, their worth as citizens and soldiers, and as a vehicle for social and economic advancement.”<sup>53</sup>

This chapter traces how historians and other scholars have written about Native American military service in the twentieth century. Most of the early historical literature on Native

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<sup>52</sup> Lorena Oropeza, *Raza Si! Guerra No! Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (University of California Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>53</sup> James Westheider, “African Americans and the Vietnam War,” in *A Companion to the Vietnam War*, ed. Marilyn B. Young and Robert Buzzanco (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2006), 333.

military service was produced in the 1980s and 1990s emphasizing service in World War I and World War II while overshadowing Native military service in the Korean War and Vietnam War. Historical analysis, for the most part, has focused on Native military service as isolated experiences or within specific timeframes. For example, the Navajo Code Talkers have been exclusively at the forefront of Native military histories. These histories elaborate on the use of the Navajo language in defeating the Germans but often fail to focus on life beyond the war. Many histories on this topic have been confined historically to precise timeframes, such as the 1940s in which World War II occurred. Other histories were confined to both World War I and the impact of the Indian New Deal after the war.

Tracing the historiography of Native military veterans throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century demonstrates that Native military service was not an isolated experience but rather a tradition that for many tribes has continued from earlier traditions. When talking about Native Vietnam veterans, it is important to analyze and critique the way historians have written about Native American military service and veterans in the first half of the twentieth century. This chapter encourages historians to think about Native American military service as redeveloped from earlier cultural practices and traditional systems and encouraged by each succeeding generation of Native military service members.

This chapter also challenges scholars to move past exclusively using federal and BIA archives in their historical analysis. It asks historians to question their roles in reinforcing stereotypes and federal assimilation narratives. In the literature on Native American military service, most scholars fail to interact with Native people beyond the more conventional archives. Therefore, historians have focused on Native military service

as separate and isolated events when they should be connecting the dots of Native military service as something that Native people continuously redeveloped throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as in the present day and through their Native communities. In moving beyond the federal archives to previously unexamined sources such as Dakota language newspapers, which will be examined later in this chapter, we can begin to see how military service developed and changed over the sixty years before and during the Vietnam War and beyond.

In her historical analysis titled, *Toward a New Era in Indian Affairs: American Indians and World War II*, the late historian Alison R. Bernstein claimed that service during the war “represented the first large-scale exodus of Indian men from the reservations since the defeat of their ancestors and an unparalleled opportunity to compete in the white world in an arena where their talents and reputation as fighters inspired respect.”<sup>54</sup> Native people, as has been documented by recent historians, moved in and out of cities throughout the twentieth century to find work, better housing, and new opportunities.<sup>55</sup> Bernstein frames Native military service as an equalizer for Native people to participate in a settler colonial and capitalistic economy. Bernstein, like many historians that followed in her footsteps, wrote strictly from the federal and Bureau of Indian Affairs archives. Native military service represented an easy transition from reservation life – presented as outside the mainstream by Bernstein – into a progressive and modern white American world. Bernstein and others ultimately created a two-world paradigm that

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<sup>54</sup> Alison R. Bernstein, *Toward a New Era in Indian Affairs: American Indians and World War II* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 40.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Renya K. Ramirez, *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond*. Duke University Press, 2007; Nicolas G. Rosenthal, *Reimagining Indian Country: Native American Migration & Identity in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

relegated Native tradition as something quickly fading into the historical past, that also failed to be integrated into the settler colonial mainstream.

Bernstein's historical work framed Native people in a stereotypical, backward, and negative light. Almost directly after her mass exodus quotation, she stated, "Small wonder that the Indian fighting man, regardless of his rank, was indiscriminately called "Chief" by his white buddies. But for the Indian soldier, this nickname was the only reminder of the world he left behind. Through military service, he had more contact with white society than ever before . . ." <sup>56</sup> Bernstein assumed that Native people appreciated any opportunity to connect with what she perceived as a quickly vanishing past. Bernstein, as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter, was not alone in these assumptions. Historian Gerald Nash concurred: "The gulf between their lifestyles and that of the majority of Americans was so wide that assimilation seemed farfetched. Before the war, the American Indian was America's outside, its most isolated minority with its own distinct cultural traditions." <sup>57</sup> Military service, in the eyes of Bernstein and Nash, served as a way for Native people to assimilate into American culture.

In *World War II and the American Indian*, historian Kenneth Townsend acknowledged the crossroads that many Natives encountered when joining the military but asserted their need to make a successful transition into "mainstream" society. Townsend alleged, "Armed with improved health, a firmer educational base, specialized job skills, and a record of military service, many Native Americans hoped to make a successful

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<sup>56</sup> Bernstein, *American Indians, and World War II*, 40.

<sup>57</sup> Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 12.

transition into mainstream society once peace returned.”<sup>58</sup> Townsend confronted Native American stereotypes and inaccurate portrayals of warrior ethos as well as local tribal resistance to the draft. Instead of relying strictly on federal and BIA archives, Townsend included a variety of Native American oral histories, something Bernstein’s historical work lacked, as well as newspaper articles, tribal documents, and oral history archives. Each of these sources added important details to the history of Native American participation in the defense of the United States.

Historian Thomas Britten’s *American Indians in World War I: At Home and at War* examined Native American military service during World War I. He argued that "an examination of Native American roles in World War I is essential if one hopes to understand the evolution of Indian societies, cultures, and federal Indian policy in the early decades of the twentieth century.”<sup>59</sup> Britten writes a complex history that demonstrated the responses, both in favor of supporting the United States as well as the draft resistance, of Native American soldiers and tribes. Britten discussed the use of military service as a federal assimilation push but also provided oral histories from Native soldiers that indicated complex reasons for military service. Those reasons included connecting to earlier generations and traditions, economic opportunities, and fighting for the protection of land, their communities, and the future. Most importantly, Britten included the experiences of Native people, especially the role of Native women, at home during World War II. Native women worked in a variety of industries to support the war effort and their communities.

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<sup>58</sup> Kenneth William Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Anthony Britten, *American Indians in World War I: At Home and at War* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 4.

In *Crossing the Pond: The Native American Effort in World War II*, historian Jere' Bishop Franco chronicled the history of Native military service on the frontlines and home front during World War II. Much like Britten, Franco described multidimensional reasons and experiences for Native military service. Franco's work, in part because she used federal and BIA archives including personal correspondence from BIA Commissioner John Collier, focused more on the federal government's belief that Native people would be excellent fighters in World War II rather than individual Native perspectives. Other than brief references, and somewhat ironically based on the title of her book, Franco did not present any Native soldier experiences during World War II. Franco instead elaborated on federal policies, German propaganda to deter Native people from volunteering in World War II, and life after the war. These were important details, but her work was similar to Alison Bernstein's historical analysis with a more nuanced view of Native people. Franco concluded her work with a story of two tribal leaders meeting with President Clinton as evidence that "Native Americans had moved beyond the fringes of American politics and become an acceptable, lobbying interest group. Rejecting acceptance into the mainstream, American Indian political interests remain particularly tribal oriented."<sup>60</sup> Franco, like so many other historians, continued the legacy of focusing on Native military service as a way for Native people to gain acceptance into mainstream American culture.

Historian Susan Applegate Krouse's *North American Indians in the Great War* examined more than 2,800 interview questioners with Native American World War I soldiers and veterans.<sup>61</sup> Krouse's historical analysis refutes other historical literature's

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<sup>60</sup> Jere' Bishop Franco, *Crossing the Pond: The Native American Effort in World War II* (University of North Texas Press, 1999), 200.

<sup>61</sup> Susan Applegate Krouse, *North American Indians in the Great War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

claims that Native military service indicated assimilation into American culture. She also argued against the notion of military service as a way for Native veterans to gain citizenship, which was a major theme in Bernstein, Franco, Townsend, and Britten's works. In her historical work, Krouse used the collections of Joseph K. Dixon, a non-Native activist for Native American rights.<sup>62</sup> His collections, which are stored at the Indian University archives, included thousands of photographs, 2,800 interview questions that he conducted, and personal correspondence and letters by Native World War I veterans.

Her work, while important in providing detailed reasons for why Native people serve in World War I, operates more as a primary source than a critical analysis.<sup>63</sup> Each chapter provides a short introduction but then focuses closely on what the Native veterans articulated in their interviews. Dixon anticipated, or at least hoped that his interviews and collections would demonstrate that Native people, especially because of their service in World War I, were worthy of citizenship. Krouse effectively turned his assimilation attempts into a study on Native veteran's military service before, during, and after World War I. According to Krouse, Native veterans volunteered to fulfill traditional warrior expectations, patriotism, economic opportunities, and protection of their land and citizens. Krouse highlighted the struggles of Native veterans in returning home to the United States, which included fighting allotment, the continued impacts of poison gas, and PTSD.

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<sup>62</sup> There is not a lot of information written about Joseph K. Dixon. There are some assumptions that he was a missionary but he is frequently categorized as an activist, who fought for the citizenship of Native veterans. He planned on compiling his collections into a book titled, "From Teepee to Trenches" but never did. He hoped that this collection would demonstrate Native people could be productive citizens.

<sup>63</sup> Krouse did not provide critical analysis for some of Dixon's assumptions or what the veterans stated. Krouse passed away from cancer around the time her work was published. This may have unfortunately rushed her analysis.

Despite Krouse's limited critical analysis, her book is a valuable contribution that gives voice to many Native World War I veterans.<sup>64</sup>

In *Medicine Bags and Dog Tags: American Indian Veterans from Colonial Times to the Second Iraq War*, historian Al Carroll outlined Native military service over three centuries. Carroll argued that Native people served in the military for the protection of their land, communities, and traditions. His elaborate analysis traced how Native people, through war songs, military societies, ceremonies, and military service, continued their cultures under the premise of American patriotism. Native veterans, Carroll contended, understood that military service could be used as a way to maintain and develop tribal sovereignty. He importantly moved away from focusing on specific battles or federal policies during the war and instead demonstrated military service as a continuously innovating cultural tradition.<sup>65</sup>

Unfortunately, it was often difficult to ascertain between Carroll's voice and his sources as he failed to cite sources for many of his conclusions, creating questions about the credibility of his work. Carroll's grand endeavor of examining over 250 years of military service drew confusing and unclear conclusions at times. His work is valuable for rethinking Native military history as a tradition; however, the all-encompassing approach made it difficult to determine the impact of military service on specific individuals and tribal traditions. Other works have attempted similar feats in encompassing Native veterans of all wars, however, their wide scope often provided limited context and history. These

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<sup>64</sup> Krouse was one of the few Native voices that have written extensively about Native veterans, and unfortunately, passed away at the age of 55.

<sup>65</sup> Al Carroll, *Medicine Bags and Dog Tags: American Indian Veterans from Colonial Times to the Second Iraq War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008). Carroll claims Indigenous ancestry but that has been questioned in the past. It is difficult to find any information about him.

works would be considered akin to popular histories with full-page color photos intended to provide a general overview of Native military service rather than providing deep critical analysis. They do; however, often give voice to a variety of Native soldiers from various twentieth-century wars and engagements.<sup>66</sup>

Historian Thomas Grillot's *First Americans: U.S. Patriotism in Indian Country after World War I* assessed Native American participation in World War I. Grillot used the term Indian Patriotism to frame his argument, which he defined as, "the mix of gestures, ceremonies, and utterances demonstrating love of the country and military loyalty."<sup>67</sup> Indian patriotism and military tradition, Grillot argued, was "repurposed for new goals" throughout the twentieth century.<sup>68</sup> To trace Indian patriotism, Grillot used the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe as a microcosm for military service and analyzed their war memorials, ceremonies, songs, and traditions. Thus, Grillot demonstrates how Indian patriotism was strategically developed to continue ceremonies, such as powwows, that had been banned by the federal government.

Grillot incorporated a variety of source material into his analysis. He paired federal archival materials and correspondence from the BIA and local reservation agents with newspaper articles, winter counts, oral histories, cultural traditions, and more. To better understand Indian patriotism, Grillot attended local powwows, visited World War I Memorials on the Standing Rock Reservation, and conducted many of his interviews. The

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<sup>66</sup> Herman J. Viola, *Warriors in Uniform: The Legacy of American Indian Heroism* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2008); John P. Langellier, *American Indians in the U.S. Armed Forces, 1866-1945* (London: Greenhill Books), 2000; Steven Clevenger, *America's First Warriors: Native Americans and Iraq* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2010).

<sup>67</sup> Thomas Grillot, *First Americans: U.S. Patriotism in Indian Country after World War I* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2018).

<sup>68</sup> Grillot, *First Americans*, 7.

combination of traditional archival material and his observations allowed Grillot to connect patriotism from World War I into the present day.

Unfortunately, Grillot's use of Indian patriotism as a framework only holds steady for his first four chapters and fades after that. At times, his use of Indian patriotism felt forced and framed Native people as obediently wanting to serve in the United States military. Indian patriotism is better understood as a mobilizer against settler colonialism rather than a way for Native people to participate in the colonizer's military. Indian patriotism, in other words, was the vehicle in which Native people realized that they could continue their old traditions and in that same process, create new ones.

Historian Paul C. Rosier's expansive work, *Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*, illustrated how during World War I and World War II, "Native Americans developed a sharpened sense of themselves as Native and American, largely because they perceived themselves fighting for two linked geographical spaces—their ancestral homelands and the United States of America—both facing a crisis of national security."<sup>69</sup> While his analysis includes Native veterans, it more so attempted to demonstrate the Native push for recognition of tribal sovereignty at a national and international level. He emphasized, "As Native Americans crossed physical and intellectual boundaries during World War II, they, along with white Americans, imagined the significance of these crossings in an international context. As a result, Rosier draws more from tribal and national archives and less on the voices of actual Native veterans. His work importantly lays out a chronological analysis from World War I to the American Indian Movement in the 1970s featuring Native activists, officials, and

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<sup>69</sup> Rosier, Paul C, *Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009), 73.

organizations fighting to establish tribal sovereignty while resisting federal attempts to eliminate it.

Historian Tom Holm's *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* has remained the only major work that focused on Native American Vietnam veterans and their experiences during and after the Vietnam War.<sup>70</sup> Despite being published almost twenty-five years ago, Holm's work remains the landmark history for anyone interested in Native American military service. Holm, a Cherokee Vietnam veteran, surveyed over 170 Native American veterans and established Native American military service as an ongoing tradition that has been redeployed from earlier generations. Most importantly, Holm analyzed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and elaborated on Native Vietnam veteran's post-war experiences, their homecomings both in urban and reservations settings, and their struggles with alcohol and drugs. He also connected Native Vietnam service with earlier generations of twentieth-century military service. His work will be centered in later chapters of this dissertation. Holm has also written and discussed PTSD among Native veterans throughout his career.<sup>71</sup>

In addition to Holm's work on Vietnam, there have been a small number of Vietnam veteran autobiographies, but most of those do not focus singularly on their Vietnam experience.<sup>72</sup> The growing number of autobiographies and memoirs in recent

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<sup>70</sup> Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996)

<sup>71</sup> Tom Holm, "PTSD in Native American Vietnam Veterans: A Reassessment," *Wicazo Sa Review* 11, no. 2 (1995): 83-86; Tom Holm, "Native American Veterans: Storytelling for Healing," Administration for Native Americans: An Office of the Administration for Children & Families, 3 October 2012: (<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ana/resource/native-american-veterans-storytelling-for-healing-0?page=all>).

<sup>72</sup> For example, see Leroy TeCube, *Year in Nam: A Native American Soldier's Story* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); Phillip H. Red Eagle, *Red Earth: A Vietnam Warrior's Journey* (Salt Press, 2007); Ron C. Wood, *Vietnam: Remembrances of a Native American Soldier* (Bloomington: iUniverse, Inc., 2011); Woody Kipp, *Viet Cong at Wounded Knee: The Trail of a Blackfeet Activist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

years has indicated that Native veterans have begun to tell their stories. Most of these works have been with smaller presses and encompassed a variety of experiences including activism, racism, violence in border towns, and post-war experiences. For the most part, Vietnam experiences were largely secondary; however, their publications indicated that there is a continued need for more veterans to tell their stories.<sup>73</sup> Autobiographies, as well as some biographies about various Native American veterans, will be explored in Chapter 3.

Nevertheless, the most glaring gap has remained the lack of individual tribal experiences. Native military service history has been limited to the singular experiences of Native Americans as a whole. To further develop the Native military literature, historians must examine specific cultural traditions, protocols, and experiences of individual tribes. This development will establish how various tribes and individuals redeployed their traditions and enacted their sovereignty. It is also important to analyze and establish Native American histories that did not participate in American military service. As sovereign nations, these tribes could, and some did enact their right to refuse military service. This was demonstrated in Townsend's brief discussion about the Zuni and Hopi, who cited religious reasons in their refusal of induction notices.<sup>74</sup> Scholars such as Audra Simpson have explored the politics of refusal among Native communities and elaborating on individual tribal cases would highlight Indigenous resistance and sovereignty to twentieth-century military participation.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Several autobiographies are in the works but that has limited distribution, therefore they are difficult to obtain. I would also like to note that many of these autobiographies have been co-authored with non-Native individuals.

<sup>74</sup> Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian*, 82-102.

<sup>75</sup> Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Duke University Press, 2014). In particular her chapter titled, "Ethnographic Refusal," p. 94-114.

The Native American military service experience has been largely written about and captured by the American imagination by one narrative: the Navajo Code Talkers during World War II. Many of these historical works on the Navajo, written largely from the United States Army archives, detailed Navajo Code Talkers in problematic and sometimes racist ways. Margaret T. Bixler's historical analysis, published in 1992, feels like an outdated anthropological study. Bixler observed about the Navajo, "The round head, flat face and nose, straight black hair and the narrow shape of the eyes resemble the Chinese, especially those from the Mongolian area."<sup>76</sup> While Bixler's work projected overtly racist and stereotypical assumptions about Navajo people, it is not uncommon for historians, as demonstrated by Bernstein and Nash, to make outdated and backward assumptions about Native people. These stereotypical characteristics are easy to spot by a trained Native historian but often remain unseen by non-Native scholars. The framework around the Navajo Code Talkers focuses more on their role in defeating the German and Japanese armies, and not on the originality and genius of Navajo Code Talkers to continue speaking their traditional language. Instead of highlighting the ways that Navajo people continued to speak their language despite federal policies that attempted to extinguish it, historians have often promoted the Navajo language as patriotic, as something that defended the settler colonial continent.

These contributions should not be completely discounted but they disregarded the contributions of Native American Code Talkers beyond the Navajo Tribe. Natives from dozens of tribes served as code talkers during both World War I and World War II including the Lakota, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and several others. Native veterans and family

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<sup>76</sup> Margaret T. Bixler, *Winds of Freedom: The Story of the Navajo Code Talkers of World War II* (Darien, Connecticut: Two Bytes Publishing Company, 1992), vii.

members have widely begun to write about their experiences in World War II.<sup>77</sup> A variety of co-authored autobiographies, biographies, and histories by family members, tribal members, and former code talkers have been produced in the last decade. These accounts expand the Code Talker narrative beyond the Navajo tribe and provide other tribal perspectives.<sup>78</sup> Andrea Page, for example, the granddaughter of Lakota Code Talker, published his narrative in 2017. Chester Nez, a World War II Navajo Code Talker, stated in his co-authored autobiography, “We have always felt a deep allegiance to our motherland, our Navajo Nation, and our families. To this allegiance is linked a sincere desire to protect all three.”<sup>79</sup> Nez’s own words, as a Native veteran and Code Talker, demonstrated the unique reasoning behind serving in the military. They also provide scholars with an opportunity to hear about the experiences, reasoning, and complexities of military service among Native people.

In addition to United States military service, scholars have also written about Canadian First Nation experiences in World War I and World War II. Historian Fred Gaffen’s *Forgotten Soldiers* focuses on specific battles, engagements, and biographies of accomplished First Nation soldiers. His work relies heavily on the Canadian archives and limits the voices of First Nation participants.<sup>80</sup> James Dempsey analyzes Western Canada’s First Nation contributions during World War I. His work, like so many American Indian military studies, incorrectly concludes that First Nation soldiers largely volunteered for patriotic reasons. He focuses on the struggles of Aboriginal peoples to adjust to a white

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<sup>77</sup> Hollis Dorion Stabler and Victoria Smith, *No One Ever Asked Me: The World War II Memories of an Omaha Indian Soldier* (Lincoln: University of Lincoln Press, 2009); Andrea M. Page, *Sioux Code Talkers of World War II* (Pelican Publishing Company, 2017).

<sup>78</sup> Chester Nez, *Code Talker: The First and Only Memoir By One of the Original Code Talkers of WWII* (New York: Berkley Caliber, 2011).

<sup>79</sup> Nez, *Code Talker*, 85.

<sup>80</sup> Fred, Gaffen, *Forgotten Soldiers* (Penticton, B.C: Theytus Books, 1985).

world and overshadows the voices of Indigenous people.<sup>81</sup> Timothy Winegard's surveys First Nation experiences before, during, and after World War I. Winegard, most notably, examines Canadian policies that attempted to recruit and assimilate First Nation soldiers into the mainstream.<sup>82</sup>

In anticipation of Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary and celebration, First Nation participation in military experiences has been widely acknowledged in mainstream media networks; however, many of these histories are typical settler colonial assimilation narratives. Two scholars have worked to change the settler narrative including Brian McInnes, whose analysis of Francis Pegahmagabow incorporates Ojibwe language, storytelling, and oral histories. Pegahmagabow, who is considered the most decorated soldier from Canada, served as a sniper during World War I. McInnes illuminates Pegahmagabow's service, and most importantly, ties it to a longer Ojibwe history of military and political resistance against settler colonialism.<sup>83</sup> Scholar Allison Norman has also emphasized the role of Six Nation and other First Nation women during World War I.<sup>84</sup> Because there are Dakota and Lakota communities in Canada, these studies will be important in tracing Native military service.

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<sup>81</sup> James L. Dempsey, *Warriors of the King: Prairie Indians in World War I*. (Regina, Sask: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1999).

<sup>82</sup> Timothy C Winegard, *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012).

<sup>83</sup> Brian D McInnes, *Sounding Thunder: The Stories of Francis Pegahmagabow* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016).

<sup>84</sup> I have been unable to find any of her research other than the title or a chapter of her dissertation: "In Defense of the Empire: The Six Nations of the Grand River and the Great War." From what I have been able to surmise from her online profile, this work focuses on education and Indigenous women in Canada. She has presented multiple times on Six Nation women during World War I. She completed her Ph.D., I believe, in education.

Scholars over the last decade have started studying Native mobilization against colonialism through a variety of lens' including the role of masculinity and gender. Ty P. Kāwika Tengan explores Hawaiian sovereignty and masculinity as resistance to settler colonialism. Tengan assesses Hale Mua, a Hawaiian men's group developed in the 1990s that asserts their warrior masculinity and sovereignty through martial arts and borrowed traditions. Tengan uses oral histories to develop how these members reconsider their masculinity and sovereignty.<sup>85</sup> Historian Edward Valandra illustrates the history of the Lakota's opposition to Federal Termination in the 1950s. While focusing on Termination, Valandra traces the history of Lakota resistance throughout the twentieth century. Many of these Lakota leaders were veterans, who inevitably redeployed their traditions to assert Lakota sovereignty.<sup>86</sup>

In the general field of Vietnam military history, historians have largely ignored Native American voices. For example, historian James Ebert's, *A Life in a Year: The American Infantryman in Vietnam* (2004) contained three brief references to Native American soldiers.<sup>87</sup> Those references included two soldiers, Robert Emery and Thomas Roubideaux, whose full interviews from the South Dakota State Archives I focus on in Chapter 2. Like Bernstein and other non-Native scholars cited earlier in this chapter, Ebert acknowledged Native veterans served in disproportionate numbers but claimed their reasons were "due in part to a tradition of honor connected to the warrior archetype . . ."<sup>88</sup> Ebert also cited poverty, prejudice, and limited economic opportunities in Native

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<sup>85</sup> Ty P. Kāwika Tengan, *Native Men Remade: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Hawai'i* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>86</sup> Edward Charles Valandra, *Not Without Our Consent: Lakota Resistance to Termination, 1950-59* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

<sup>87</sup> James Ebert, *A Life in a Year: An Infantryman in Vietnam* (London: Greenhill, 2004).

<sup>88</sup> Ebert, *A Life in a Year*, 7.

communities as additional reasons for Native American service in Vietnam. Ebert did acknowledge the stereotypes that Roubideaux encountered, such as being called Chief and being forced to walk point – that serves as the lead for the rest of the group. Non-Native soldiers and commanders often assumed that Native people had an innate ability to hunt and track enemies as well as find enemy bombs, tracks, or hideouts. Roubideaux simply accepted these as roles that fulfilled that Native American warrior archetype. Thus, his promise to tell the story of the American infantryman, which included access to at least five Native American Vietnam veteran's interviews in the South Dakota State Archives, fell short.

The same can be said for other major works on the Vietnam War, especially those promising to tell the story of the Vietnam American infantrymen. Historian Christian G. Appy has been at the forefront of Vietnam history, and his works have focused on minorities and working-class experiences during Vietnam.<sup>89</sup> The late Wallace Terry, a former journalist who covered the Vietnam War, edited and illustrated the oral histories of over twenty African American Vietnam veterans.<sup>90</sup> These works, while valuable, disregarded Native American veterans entirely. Appy's *Patriots: The Vietnam War: Remembering Vietnam from All Sides*, included interviews from over 350 soldiers, government workers, and included Vietnamese soldiers and citizens impacted by the war. Appy projected that his interviews, "allows us to envision the war's full scale and significance."<sup>91</sup> His 500-page book does not include the voice or perspective of one Native

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<sup>89</sup> Christian G. Appy, *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides* (London: Penguin Books, 2004); Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

<sup>90</sup> Wallace Terry, *Bloods: Black Veterans of the Vietnam War; an Oral History* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984).

<sup>91</sup> Appy, *Patriots*, 2004.

American veteran. Appy, as well as other historians, largely centered African American Vietnam infantryman and soldier experiences, which unlike Native soldiers fight for sovereignty, land, and community, included struggling for equality, civil rights, and economic opportunities. Despite limited references to Native American people, these works are not only important in differentiating and comparing the experiences of Native American veterans to other soldiers of color, but also in promoting the distinct reasons that other minorities and working-class soldiers served in the military.

While historical scholarship has largely ignored the role of Native American military service in twentieth and twenty-first-century American engagements, literature, both by Native and non-Native authors, has incorporated a variety of Native veterans and their experiences during and after the war. These fictional portrayals, both accurate and stereotypical, reflect and encompass the large numbers of Native veterans during this time. Most of the literature can be divided into two categories. The first category focuses on the stereotypical and masculine warrior that can track enemies and have an innate sense of the wilderness.<sup>92</sup> The second category, most often written about by Native authors, emphasizes veteran struggles in returning to the reservation and other Native communities.<sup>93</sup> Additional literature has focused on Native veterans as secondary characters who are often unnamed or referred to as “Chief” holding a grudge against the United States.<sup>94</sup> Mark St. Pierre has also written a work of fiction based on the experiences of a real Pine Ridge Lakota Frank Jealous of Him and his non-Native friend in Vietnam.<sup>95</sup> The late Jim

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<sup>92</sup> Rambo. Henry Standing Bear from the Longmire series and television show.

<sup>93</sup> Leslie Marmon Silko’s, *Ceremony*; N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn*.

<sup>94</sup> Tim O’Brien’s, *The Things They Carried*.

<sup>95</sup> St. Pierre, Mark, *Of Uncommon Birth: Dakota Sons in Vietnam* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016). This is a work of fiction but Frank Jealous of Him was a real Native person, who was killed in action during Vietnam. The account is largely based on the notes from his non-Native friend. St. Pierre also

Northrup, an Ojibwe Vietnam, wrote short stories, poetry, and newspaper editorials about Vietnam veterans.<sup>96</sup> Finally, Philip Caputo, who famously wrote the best-selling memoir, *A Rumor of War*, and won a Pulitzer Prize for literature, produced a fiction account of an Ojibwe Vietnam soldier.<sup>97</sup> Twentieth-century Native American literature will be more closely examined in Chapter 4.

### **A Lakota and Dakota Archive**

In a 2014 interview, Dennis Rucker, a Yankton Sioux Vietnam veteran, stated, “Our people, my people, or Indian people have a lot of respect for the akíčhitas. In our society, we put our children and our elderly first but our akíčhitas above them on a pedestal.”<sup>98</sup> The Lakota word Rucker referenced for soldier, akíčhita, is most commonly used to describe Native American soldiers in twentieth and twenty-first-century engagements. According to the Lakota dictionary, akíčhita has been redefined from “members of warrior societies whenever they were on duty (as camp police, during a communal hunt or war path, as scouts) . . . to Indian police and to soldiers of the U.S. army.”<sup>99</sup> In *Turtle Lung Woman’s Granddaughter*, Lakota scholar Delphine Red Shirt described that transition. Writing from the perspective of her grandmother, Red Shirt articulated the experiences of her great-grandfather, who served as a scout in the United States Army in the late nineteenth century. As she illustrated her great-grandfather, referring to him as Kaká, Red Shirt detailed:

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based the work on his notes and does not provide citations; however, he states in the introduction that he interviewed the family of Jealous of Him. The work also contains pictures of Jealous of Him.

<sup>96</sup> Jim Northrup, *Walking the Rez Road: Stories* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum, 2013).

<sup>97</sup> Caputo, Philip, *Indian Country* (New York: Vintage, 2004).

<sup>98</sup> Dennis W. Rucker, interviewed by Dr. Samuel Herley and John Little, Yankton Tribal Veteran’s office, Wagner, SD, February 2, 2014, American Indian Research Project.

<sup>99</sup> Lakota Dictionary iPhone Application under a search for “soldier.” The term is also found when searching the terms: warrior, army, military, troops, and police (depending on the community).

In civilian life, after the military discharged him, Kaká dressed a certain way each day. He wore pants that were like suit pants, a shirt, and suspenders. He followed the ways of the “akíchita,” the white man’s soldier. In the old days, the word “akíchita” meant something else. A long time ago, that word had a very specific meaning. It signified a Lakota man who was entrusted to keep order and peace among the people. He was required to guard the ways of the people. In those days, the people had no written laws but live by very strict rules and customs. When it came to maintaining order among the people, the akíchita were respected and obeyed. Kaká, perhaps, liked the idea of being an akíchita, even it was for different people.<sup>100</sup>

Red Shirt also discussed the term akíčhita in her work on George Sword, who was the first police chief on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in the late twentieth century. As she stated, “the Lakota people perceived the newly established reservation police as similar to the *akicita* societies that were traditionally esteemed in Lakota culture.” She continued, “These men maintained necessary order among the people and were thus culturally accorded deep respect and were often obeyed by all.”<sup>101</sup> These policemen or akíčhita, according to Red Shirt, were seen as protectors of people, culture, and land. That word, as contributed by Rucker, Red Shirt, and the Lakota dictionary, developed from a time when the Lakota culture and language were still intact. Thus, the word akíčhita displays pre-reservation contexts of service towards the protection of Lakota people, land, and traditions into the twenty-first century.

As stated throughout this chapter and in the introduction, scholars working on military service have discounted valuable sources that demonstrate Lakota and Dakota military service as a continuously developing tradition throughout the twentieth century. Non-Native scholars have frequently cited the word akíčhita to describe Lakota soldiers in

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<sup>100</sup> Delphine Red Shirt and Lone Woman, *Turtle Lung Woman’s Granddaughter* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 85. Kaká is a Lakota kinship term commonly used to describe grandfather.

<sup>101</sup> Delphine Red Shirt, *George Sword’s Warrior Narratives: Compositional Processes in Lakota Oral Tradition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 33.

the United States military but often failed to provide any context behind the term other than referencing it as old or as a word that was now used in context with contemporary soldiers. Without understanding the deep and complex meanings of the Lakota language, scholars have missed key connections of contemporary military service to the older tradition of protecting their people and way of life. It is in these seemingly simple but complex traditions that Lakota and Dakota veterans chose to serve as an *akíçhita* in the United States military, never serving for the United States but rather for their distinct reasons.

One of the most revealing ways to see how military tradition changed and has been incorporated into contemporary military service is to examine Lakota and Dakota language newspapers from the late twentieth and early twentieth centuries. This included the Dakota language missionary newspaper, *Iapi Oaye* as well as the Lakota language newspaper, *Anpao Kin. Iapi Oaye*, translated as *The Word Carrier*, was published from May 1871 until March 1939. The *Iapi Oaye* was first published in Greenwood, Dakota Territory and later in Santee, Nebraska near the present-day Santee Sioux Reservation. The earliest publications of *Iapi Oaye* were strictly in the Dakota language; however, later publications were published both in Dakota and English. The original purpose was for Christian missionaries to spread the word of God among the Dakota and Lakota. It is difficult to estimate the circulation totals, but a variety of Lakota and Dakota people wrote letters to the editor throughout South and North Dakota demonstrating that it had a large and widespread audience. When the paper moved to Santee, Nebraska, it was renamed *the Word Carrier of Santee Normal Training School*.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> For consistency, I will refer to this newspaper as the *Iapi Oaye*.

*Anpao Kin*, translated as *the Daybreak*, enjoyed a long circulation as well but struggled financially and stopped publication multiple times. For the most part, the *Anpao Kin* disseminated from 1878 until 1937 under several names including *Anpao*, *Anpao Kin*, and *Anpao (The Daybreak)*.<sup>103</sup> Like the *Iapi Oaye*, *Anpao Kin* served as a form of the Christian gospel for the Niobrara Mission and Protestant Episcopal Church in Niobrara Mission (1878-1908) and Mission, South Dakota (1908-1937), located on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation. *Anpao Kin* served both Lakota and Dakota subscribers and relied on local individuals to publish every week, many of which were the same editorial writers as the *Iapi Oaye*. The publishers of both newspapers were Christian missionaries; nevertheless, the brief portions examined in this chapter were letters to the editors written by Native correspondents.

As Ann Juneau, Department Head of the National Museum of Natural History, pronounced about the *Anpao Kin* papers in the Smithsonian collections, “Researchers can find nuggets of biographical information about individuals tribes’ people; invaluable leads to Native American ancestry, linguistics and tribal dialectical examples.”<sup>104</sup> Juneau was correct in that researchers could find nuggets of rich resources; nonetheless, the *Iapi Oaye* and *Anpao Kin* have, for the most part, gone unnoticed in studies about Native American military service. Due to their large Christian influence, they have also been written off as missionary attempts to spread the word of God among the Lakota and Dakota. These newspapers documented some of the first and perhaps only true voices of Lakota and Dakota World War I veterans. It is important to note that these newspapers are readily

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<sup>103</sup> For consistency, I will refer to this newspaper as the *Anpao Kin*.

<sup>104</sup> Ann Juneau, “Historical Sioux Tribal Newspapers See Light of Day,” *Unbound: Smithsonian Libraries*, May 10, 2013. <https://blog.library.si.edu/blog/2013/05/10/historical-sioux-tribal-newspapers-see-the-light-of-day/#.XbEuHy-ZPs0>.

accessible online and in many archives such as the Minnesota Historical Association, the Amherst Library, the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, and the Newberry Library.<sup>105</sup>

These newspaper sources have been ignored for several reasons. For one, scholars do not have the background knowledge of the Dakota or Lakota language to understand what was written, especially in the early versions which were written strictly in Dakota and Lakota. Despite many of the editorials from Lakota and Dakota World War I veterans being translated into English; scholars have failed to use the contributions of these soldiers in their historical works. Secondly, as Lakota scholar Red Shirt has pointed out in her work on George Sword and Lakota composition, historians have focused on the *content* of military service rather than the *process* of how Lakota or Dakota traditions or languages work.<sup>106</sup> When using Lakota written texts, as Red Shirt examined, scholars relied on translations from non-Lakota, and more importantly non-fluent, individuals. These translations missed key concepts in Lakota and Dakota culture and tradition. Lastly, as discussed earlier, it was assumed that these newspapers only carried the voices of Christian missionaries attempting to convert Lakota and Dakota people.

These newspapers importantly contained dozens of obituaries on Dakota and Lakota soldiers that were killed during World War I including Thomas Kasto, John Taylor, and Joe Peters. John Thunder, a former Santee Training School graduate from Pipestone, Manitoba, wrote a letter to *Iapi Oaye*, which was published in the April 1918 edition. The letter, published under the title *Canada Dakota Koska Okicize Opapi Kin*, provided a

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<sup>105</sup> These are just four possible archives that I have utilized over the last four years, both online and in person. the Minnesota Historical Society has made them available online as well as the Amherst library. It can be assumed that other archives featuring Native collections have access to them as well.

<sup>106</sup> Red Shirt, *George Sword's Warrior Narratives*, 16.

thorough explanation of his military service for the British and Canadian governments, as well as why he was fighting the Germans overseas. It was cited that the Germans were trying to destroy democracy and the British government. Thunder mentioned other letters written by Dakota that he was paraphrasing in his published letter. The final portion of the letter listed the three men, Kasto, Taylor, and Peters, who were killed during the war.

The final portion, written in Dakota, was published as:

Koska dena iye cinpi hca on okicize econpi hecen hena akicita waditakapi wankahanpi kin om wankahanpi qa eajepi kin sanpa iyagapi. Koska dena wicaktepi ki eepi. Thomas Kasto Pipestone etanhan, John Taylor Wipazuka Wakpa etanhan, Joe Peters Mdetanka etanhan. Ehanke wiconi en Itancan kin heya, “Tuwe takuwicaye cin on wiconi ehepkiye cinhan he wowaste kin tuwena kapeye sni.”<sup>107</sup>

The *Iapi Oaye* published the version in English as well in June-July edition of the *Iapi Oaye* under the title. The English version translated the same passage as:

German bullets have now killed one of our boys from each of these localities, Pipestone, Juneberry Creek, and Big Lake. These were all very young but their hearts were full of bravery. They were all volunteers so they deserve honor. Their names are Thomas Kasto (smoothed) from Pipestone, John Taylor of Wipazuka (Juneberry) Creek and Joe Petus [misspelling] from Mdetanka (Big Lake.) Our Lord said “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”<sup>108</sup>

There are obvious discrepancies in the Dakota and English translations of the published letters. For one, the title in the Dakota language would more accurately be

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<sup>107</sup> John Thunder, “Canada Dakota Koska Okicize Opapi Kin,” *Iapi Oaye*, April: [https://newspapers.mnhs.org/jsp/viewer.jsp?doc\\_id=mnhi0009%2F1KLJ415B%2F18040101&init\\_width=600&recoffset=0&collection\\_filter=9a9d3373-1a07-41bd-8863-6b371c0cf6b5&collection\\_name=9a9d3373-1a07-41bd-8863-6b371c0cf6b5&sort\\_col=publication%20date&CurSearchNum=-1&recOffset=0](https://newspapers.mnhs.org/jsp/viewer.jsp?doc_id=mnhi0009%2F1KLJ415B%2F18040101&init_width=600&recoffset=0&collection_filter=9a9d3373-1a07-41bd-8863-6b371c0cf6b5&collection_name=9a9d3373-1a07-41bd-8863-6b371c0cf6b5&sort_col=publication%20date&CurSearchNum=-1&recOffset=0).

<sup>108</sup> John Thunder, “Canadian Indian Soldiers Killed in France,” *Word Carrier: Santee Normal Training School*, June 1918: [https://newspapers.mnhs.org/jsp/viewer.jsp?doc\\_id=mnhi0009%2F1L7BYD5B%2F18050101&init\\_width=600&recoffset=0&collection\\_filter=0b0442c1-6cb6-49f5-9364-a1d0efbbe7e7&collection\\_name=0b0442c1-6cb6-49f5-9364-a1d0efbbe7e7&sort\\_col=publication%20date&CurSearchNum=-1&recOffset=0](https://newspapers.mnhs.org/jsp/viewer.jsp?doc_id=mnhi0009%2F1L7BYD5B%2F18050101&init_width=600&recoffset=0&collection_filter=0b0442c1-6cb6-49f5-9364-a1d0efbbe7e7&collection_name=0b0442c1-6cb6-49f5-9364-a1d0efbbe7e7&sort_col=publication%20date&CurSearchNum=-1&recOffset=0).

translated as, “The Dakota Canadian soldier went overseas to war or joined the war effort.” The word “opapi” roughly translated would mean to “go by way of something” such as a boat overseas to war. Opapi used in the present references Native soldiers serving, enlisting or joining the Armed Forces.<sup>109</sup> Those inconsistencies become even more apparent when translated by a fluent Lakota speaker such as Delphine Red Shirt, a professor at Stanford who has written extensively on the Lakota language and agreed to translate this passage for my dissertation. Her translation for the same passage was:

For those Dakota who serve. The life of a soldier is difficult but honorable. (Ho), for us, Dakota people, the young men who have served. Some are shot and killed. Although regardless of the hardships, these young men want to serve in battle, that is why they serve in the military. The young men they have killed are: Thomas Kasto from Pipestone, John Taylor from Wipazuka Wakpa, and Joe Peters from Mdetanka. Long ago, a leader said, “There is no honor greater than for he who gives his life for his relatives.”<sup>110</sup>

In being translated by a fluent Lakota speaker, compared to a Christian missionary, who may have had their underlining motives, the passage demonstrates the complexity of the Dakota language, and more importantly, the continuation of Dakota military traditions. In her translation, it becomes clear that Dakota soldiers had their reasons for serving in the military. Words like “Itancan,” which traditionally means, “Leader,” have layered meanings. For many Christian missionaries, the word “Itancan” was used to describe the Lord, Jesus, or God.

Consequently, Red Shirt reframed the Christian missionary’s translation of the Lord’s prayer into Thunder’s construction that these soldiers died serving, protecting, and

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<sup>109</sup> These are just minor discrepancies that I can notice as a second language learner in Dakota. I am no way fluent and continue to learn every day.

<sup>110</sup> Delphine Red Shirt translated this passage at my request in August of 2017 and provided me with the written text of what she perceived the Dakota letter. She is a fluent speaker and translated this text before I found the English version.

honoring their people, relatives, and communities rather than fighting for the United States, or even God. While it could be debated that Thunder, who was a student at Santee Normal Training School, would have been familiar with the Lord's prayer, it could be assumed that Lakota and Dakota readers who translated this passage without Christianity in mind, could have read the passage without religious affiliation. Regardless of that debate, Thunder would have likely understood the legacy he was carrying and continuing as an *akíčhita* in World War I.

This is just one example from the *Iapi Oaye* but it is an important one that reframes military service from a Dakota perspective and has a deep underlining message about military tradition. There are other examples of this, especially in the *Iapi Oaye* obituaries and correspondences written by Dakota and Lakota people, that deserve more attention. The *Anpao Kin*, whose issues were often written in Lakota, Dakota, and English, also has portions that described military tradition. Philip Frazier, who wrote for both the *Anpao Kin* and the *Iapi Oaye*, stated:

We have had many trying hours and hardships. Our minds have been broadened, our hearts and minds have learned many sad but important lessons. May we ever keep those lessons in our mind and find a place to work out our lessons. We have much to live up to now in order to prove ourselves worthy of these brave souls whose bodies are underneath the soil of France. We cannot go back home and play a two faced game. The war game has shown us to make a stand for truth in face of death. The American Indian has proven himself a worthy citizen in that he has done his part faithfully and with skill among his comrades. We are coming home to work and carry out the work which we started that of making the world a better place to live in. Thus with a broader mind and a larger heart we are coming home. May we prove ourselves worthy citizens of the United States as well as worthy soldiers of humanity and God.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Philip Frazier, "Our Indian Minister's Son," *Anpao: The Daybreak*: July 28, 1919: (<https://ia800200.us.archive.org/32/items/Anpao32A/Anpao32A.pdf>).

Frazier eluded to a lot of complexities for his service. The most important was to honor his fallen comrades in World War I. However, this section of the *Anpao Kin*, demonstrates that Frazier and other soldiers were not going to live under the shadow of the federal government without fighting for their rights, which included citizenship. Native people, as Frazier boldly pointed out, would not be seen as second-class citizens. They had served their country, for a variety of complex reasons, and would continue that fight.

While these are just brief examples, they can vastly change historians' understandings of Lakota and Dakota military service in the twentieth century. Scholars cannot continue to ignore Lakota and Dakota's written texts, regardless of how inconvenient and difficult it might be to learn these languages. As Joseph Cloud stated in the July 1, 1919 edition of the *Iapi Oaye*, published in English, "I did all I could for my country. I'm proud that I did and I would do it all over again, too. My nation gave liberally to the Army. The men wanted to go; the women ordered us to go. No good Indian would run away from a fight. We knew that the life of America depended on the men, and we are Americans." Unlike Bernstein, Townsend, and other scholars writing on Native veterans, Cloud projected himself and Native people as part of America. His Nation, the Dakota tribe, gave liberally, and they would not be refused that acknowledgment. As he concluded, "The Germans . . . tried to stir up disloyalty among the Indians. They failed. No one could ever have made our nation disloyal. Whatever may have happened in the past is all over now. We are Americans, loyal Americans."<sup>112</sup> Cloud projected that the Dakota Nation answered the call and would continue to answer the call throughout the twentieth

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<sup>112</sup> Cloud, Joseph. "The Indians True to the Traditions of War." *The Word Carrier of Santee Normal Training School*. July 1, 1919: (<http://www.mnhs.org/newspapers/lccn/sn96080197/1919-07-01/ed-1/seq-2>).

century. He, as well as others, ultimately did it for their people, the land, and the continuation of Dakota and Lakota culture into the present but also proved that they would continue to remain Dakota people despite being enmeshed into the settler colonial continent of America.

## **Chapter 2: Native Sons in Vietnam**

In a 2017 interview, Rosebud Sioux veteran Rick Thomas reflected on his military service in Vietnam and his return home to the United States. This reflection, in light of the release of the Ken Burn's ten-part documentary series: *The Vietnam War*, was captured by the South Dakota Public Broadcasting Systems (PBS) affiliate. The documentary series promised viewers a deep analysis of one of the "most consequential, divisive, and controversial events in American history as it has never been told before on film."<sup>113</sup> In preparation for the documentary series, PBS affiliates across the United States began to interview Vietnam veterans. Thomas, as well as five other South Dakota Native Americans, were part of that process alongside dozens, perhaps hundreds, of interviews from a variety of individuals and perspectives. These included former American policymakers, American soldiers, and even Viet Cong soldiers who fought against the United States.

Thomas' twenty-five-minute interview elaborated on his experiences during and after Vietnam.<sup>114</sup> Like many who had served there, Thomas suffered from the lingering and ongoing impacts of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). He traced his PTSD to many of the things he encountered during and after Vietnam, with particular attention to one brutal ambush on Hill 51 when he watched many of his fellow soldiers be killed or wounded. During the ambush, Thomas held a soldier whose intestines were falling out of a mortal wound. The soldier asked Thomas if he was going to die, and Thomas realized that

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<sup>113</sup> Public Broadcasting Service, "The Vietnam War: About," PBS.org: <http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/the-vietnam-war/about/> (accessed March 18, 2019).

<sup>114</sup> Thomas' interview, as well as the other PBS interviews, were edited by the SDPBS. It's not known what they edited out, but it appears that it was mostly to cut out some of the "um's," "uh's," and some of the silent pauses. Each interview section was divided into chapters with questions from the interviews. For example, "Why did you serve?"

all he could do for his comrade at that moment was comfort and keep telling him he was going to make it. Thomas remembered right before the wounded soldier died, “he was trying to talk to me, his head went back, his eyes rolled up, and he said, ‘Mom, mom.’ Looking up [Thomas motions up], his mother in spirit must have come after him or something. And so, I always remembered that . . . No matter where we’re at, whether in combat, whether back home on the rez, seems like mom was always around. And I seen that on Hill 51.”<sup>115</sup> Like so many young men who went to war, it felt like home and family were never that far away.

In the interview, Thomas acknowledged his PTSD as well as his guilt for surviving the war while many others did not. “There was 82 of us,” Thomas stated, “that flew out of Ft. Benning, Georgia to Vietnam. When I came home, there was only three of us on that plane. [It] makes you stop and think . . . Sometimes you even feel guilty you know. What’s so unique about me that I’m still alive at 71?”<sup>116</sup> Because his interview with PBS was in front of a camera, the viewer can see, and in some ways feel, the continued impact of the PTSD on Thomas. In many moments, Thomas pauses midway through a sentence to collect his thoughts, tears streaming down his face before he can go on or finish a story.

When the interviewer asked Thomas how he carried his trauma with him, he replied: “Drinking. Boy, I was a hardcore alcoholic. Been to treatment three times. I couldn’t quit. I could find myself waking up at night, curled up in the corner, cold sweats . . . I knew something was wrong because I used to wake up in the morning, and I always thought about sitting on a hill and sniping at anything.”<sup>117</sup> Thomas would sometimes go

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<sup>115</sup> Rick Thomas, *SD Vietnam Stories: Rick Thomas*, Camera, September 1, 2017, Public Broadcasting System: <http://www.sdpb.org/blogs/arts-and-culture/sd-vietnam-stories-rick-thomas/>.

<sup>116</sup> Rick Thomas interview.

<sup>117</sup> Rick Thomas interview.

weeks binge drinking without stopping but eventually turned to his Lakota culture realizing that it was not his time to die. The bullets had missed him, as he referenced, so the Creator must have a different plan for him. As he relayed later, “sometimes I go into self-pity. And again I bring myself out of it by putting something positive there. It’s learning how to do all that.”<sup>118</sup> While Thomas survived a year in Vietnam, surviving PTSD after the war proved to be a much more difficult task.

Thomas credited Charlie Kills Enemy with helping him to quit drinking. The story went that Kills Enemy invited Thomas out to his house in St. Francis, South Dakota on the Rosebud Indian Reservation. Once he arrived, Kills Enemy greeted Thomas by a sweat lodge. Thomas described the story:

I want to show you something he says. He picked up two rocks and when he picked up those two rocks he said, ‘You went through a lot in your life.’ he said, ‘Going to war. Coming back. Drinking yourself. All those memories. All those pains. That alcohol is what’s killing you.’ So he showed that rock to me but he said, ‘Take a look at this rock over here, you’re a Dakota, you’re an American Indian. You have your culture. You have your spirituality,’ he said, ‘which one do you want? Because you can’t have both.’ I thought damn that makes a lot of sense. So I chose this one and never drank after that. It’s been over 42 years now for me. Just by what a spiritual leader told me.<sup>119</sup>

The common narrative about Vietnam veterans, especially in popular culture, is one of isolation, depression, alcoholism, and lonely death. Thomas acknowledged his use of alcohol to suppress his traumatic memories and PTSD, but more importantly, he was able to share that over 50 years later, he was allowed to tell his story of adversity and survival rather than suicide or isolation. “I got used to talking about my experiences,” Thomas reiterated, “listening to other vet’s experiences. That helped me to be more open to telling

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<sup>118</sup> Rick Thomas interview.

<sup>119</sup> Rick Thomas interview.

my story. And it's difficult. They tell us PTSD will never leave. But I know that we have to be taught how to walk through it with PTSD you know." He continued, "a lot of our vets hate to say they have PTSD because it's a behavior health issue, mental health. But if they're getting rated for it, they need to talk about it."<sup>120</sup> Even with his emotional moments, this interview importantly centered Thomas as a survivor, not only of Vietnam but the ongoing effects and impacts of PTSD. Contrary to that stereotypical narrative, Thomas chose to live.

Thomas' interview, as well as many of the interviews that will be discussed in this chapter, documented the experiences of Native American Vietnam veterans. Native Vietnam veterans, for the most part, have been underexamined in the historical literature. Historian James B. Ebert, for example, cast Vietnam veterans as the "great silent majority." Ebert's reference was meant to call out the fact that Vietnam veterans have remained overshadowed in terms of historical analysis, federal resources for dealing with PTSD and other issues, and public attention. More recently, special attention has been paid to Vietnam veterans, but their stories often continue to be considered an unworthy and ugly part of American history that people want to forget. Ebert's work promised to tell the story of the soldiers that fought on the front lines, predominantly working-class and soldiers of color. His massive 400-page work, *A Life in a Year: The American Infantryman in Vietnam*, contained just four brief paragraphs on Native veterans. Ebert's work effectively – albeit – unintentionally cast Native veterans as an even greater silent minority.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Rick Thomas interview.

<sup>121</sup> James Ebert, *A Life in a Year: The American Infantryman in Vietnam, 1965-1972* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004), xxi.

Instead of including any Native veteran perspectives or interviews in his seemingly all-encompassing work titled, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam*, historian Christian Appy summarized Native Americans, Hispanics, and Asian American soldiers under one simple line: “even the most basic statistical information about their role in Vietnam remains either unknown or inadequately examined.”<sup>122</sup> Another book was written by Appy, *Patriots: The Vietnam War from All Sides*, comprised of 135 interviews from both sides but did not contain one single contribution from a Native American soldier.<sup>123</sup> Each of these works contained hundreds of interviews from Vietnam soldiers promising to tell the complete story of the Vietnam War but failed to include any deep or real perspectives from Native soldiers.

Ebert claimed that Vietnam veterans in general, “are proud to have served their country and most have remained patriotic, but with one difference: Many of them were embittered because they were called upon to fight an unpopular war without much public support. They resented the loss of life and limb and the experience of their own efforts for what ultimately turned out to be little or nothing.”<sup>124</sup> Ebert’s claim may be true for some Vietnam veterans but in looking at Thomas’ oral history, we can see a more complex and nuanced experience in his return home to the states. Thomas, who returned home in 1967, acknowledged, “It was traumatic just to come home.”<sup>125</sup> After landing in the Denver airport in full uniform, Thomas was followed into a public restroom by two individuals he described as “skinheads.” These individuals called Thomas a baby killer, mocked him for

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<sup>122</sup> Christian G. Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill and London, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 19.

<sup>123</sup> Christian G. Appy, *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides* (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

<sup>124</sup> Ebert, *A Life in a Year*, xxi.

<sup>125</sup> Rick Thomas interview.

his military service in Vietnam, and for being Native American. Thomas quickly realized, "I had two marks against me, just walking back into the United States."<sup>126</sup> In other words, Thomas was verbally assaulted for being a veteran of the highly unpopular and controversial Vietnam War, as well as for being Native American. After ignoring their remarks, Thomas soon realized he would not get out of the restroom without a fight. Fortunately for Thomas, another Marine Vietnam veteran walked in and the two fought their way out of the escalated moment.

Rick Thomas, like many veterans who returned home, witnessed protestors holding signs, heard the whispers, and felt the stares from those he walked past in both the Washington and Denver airports. He even heard rumors of snipers wanting to shoot Vietnam veterans returning home. These particular moments angered Thomas, but in contrast to Ebert's assumption, he regretted not being able to walk with more pride in his return home for his military service. Thomas continues to learn how to live with PTSD and instead of being embittered, he returned to his cultural traditions. He writes about how other Native veterans from other wars can learn to process PTSD and return to their culture as a means of coping. As he concluded in his interview, "We belong to the Oceti Sakowin, the Great Sioux Nation. And we are the Buffalo People. . . . If you take the domestic animals like the cow for example. When there is a storm coming, they turn their back to it. But the buffalo will face it and walk towards the storm. We want to teach people or help no matter what their problem is, 'Don't give up. [Go] to it. And through it. It's in our DNA."<sup>127</sup> For Thomas, following the Red Road philosophy – that is living a sober free life

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<sup>126</sup> Rick Thomas interview.

<sup>127</sup> Rick Thomas interview.

and returning to Native culture – allowed him to walk towards and through the PTSD storm.

This chapter seeks to expand the historical narrative to include the voices, perspectives, and experiences of Native American Vietnam veterans. Historian Tom Holm, himself a Cherokee Vietnam veteran, is the only scholar to write a detailed study on Native American military service in the Vietnam War. Holm's historical analysis, now over twenty years old, detailed the experiences of Native Vietnam veterans, in particular, analyzing their returns home to their communities and the impacts of PTSD. Holm surveyed over 170 Native Vietnam veterans through a one-page questionnaire titled the Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS) survey. As Holm's reflected on his book, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls* twenty-one years later, "It was, in keeping with the foundations of American Indian studies, an activist, academic approach to what we perceived was a largely overlooked and misunderstood group of Indian people who not only deserved recognition for their military service but also merited attention to their specific needs in dealing with their return from a war zone."<sup>128</sup> Holm recognized through the RCS survey that most Native veterans felt unappreciated, especially outside of their tribal communities. Native Vietnam veterans also struggled with PTSD and sometimes felt embittered, particularly because the United States government failed to acknowledge tribal sovereignty and provide services guaranteed for their communities and their military service. The RCS survey importantly provided Native veterans the opportunity to discuss why they served in Vietnam concluding that nearly 80 percent of the interviewees volunteered.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Tom Holm, "Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls Revisited: The Research, the Findings, and Some Observations of Recent Native Veteran Readjustment," *Wicazo Sa Review* 32, no. 1 (2017), 118.

<sup>129</sup> Tom Holm's, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin, Texas: The University of Texas Press, 1996), 20.

This chapter, much like Wallace Terry's *Bloods: Black Veterans of the Vietnam War: An Oral History*, examines the oral histories of Native Vietnam veterans. Terry's powerful narrative presents over twenty African American soldiers and their experiences before, during, and after Vietnam.<sup>130</sup> As Terry stated in his introduction:

These stories are not to be found in the expanding body of Vietnam literature; they deservedly belong in the forefront because of the unique experience of the black Vietnam veteran. He fought at a time when his sisters and brothers were fighting and dying at home for equal rights and great opportunities, for a color-blind nation promised to him in the Constitution he swore to defend.<sup>131</sup>

Historian William M. King concurred: "Each of the oral narratives in *Bloods* gives an insider's view of being Black and of being a black soldier in Vietnam. Taken singly or collectively, the stories provide the raw human material for fleshing out the interpretive contexts of the black experiences."<sup>132</sup> *Bloods*, published thirty-five years ago, has continued to remain an important book used in American history courses and English courses focused on the Vietnam War.<sup>133</sup>

Except for the University of South Dakota, the South Dakota state archives, the University of Arkansas Little-Rock, and other oral history collections scattered throughout the United States, the voices of Native veterans have been left out of the historical record. Terry's valuable work has provided a key framework to examine and listen to the stories of African American Vietnam veterans. King, who used Terry's *Bloods* in his undergraduate college courses, stated, "*Bloods*, then in its description of another history of the war in

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<sup>130</sup> Wallace Terry, *Bloods: Black Veterans of the Vietnam War: An Oral History* (New York, New York: Presidio Press - Ballantine Books, 1985).

<sup>131</sup> Terry, *Bloods*, xv.

<sup>132</sup> William M. King, "Bloods: Teaching the Afroamerican Experience of the Vietnam Conflict," in *Soldier Talk: The Vietnam War in Oral Narrative*, ed. Vincent Paul Budra and Michael Zeitlin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 194.

<sup>133</sup> During my senior year in my undergraduate work, I took a class at South Dakota State framed around Vietnam and Popular Culture. *Bloods* was one of the books used in the course.

Vietnam, can help us learn much about how some young black soldiers who fought in Nam attempted to cope with the long and ongoing ordeal of race relations in American culture.”<sup>134</sup> Like African Americans, Native Americans served in high per capita rates, unknown to many as being the highest per capita rates of all races and ethnicities in Vietnam. Native veterans encountered racism, but their interviews demonstrated that tribal sovereignty and protection of the land and their People were more important than civil rights.<sup>135</sup>

In examining Native veteran oral histories, we can see how and why Native individuals served in Vietnam. For many, those reasons included honoring previous generations and their military service. There has also been a tracing of how Native traditions have evolved but also continued throughout the twentieth century. World War II veteran Wallace Black Elk, for instance, a descendant of Nicolas Black Elk, the medicine man featured in *Black Elk Speaks*, traced those connections in a 1967 interview: “we’ve been able to retain our warrior’s society down through the years. My grandfathers were scouts, my father [served in] World War I, myself in World War II . . . my younger brothers in [the] Korean War, and my cousins in Vietnam.”<sup>136</sup> Veterans from World War I and World War II included fathers, grandfathers, cousins, and uncles that encouraged and influenced Native veterans to serve in Vietnam, a legacy that continues to be seen among those serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other twenty-first-century engagements. Improving socioeconomic status, advancing career opportunities, and protecting traditions,

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<sup>134</sup> King, “*Bloods: Teaching the Afroamerican Experience of the Vietnam Conflict*,” 188.

<sup>135</sup> For more information, see Daniel M. Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (University Press of Kansas, 2008) and Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (The New Press, 1997).

<sup>136</sup> This interview is in Dakota but translated by Bea Medicine. Wallace Black Elk, interview by Bea Medicine, 9 March 1967, American Indian Research Project.

community members, and land were also factors cited for entering the military. While many veterans acknowledged many of these reasons for their service, most had a variety of complex motives for serving. These reasons will be analyzed throughout this chapter.

### **Methodology**

In this chapter, I will use a variety of oral histories collected through various means and archives over the last fifty years. The largest collection used in this chapter will be from the University of South Dakota Oral History Center (SDOHC), which has collected more than a dozen interviews from Lakota and Dakota Vietnam veterans. These interviews were conducted over forty years, ranging from the early 1970s to the early 2000s. Many of them were conducted by the late Leonard Bruguier, a Yankton Sioux Vietnam veteran and former director of the University of South Dakota Native American Studies department. Bruguier, who earned his Ph.D. in history from Oklahoma State University, passed away in 2009. In a mid-1990s article on oral histories, Bruguier believed that the interviews at the SDOHC were sacred because they preserved the voices of many people who had passed away. He reflected, “I’ve been put in charge of keeping the voices. Many of the people are no longer with us. I consider it a very spiritual place.”<sup>137</sup> Bruguier would have no idea that almost 25 years later, his oral history about his experiences in Vietnam would be used in a dissertation about Native American Vietnam veterans. He built an enormous archival collection at USD that made this dissertation possible. As a veteran himself, Bruguier spoke the language of a Vietnam veteran, which enabled him to discuss difficult topics with many of the veterans he interviewed. Thus, his interviewees acknowledged and

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<sup>137</sup> Leonard Bruguier in “History in the First Person: Always Valued in the Native World, Oral History Gains Respect among Western Scholars,” ed. Ambler, Marjane, *Tribal College Journal*, February 15, 1995 (<https://tribalcollegejournal.org/history-person-valued-native-world-oral-history-gains-respect-western-scholars/>).

addressed their PTSD, suicidal thoughts, and ongoing trauma after the war. Veterans were also willing to discuss specific battles and military engagements, racism, and reasons for serving in Vietnam. His veteran background, and skill as an interviewer, provided oral histories that were rich in humor, survival, and struggle.

As a Masters student in history at the University of South Dakota, I used the SDOHC interviews to write an 80 plus thesis paper titled, “Between Cultures: Sioux Warriors and the Vietnam War” which eventually led to a 2015 peer-reviewed article under the same name in the *Great Plains Quarterly*.<sup>138</sup> Veterans in Bruguier’s interviews, as well as those held at the South Dakota State Historical Society archives in Pierre, South Dakota, cited grandfathers, uncles, fathers, and older cousins military service as their main reason for military service in Vietnam. This established how Lakota and Dakota Vietnam veterans redeployed and continued *akíčhita* tradition. This chapter will also use interviews conducted by the South Dakota PBS affiliate in 2017 and 2018. Several veterans were represented in multiple interviews. Francis Whitebird, for example, was interviewed for veteran projects in the early 1980s, 1990s, and also again in 2017 for PBS affiliate. Although most are predominantly Lakota and Dakota tribal members, these interviews importantly articulate tribal perspectives from at least six of the nine tribes in South Dakota. These interviews also demonstrate a time that spans fifty years.

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<sup>138</sup> John A. Little, “Between Cultures: Sioux Warriors and the Vietnam War,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 35: 4 (Fall 2015), 357-375; John A. Little, “Between Cultures: Sioux Warriors and the Vietnam War,” (MA thesis, University of South Dakota, 2014). My thesis was divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 and the introduction focused on the reasons that Native people were ignored in the historical narrative. This included an examination of film, literature, etc. that did not allow Native people to be seen in the present. Chapter 2 compared and contrasted African American reasons for entering the war as well as their experiences. Chapter 3 analyzed Native veterans and their return home to both urban and reservation communities.

When I first explored this topic, I assumed that Native soldiers served primarily to invoke warrior traditional expectations of protecting land and community. In having a better understanding of the literature through my doctoral studies, I now understand that Native veterans served for a variety of reasons. Many Native soldiers used Vietnam and other twentieth-century military engagements to emulate warrior traditions, including survival in a settler colonial and capitalistic system. Since completing my previous work, I have developed more critical and nuanced views about Native American military service in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Many Native veterans served to connect to earlier traditions; nonetheless, many acknowledged volunteering to have more control over what military branch they could serve in, find a career, or earn a paycheck and steady meals. There was also the belief that they could help the Vietnamese by fighting communism while others wanted to see what life looked out beyond their reservation communities. All of these experiences will be centered and explored further throughout this dissertation. Besides, many veterans were celebrated and honored by their communities for their military service and participated in a cultural protocol designed to protect them during the war. Other Native veterans left for Vietnam without celebration or cultural protocol, sometimes communicating with their families and communities that they were leaving for Vietnam, and sometimes not.

During their tenure in Vietnam, many veterans encountered a variety of assumptions and stereotypes. Robert L. Stands, for example, a Rosebud Sioux, experienced racial slurs in the form of "catcalls" such as "chief," "blanket ass," or "blanket man." Almost all veterans faced racial epithets or slurs, as well as stereotypes about their ability to walk point, track the enemy, and blend into nature. As a result of these stereotypical

assumptions, Native soldiers serving in Vietnam were wounded and killed at high casualty rates. Native veterans also recognized a variety of interactions with Vietnamese soldiers and citizens and noted the similarities between Native and Vietnamese people. Both racial and stereotypical experiences were prominent in most of the interviews that I will examine.

Many veterans, like Rick Thomas, faced obstacles during and after their returns to their communities. George LaMont, for example, a Rosebud Sioux Vietnam veteran, encountered protestors, was spit on and called baby killer during his return to the states. LaMont also turned to alcohol to cope with his PTSD.<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, he is a survivor of both Vietnam and his continued PTSD. Nearly every veteran presented in this chapter acknowledged their PTSD; however, unlike typical popular cultural portrayals, this chapter will portray Native veterans as survivors rather than as victims.

This chapter will be divided into three sections to develop three prominent themes in the interviews: The first section will focus on reasons for military service, as well as the cultural protocol that some veterans chose to experience before leaving for Vietnam; the second will analyze experiences based on racial stereotypes, and the third section will illuminate veteran's returning home to their communities. Oral histories, unlike the autobiographies and biographies featured in Chapter 3, project key memories that influenced (and continue to influence) these veterans. This chapter does not question or critique the memories associated with each veteran, rather it uses them as a template for understanding the experiences of many Native American veterans in Vietnam.

Nevertheless, the fact that many of these interviews were conducted over fifty years, demonstrates that veterans are subject to memory loss or confusion when describing events

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<sup>139</sup> SD Vietnam Stories: George Lamont, Camera, 29 2017, South Dakota Public Broadcasting System (<http://www.sdpb.org/blogs/arts-and-culture/sd-vietnam-stories-george-lamont/>).

that occurred in the past. Rick Thomas demonstrated that confusion in his interview, by stating that he was told to change out of his military fatigues when he landed in Washington. However, during his story about fighting the "skinheads" in the bathroom at the Denver airport, he discussed wearing his military uniform. These small details are important, but for this particular chapter, I am more interested in the idea that Thomas, like many Vietnam veterans, encountered protestors in his return to the states and registered that experience enough to discuss in an interview. My role, as a Dakota historian, is not to decipher fact or fiction or determine the "truth" behind the experiences claimed in these oral interviews, rather it is to project a depiction of how Native American soldiers remembered and experienced the Vietnam War.

**"Well, it has always been a tradition"**

Leonard R. Bruguier joined the Marine Corps in 1964 when the Vietnam War was largely unknown to the American public. Bruguier, a Yankton Sioux, saw the military as an alternative to college but hoped, in the long run, to benefit from the G.I. Bill. Bruguier cited Native military tradition as an additional reason for his service: "it has always been a tradition that Indians serve in the service. It's a family tradition. And when you do that you have met the obligations that . . . the Indian society demands and the fact that you were a soldier or a warrior . . . it's an honorable profession to be a member of."<sup>140</sup> Bruguier eventually saw major combat in Chu Lai and the Mekong Delta, mostly serving as airstrip security in high combat zones. He always remembered the special treatment he was given among his relatives when he returned home on leave. He reiterated, "It's a big honor to serve in the military if you're Indian. So when I did come back, I was given very special

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<sup>140</sup> Leonard R. Bruguier, interviewed by W. Bruce White, University of South Dakota campus, 28 May 1985, American Indian Research Project.

treatment and treated with deference and respect.”<sup>141</sup> Due to this special treatment from tribal communities, Bruguier believed that no Natives, or at least none that he knew of, avoided the Vietnam War. In Bruguier’s opinion, most Native veterans volunteered. His opinions were backed by Holm, who estimated that as many as 80 percent of Native Vietnam veterans had volunteered. This estimate was supported by his RCS survey of 170 Native veterans, in which nearly 80 percent of veterans admitted they volunteered for Vietnam.<sup>142</sup> These volunteer estimates for Native veterans represented the entire duration of Vietnam (1964 to 1973).

In comparison to Holm’s survey and Bruguier’s estimates about Native Vietnam veterans, African American volunteer rates for Vietnam fluctuated, especially as the war progressed. A 1964 survey that was published in 1967 cited the nearly 90 percent of African Americans would willingly fight for the United States. However, African American support for Vietnam waned as their fight for Civil Rights advanced. The 1964 survey, in other words, was likely outdated by the time it was published in 1967. Out of the 382,000 men drafted in 1966, at least 47,500 (13.4 percent) were African American. In 1968 and 1970, 16 percent of inductees were African American.<sup>143</sup> It is difficult to find volunteer rates for African Americans, but in addition to the draft, several programs actively recruited African Americans. Project 100,000 recruited young men who did not meet the military’s minimum standards on the mental aptitude test. During October 1966

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<sup>141</sup> Bruguier interview.

<sup>142</sup> Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 20.

<sup>143</sup> James E. Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts: African Americans and the Vietnam War* (New York University Press, 1997), 20-21.

and June 1969, Project 100,000 recruited more than 246,000 men into the Army. African Americans represented 41 percent of the Project 100,000 recruits.<sup>144</sup>

Oglala Lakota Vietnam veteran, Chuck Richards, echoed Bruguier's assessment of military service among Native people. Richards stated, "even back in World War I when Lakota people weren't even eligible to vote yet, they volunteered . . . it's probably always been our tradition, war."<sup>145</sup> Richards summed up military service—albeit somewhat stereotypically—as a continuation of earlier traditions. Under his assumptions, military service for the Lakota people has always been a tradition and one of the ways for tribal members to test themselves. Richards determined that "It's probably Lakota [tradition] to go to war. It's just to test themselves, if they have it in them . . . you know, the same stuff our ancestors had. And some do and some don't."<sup>146</sup> Richards found himself volunteering not only for Vietnam but also for special units and reconnaissance missions, considered by many to be the most dangerous missions during Vietnam, to test himself.

As for all Vietnam veterans, the draft influenced many Native soldiers into voluntarily joining the military because they wanted more control over their circumstances. Robert L. Stands, Rosebud Sioux, was drafted into the army, but before he was inducted, he volunteered with the United States Air Force to select which military branch he would serve in. Being able to choose a specific branch, especially if other family members or friends had served in that branch, was important for Native veterans. Other veterans who volunteered wanted to avoid joining certain branches that stood a higher chance of going to the frontlines or on dangerous missions, such as the Marines or the Army. Stands felt

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<sup>144</sup> Westheider, *Fighting on Two Fronts*, 35.

<sup>145</sup> Chuck Richards, interviewed by Don Doll, 27 October 1992, American Indian Research Project.

<sup>146</sup> Richard interview.

obligated to fight because of the culture and way he was raised on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation. He believed that this type of upbringing led many soldiers to ignore the politics of the Vietnam War and instead focus on performing Indianness. He stated, “Well . . . we’re not really concerned about that, like us Indian people I guess, we’re not really concerned about the political aspects of why we’re over there in Vietnam and more or less than concerned about playing the warrior image of being over there.”<sup>147</sup>

Stands, like Bruguier and Richards, acknowledged the tradition of military service among Lakota and Dakota people. Interestingly, Stands recognized that “playing” the warrior image might have been an unrealistic embodiment or burden that pressured Native men to volunteer for the military. Stands concluded that younger generations served because they watched brothers, dads, uncles, grandfathers, and others serve in the United States military. In reflecting on his military service 20 years later (the original interview was conducted in 1985), Stands determined that he would look at his service through politics and not through the warrior experience. He would not hesitate to serve again, especially to honor his grandfather who fought against Custer, but he would probably discourage future generations, or at least urge them to question the political reasons of the war.<sup>148</sup>

Jerry Lytle, a Crow Creek Sioux from Fort Thompson, volunteered for his first tour in Vietnam. While he did not list any specific reasons for volunteering, Lytle’s second tour, in which he again volunteered, was because of the difficulty he had adjusting to civilian life. He admitted to having PTSD and returning to combat zone seemed like an

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<sup>147</sup> Robert L. Stands, interview by W. Bruce White, University of South Dakota campus, 26 August 1985, American Indian Research Project.

<sup>148</sup> Stands interview.

easier transition than dealing with civilian life. Lytle served and fought during the Battle for the Highlands and the Tet Offensive, which he cited as the reason for his loss of faith in God. Despite these struggles, including contemplating suicide, Lytle's military service-connected him to other veterans, his culture, and to find a sense of identity. He stated, "before I knew who I was as an Indian man, I only knew I was an Indian and that . . . contained a lot of negative connotations." Finding a sense of purpose, despite trauma and PTSD, allowed Lytle to connect to a positive tradition of protecting his People.<sup>149</sup> Chuck Richards similarly reflected: "The only way to stop this [Vietnam] was for me to go and fight. You know, that was my whole way of thinking. And it was not because of the American flag or none of that. It was to protect my people . . . that's the reason I went."<sup>150</sup> Richards and Lytle laid out their reasoning, which included complex understandings of who they were and wanted to be as Native men and protectors.

During Vietnam, Donovan Shangreaux, an Oglala Lakota, served in the United States Army. Shangreaux, in contrast to many of the other interviews, was drafted: "I was a draftee and I didn't like the army but it was something that had to be done . . . I thought that I had to live up to the standards that my older brothers had already set."<sup>151</sup> Shangreaux had three brothers who served in the United States Army: Pete in World War II, Bill in Korea, and Antonio in Vietnam. Shangreaux's brother's military service ultimately influenced his own decision to serve in Vietnam. "I had a lot of respect for them," he continued, "I wanted them to be proud of me. I was forced into two different kinds of

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<sup>149</sup> Jerry Lytle, interviewed by Leonard Bruguier, Dakota Wesleyan University campus, 23 March 2002, American Indian Research Project.

<sup>150</sup> Richards interview.

<sup>151</sup> Donovan Shangreaux, interview by Freda Poor Bear, 6 July 1995, American Indian Research Project.

ways: one by the draftee situation; the other by my own home and cultural setting.”<sup>152</sup> Shangreaux later expressed, “I suppose my expectations were that I wanted to prove to myself and to my family that, you know, that I was able to be a warrior.”<sup>153</sup> In the end, Shangreaux highlighted several reasons, the most prominent being to honor his family. Donald Sam Loud Hawk similarly discussed the influence of his father, grandfather, and uncle, who referenced their military service and informed him that he would face a lot of hardships during the war. Loud Hawk did not cite which branch he was in if he was drafted, or volunteered. These influences provided him insight into the real possibility that he could die during the war; however, as he was told, there was no higher honor than death for protecting his family.<sup>154</sup>

Some Lakota and Dakota veterans also volunteered because they believed their lower socio-economic status left them vulnerable towards the draft. Although the draft relied on birthdates and other factors in its selection process, the perception was that it targeted people of color and lower socioeconomic status. These perceptions were not true; however, people of color and lower socioeconomic status had a more difficult time getting access to some of the draft deferments. Arthur Honomichl Jr., Yankton Sioux, believed that his lower socio-economic status meant he was likely to be drafted. Honomichl ultimately volunteered for Vietnam, but he had doubts about supporting Vietnam and suspected that other Native veterans felt the same way. Honomichl's high school friend Harlan High Pine returned home from Vietnam after he stepped on a landmine and had his

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<sup>152</sup> Shangreaux interview.

<sup>153</sup> Shangreaux interview.

<sup>154</sup> Donald Sam Loud Hawk, interview by Freda Poor Bear, 6 July 1995, American Indian Research Project.

leg amputated. This interaction made Honomichl question if he should serve in Vietnam.<sup>155</sup> These types of interactions no doubt influenced future Native soldiers from questioning their service, especially as the Vietnam War became more unpopular in the media.

Robert Emery had multiple brothers serving in the Navy, however, it was the potential employer that military service offered, rather than family tradition, that piqued his interest. Emery spoke with recruiters during high school but never committed. He was eventually drafted a few years after high school. After being drafted by the United States Army, Emery instead volunteered for Jump School to become a paratrooper.<sup>156</sup> Emery, who was Rosebud Sioux living in the border town of Valentine, Nebraska, suspected that many Native people volunteered to avoid being drafted. Fear of the draft, which has been eluded to, meant that Native veterans had less choice on where or when they went to Vietnam. It also meant they were likely candidates for the front lines of Vietnam. Emery specified, “in the Indian communities they don’t have a chance for college. Not having a college education, a person was more apt to be drafted and stuck into the service.”<sup>157</sup> It’s likely that lack of accessibility as well as affordability to attend a university or college, particularly because tribal colleges were not developed until the early 1970s, influenced Native soldiers to volunteer. Sinte Gleska, which would have been the closest college to Emery, would not open until 1972. The closest college or university to Valentine would have been more than 200 miles away. As a result, the G.I. Bill seemed like a great opportunity for Emery to earn money but also have the military pay for his college.

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<sup>155</sup> Arthur Honomichl, Jr., interview by Leonard R. Bruguier, 11 July 1994, American Indian Research Project. This interview contained a lot of ah’s, um’s, and uh’s that I cleaned up for brevity.

<sup>156</sup> Emery did not want to serve in the infantry, so he volunteered for Jump School to avoid his draft induction.

<sup>157</sup> Robert L. Emery, interview by Thomas C. Magedanz, Mission, South Dakota, 18 August 1985, South Dakota Oral History Project, 23.

Robert Moran, a Rosebud Sioux veteran, concurred with Emery in that Native veterans had limited access to resources and economic opportunities on the reservation. Moran was born and raised on the Rosebud Indian Reservation, the same one that Emery hailed from. He ultimately saw military service as an opportunity to leave the reservation and earn a living. Moran stated, “When you have poverty, there are no jobs; what else are you going to do? Join the Marines, join the service . . . . The service is the way out. You can make a living.”<sup>158</sup> His volunteering into the service was also because, “For people back then on the reservation, it was an honor to go and fight for your country [and] not letting another country be taken over.”<sup>159</sup> Moran wanted to protect Vietnam from the way of Communism. He, like so many others, connected his service to his father and uncles, who served in earlier wars and engagements.

Dennis W. Rucker, Yankton Sioux, was motivated to volunteer in Vietnam because of his grandfather and uncle’s World War II military service. Rucker identified tradition and respect as a key component for the reason many veterans served: “Our people, my people, or Indian people you know have a lot of respect for the akicitas. In our society, we put our children and our elderly first but our akicitas above them on a pedestal.”<sup>160</sup> He sustained, “You would give your life for your people so that is the reason that they have so much respect for you.”<sup>161</sup> As will be later discussed, Native veterans, unlike many non-Native veterans, were treated with reverence and respect when they returned to their communities. This positive reinforcement impacted service rates because there was no

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<sup>158</sup> Robert H. Moran, Jr., interview by Thomas C. Magedanz, Pierre, South Dakota, 7 August 1985, South Dakota Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project.

<sup>159</sup> Moran interview.

<sup>160</sup> Dennis W. Rucker, interviewed by Dr. Samuel Herley and John Little, 2 Feb 2014, American Indian Research Project.

<sup>161</sup> Rucker interview.

higher status in Native communities than that of a veteran. Native veterans, for example, were expected to serve as the grand entry in local powwows and events. These events often would not start until a Native veteran presented the color guard, which typically included the American flag, local tribal flags, and the prisoner of war flag. Many Native veterans craved this acceptance, attention, and positive reinforcement.

Francis Whitebird, a Rosebud Sioux, discussed the various honoring ceremonies and celebrations that he received for his accomplishments, which included high school and college graduations as well as military service. These types of celebrations, like the positive reinforcement Rucker, described, influenced young Native men to volunteer for military service. Whitebird indicated, "I remember when I was growing up and every time we accomplished something like graduation from high school or something . . . my family would put on a feed for everybody and recognize that. When I graduated from college and subsequently when I got back from Vietnam I received my war bonnet, you know, which I earned in Vietnam."<sup>162</sup> This type of celebration, especially in recognition of Vietnam service which was a controversial topic for many, reinforced the value placed on military service among the Lakota and Dakota.

George LaMont enlisted because his close friend had been drafted and encouraged him to go with him. At the time of his enlistment, he was working with Job Corps, a federal program designed to teach young adults vocational and job training skills, in Cincinnati, Ohio. The military seemed like a better option than Job Corps work. As a result, Lamont quickly enlisted in 1968 and the two served together in Vietnam. The comradery was important for young Native American men, especially those like LaMont

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<sup>162</sup> Francis Whitebird, interview by Don Doll, American Indian Research Project. There is no date, although many of Don Doll's interviews were in the mid-1990s.

who anticipated he would not be able to avoid the Vietnam draft because of the high cost of college. This type of buddy system allowed them to go into the military together.<sup>163</sup>

Interestingly, Raphael G. "Ray" Leanna enlisted in the Army in 1945, missing World War II by a few months but served over 23 years in the military. His military service included one stint in Korea from 1952 to 1953 and two stints in Vietnam from 1966 to 1967 and again from 1968 to 1969. Leanna volunteered because every male in his family was in the military and he "didn't want to be left out I suppose."<sup>164</sup> In his interview, Leanna challenged anti-war protestors and called people who used college to avoid the war cowards. Most of the people he knew had enlisted or if they had been drafted. Native soldiers, Leanna argued, readily went to the war. He elaborated, "to hear that somebody was resisting the draft and all that—I myself would be ashamed to be drafted."<sup>165</sup> Even after over 20 years of military service and the fact that he would have been in his mid to late '50s during the interview, Leanna stated he wished he could volunteer for the next war or he would at least enlist if there was a dire need.

Multiple soldiers elaborated on the ceremonies they went through before leaving for Vietnam. Donald Sam Loud Hawk accredited his protection in Vietnam to a medicine pouch that was given to him by his grandmother. He carried that medicine with him throughout the war.<sup>166</sup> Dennis Rucker was offered the opportunity to do a traditional sweat or inipi ceremony before he went to Vietnam, but he did not participate because he was drinking alcohol in the days leading up to his departure for Vietnam. Rucker's family had

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<sup>163</sup> Lamont interview.

<sup>164</sup> Raphael G. "Ray" Leanna, interview by Thomas C. Magedanz, 27 June 1985, South Dakota Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project, 1.

<sup>165</sup> Leanna interview transcript, 32.

<sup>166</sup> Loud Hawk interview.

organized the inipi and he felt ashamed that he was not able to participate in the ceremony. Rucker, like Loud Hawk, carried a medicine pouch made out of leather with him during Vietnam. Rucker was instructed to wear the pouch wherever he went during Vietnam. He carried it for more than eleven months until the medicine pouch seemed to explode in the shower. Rucker immediately felt vulnerable without his traditional medicine and stated in his interview, “Ah shit, something’s going to happen to me.”<sup>167</sup> Unfortunately, he was correct in those assumptions as he was injured right after the medicine pouch exploded. Rucker did not go into great detail about his injury, but his story demonstrated the strong belief that Native soldiers had in traditional medicine.

Sherman Marshall, a Rosebud Sioux, expressed that he served in the army because of Lakota pride and also the influence of other relatives who served in the military. Marshall had a ceremony conducted for him and received a medicine pouch from his grandmother and was given a new traditional Lakota name, They Tell of Him. This new name replaced his original Lakota name, Many Shot at Him, which had been previously given to Marshall’s father for his World War II military service. Marshall carried his medicine pouch in his wallet during the war but temporarily lost it when his wallet was stolen. His wallet was given back to him with everything missing except the medicine pouch. Marshall survived the war but while he was gone, his medicine man passed away and he never completed his ceremony. As a result, he returned to his Lakota name of Many Shot at Him and gave the medicine pouch back to the medicine man’s wife.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Rucker interview.

<sup>168</sup> Judge Sherman Marshall, interview by John Little, Rosebud, South Dakota, 28 February 2014, American Indian Research Project.

Thomas L. Roubideaux's volunteered for Vietnam in 1965 after he read a *Time Magazine* in the Todd Country High School library on the Rosebud Indian Reservation. His service-connected him to a long legacy of military service, by some of the male figures in his life including his father and uncles. Roubideaux stated, "My ancestors fought against the Army in the Indian Wars, one of my great grandfathers was a scout . . . during the early 1890s. My grandfather fought in World War I with Pershing, my father fought with the Rangers in North Africa and Italy and then in Normandy, where he lost his legs. My uncles fought in Korea as Airborne Rangers and my brother was in the Army."<sup>169</sup> He continued, "I decided to follow the line and become a Ranger. Go for it, you know."<sup>170</sup> Roubideaux served an incredible 52 months in Vietnam from 1965 until 1975 and was wounded seven times during his tenure. In total, he spent eleven years on active duty before leaving the military for good in 1976. Roubideaux also believed that almost every male in his high school graduating class of 1965 as well as the classes in the years after served in the military and/or were sent to Vietnam.<sup>171</sup>

Roubideaux, a Rosebud Sioux, recalled a story about how his grandfather prepared him for warfare, in particular, the Vietnam War:

One of my Grandfathers had sung as I was getting ready to leave. He came over to the house and sang a traditional song, a going away song. This song essentially said, 'Be strong now, you're a man now.' In Lakota it means that you're seeing a black face, because killing is a thing that God doesn't appreciate, so you wear a black face to hide it. You see this with dancers, traditional dancers, out dancing at Pow Wows. They'll wear black on their faces. His song said, 'Be strong, you're representing the people now, your Grandfather (referring to the President) has asked you to go, walk with pride, reveal the Lakota braveness.'<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Thomas L. Roubideaux, interview and transcription by Thomas C. Magedanz, Pierre, South Dakota, 20 June 1985, South Dakota Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project, 2.

<sup>170</sup> Roubideaux interview transcription, 2.

<sup>171</sup> Roubideaux interview transcription, 52.

<sup>172</sup> Roubideaux interview transcription, 6.

After the song, Roubideaux felt like he could associate with earlier generations: “I sat there, and it was like something inside me really grew. I was really proud. I was a warrior. It was like flashing back to Little Big Horn and all kinds of battles before and after where the Lakota boys my age were more considered men in fighting.”<sup>173</sup> His mother, who had lost her first husband in World War II, as well as Roubideaux's father who suffered from World War II PTSD, caused her to seek protection that provided medicine to bring her second oldest son home from the war. As a result, Roubideaux received a pipe and medicine from a local medicine man.

Basil Heath associated military service with his forced attendance at federal boarding schools. As a result, Heath noted that military service was an easy transition for him. Boarding schools forced Native students to have their hair cut when they first got to school. They were regimented and he was used to constantly being put down by school officials. Heath, thus, believed that he easily adjusted to the service versus other soldiers. It can be assumed that a variety of Native soldiers, like Heath, were forced to attend boarding schools normalizing their transition into the military.<sup>174</sup>

### **“You, me, same same”**

“I remember one time . . .” stated Francis Whitebird, “I was on patrol and we came to a village and there was a Vietnamese boy standing there. And he said, ‘you, me, same same.’ And I knew what he was talking about. I looked like a Vietnamese . . . I got to thinking about, we’re invading this tiny country just like America did to Lakota people and we’re killing their people off. And all of the sudden that you, me, same same took a very

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<sup>173</sup> Roubideaux interview transcription, 6.

<sup>174</sup> Heath interview.

different meaning.” Whitebird continued this story in his mid-1990s interview with Don Doll, “I knew the history of what happened to us. And history was repeating itself and I was part of it. And it sure bothered me.”<sup>175</sup> The experiences that Whitebird described were not uncommon for many Native veterans. As documented in *Chapter 3: Autobiographies*, many veterans noted both the physical and cultural similarities between Vietnamese people and Native Americans. The Vietnamese, as demonstrated by the young Vietnamese boy, also noticed those similarities. It was a strategy that Vietnamese soldiers and civilians likely exploited and used to their advantage.

Native veterans also encountered a variety of expectations based on stereotypes about Native people. Dennis Rucker acknowledged, “White people, black people have that version of Indians being super-soldiers but were not though, we're just human beings.”<sup>176</sup> Rucker was required to walk point repeatedly, most likely because his fellow soldiers assumed that Native people had innate abilities to find and track enemy soldiers. Walking point, typically one of the most dangerous jobs during Vietnam meant leading the rest of the soldiers through the dense jungle of Vietnam. Individuals walking point risked setting off Vietnamese mines planted along the road, as well as being the first point of contact in an ambush from Vietnamese soldiers.

Native soldiers in Rucker’s unit wanted him to say something to the commander about them being forced to walk point more than other soldiers but Rucker reminded them, “Who would you trust? A guy that never walked point and not knowing what the hell they are doing . . . or [us].”<sup>177</sup> Rucker disagreed with the walking point but for the safety of

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<sup>175</sup> Francis Whitebird interview. Whitebird repeats stop and start over multiple time so the interview has been edited to take out the repeated phrases.

<sup>176</sup> Rucker interview.

<sup>177</sup> Rucker interview.

himself and his fellow soldiers, he urged the other two Native soldiers as well as himself to walk point and deal with the stereotypes and racism until after the war. Rucker later concluded, "I took it as a compliment, but I also took it as an insult." In other words, Rucker was glad that his fellow soldier recognized that he was good at the walking point but also frustrated at the racist stereotypes about Native American people.

Raphael G. "Ray" Leanna, a Yankton Sioux, agreed with Rucker, "I'll bet there were a bunch of Indians who got killed because they kept putting them on point."<sup>178</sup> As Leanna theorized, many Native veterans may have fallen under those stereotypical assumptions about their abilities as superior fighters, and as a result, volunteered for dangerous missions. Leanna also referred to Native soldiers who grew up in urban areas instead of isolated and rural reservations.<sup>179</sup> Urban Natives would have been less likely to participate in hunting and fishing which was a hobby of many reservation Natives, as well as a way to provide food for their families.

Leanna posited that the Montagnard, Indigenous soldiers from the Central Highlands of Vietnam fighting for the United States, cheered and appreciated him because of the Cowboy and Indian Westerns that they had watched. "They were always rooting for the Indians," Leanna claimed, "or else they'd be clapping, 'hey, here come the good guys,' you know."<sup>180</sup> Leanna's comments demonstrated that Hollywood movies, and their stereotypes, were accessible to Vietnamese soldiers and civilians. These Hollywood portrayals, like American soldiers and civilians, influenced the way that Vietnamese

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<sup>178</sup> Raphael G. "Ray" Leanna, interview by Thomas C. Magedanz, 27 June 1985, South Dakota Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project, 31.

<sup>179</sup> Leanna interview.

<sup>180</sup> Leanna interview transcript, 31.

people viewed Native people by creating preconceived notions about Native soldiers as fierce, stoic fighters.

Thomas Roubideaux appreciated his service as a Platoon Guide, which may or may not have been because of his Native background, stating, “I was selected as a Platoon Guide, which was a reward for me that I’d never ever gotten in civilian life, you know. I was given some responsibility and I relished it.”<sup>181</sup> Roubideaux's first tour in 1965 was early enough in the war that it was much less controversial and almost all of his fellow soldiers were excited about the opportunity. Nevertheless, his long tenure of 52 months over 10 years caused Roubideaux's views to shift during the war. He still valued the opportunities he gained – most of which he believed would not have been possible back home on the reservation, or in South Dakota border towns that believed Native people to be drunks and lazy – but his views shifted in the early 1970s. After he shot and killed a North Vietnamese officer, narrowly missing his death (almost all of his equipment had been shot and destroyed during the small firefight) Roubideaux searched the body and found a picture of the officer’s son and daughter. For Roubideaux, whose battalions served on some of the most dangerous missions that were estimated to have killed over 400 people, the war seemed more real and he wanted out of the frontlines.

Roubideaux also watched stereotypes influence the number of Native people being put on point. “It seemed like whenever they wanted a pointman,” stated Roubideaux, “they’d put an Indian on point . . . Consequently, even though I was a medic, a lot of times I was on point, or another Indian.”<sup>182</sup> He named Percy Good Eagle, a Dakota from Sisseton; as well as Tommy Russel, a Native from Philadelphia, as individuals in the 101<sup>st</sup>,

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<sup>181</sup> Roubideau interview transcript, 3.

<sup>182</sup> Roubideaux interview transcript, 46.

who their First Sergeant put on point repeatedly. Roubideaux noted that Natives, Chicanos, and Native Hawaiians bonded with each other better than African Americans and whites, who he observed were constantly fighting each other over race relations. “You didn’t want to get too friendly with the blacks or whites,” he reiterated, “because you might end up picking frags (grenades) out of your butt . . . or being unconsciously or unintentionally involved in a fight between them.”<sup>183</sup> Roubideaux alluded to the friendly fire that likely occurred during Vietnam.

Many veterans, like Roubideaux, cited specific moments in their Vietnam service that seemingly haunted them. In one particular story, Roubideaux watched two American soldiers, one African American and one white, comment negatively on the Vietnamese people calling both women and men derogatory names. This incident reminded Roubideaux of a childhood memory in White River, South Dakota, a predominantly white border town located on the edge of the Rosebud Reservation, where two white men in a pickup truck tried to take advantage of a Native woman who was drunk. After Roubideaux’s grandmother stopped them from taking the woman, they called him and his grandmother derogatory names similar to the ones that the American soldiers used against the Vietnamese. Moments like these reminded Native veterans that were essentially helping the United States do the same things that had been done to Native people in the nineteenth century.

Roubideaux described stereotypical statements he heard during Vietnam including one phrase while on he was on leave, “Oh, here come the fucking Indians. There is gonna [sic] be some drunks tonight.”<sup>184</sup> Another story Roubideaux remembered was when a

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<sup>183</sup> Roubideaux interview transcript, 46.

<sup>184</sup> Roubideaux interview.

Sargent blamed his high alcohol consumption on his Native American heritage. Other soldiers blamed their intoxication on Cherokee ancestors, usually inherited from their grandmother, going along with the common trope of the Cherokee Princess. These stereotypes were so profound that Roubideaux teased, "I'm beginning to think the whole Cherokee side was nothing but women. Where's the men? Nobody had a [Cherokee] grandpa."<sup>185</sup> These negative assumptions forced Roubideaux to rarely drink alcohol during the war.

George LaMont witnessed the comradery on the battlefield but believed that beyond the war, those expectations were not the same. He stated, "Everybody is always saying, 'we're brothers, all nationalities.' Sure, we were over there on the battlefield, but coming back to the states it was way different. The guy who was with you over there, he won't even shake your hand downtown or anything. Won't even say hello to you."<sup>186</sup> LaMont criticized this double standard and chastised people who said the military is a brotherhood. For LaMont, this continued beyond the war at the Veteran's Association (VA) clinic and PTSD meetings. He stated, "They are all happy to see each other. That's in the group. Once they leave that group, it separates again."<sup>187</sup> LaMont demonstrated the loneliness that many veterans faced after Vietnam. On one hand, the veteran's meetings were supportive but it was clear that racial dynamics factored into the reasons that non-Native soldiers did not want to be friends with LaMont outside of the meetings.

Robert Emery, who served in Vietnam in 1965, did not believe there were many racial issues during his tour in Vietnam. He admitted that he encountered the use of

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<sup>185</sup> Roubideaux interview.

<sup>186</sup> LaMont interview.

<sup>187</sup> Lamont interview.

derogatory terms or names, especially when soldiers were drinking alcohol, but pointed to the importance of depending on other soldiers for survival. He asserted, “Out in the field, the frontlines, you depended on that man, and he depended on you. There was no reason for discrimination, and no reason for treating anybody bad. If you did, chances are if you had to depend on that guy he wouldn’t be there.”<sup>188</sup> As a result, Emery believed relationships with everyone in the field were solid. As noted, Emery served in Vietnam in 1965, before many of the protests and racial issues were at the forefront of American headlines, so his experiences likely differed from those serving later in the war. Many soldiers also encountered racism in more direct ways such as being called racial epithets. Robert L. Stands was called “Chief,” “Blanket Ass,” and “Blanket Man” during Vietnam. All three of these names were derogatory terms with “Chief,” a common name that many Native soldiers heard. The latter two with the word “blanket” were about when Native people were forcibly removed and confined to reservations throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### **Coming Home**

Thomas Roubideaux reflected on his return home, “every time I came home, I was honored, you know. I’d make it through the hippies and everybody else, get to South Dakota and it was just like you’re coming into a veil . . . Then folks would come over and shake hands and really treat you well. They’d have honor songs for me. I have an Indian name, so they’d sing my name you know.”<sup>189</sup> Roubideaux was referencing how Native singers and songwriters honored veterans by inserting traditional Lakota or Dakota names into honor and veterans’ songs, to acknowledge their service for their people. It wasn’t just

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<sup>188</sup> Emery interview transcript, 25.

<sup>189</sup> Roubideaux interview transcript, 49.

Native people who respected him. He remembered flying into the Pierre airport and a non-Native woman there would always have a cold glass of milk and a hamburger waiting when he was home on leave. “And she always hugged me,” Roubideaux stated, “and said ‘Welcome home.’ [While] everybody else stood and wondered what kind of crazy woman would be hugging an Indian.” He continued, “So being Indian, in that way has been really good for me. The war is both to me, and the negative stuff is slowly going away. It’s mostly mellowed out to all the good times . . . I’m honored wherever I go—they sing honor songs for me. When I put my dance outfit on, people respect me – contrary to the majority society where I’m just another dumb Indian.”<sup>190</sup> Vietnam, as well as other military engagements, seemingly allowed Native veterans to transcend racial barriers that they felt before the war. After using the G.I. Bill to get an education, Roubideaux recognized, “I’m even more dangerous since I’m educated now.”<sup>191</sup>

Ray Leanna still bitterly remembered the Vietnam War protestors, many of whom he still challenged in the 1980s when he conducted his oral interview. “The war protestors,” Leanna contested, “I never had any use for them, and to this day if somebody talks about protesting the war, I’ll talk to them about it.”<sup>192</sup> Leanna spoke against these protestors because he wanted to justify the reasons that he served, versus the assumptions about many of the protestors. Leanna also resented the federal government and politicians for losing the Vietnam War stating, “I don’t see how the hell we lost except for the politicians. They were the ones who lost it. I think the grunts did all they could. Everybody did what they could.”<sup>193</sup> Leanna wanted people to recognize that Native veterans, and

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<sup>190</sup> Roubideaux interview transcript, 49-50.

<sup>191</sup> Roubideaux interview transcript, 49-50.

<sup>192</sup> Leanna interview transcript, 32.

<sup>193</sup> Leanna interview transcript, 30.

others on the frontlines, simply did their job and should not be blamed for the loss of the Vietnam War – especially by individuals who were not there. He continued, “It isn’t our fault, we didn’t lose the war. We did everything we were told, and then some. We did our job. They let us down.”<sup>194</sup> Native veterans, like Leanna, grappled with their service in Vietnam, ultimately not wanting his sacrifices to be for nothing. For many, that anger and also guilt would be one of the hardest things for them to overcome.

Robert Emery also criticized the government for fighting the war the wrong way. Emery voiced, “we did not accomplish what we set out to do. We abandoned the guys we sent the job to do. That’s mainly the thing that gets me. . . . it was a noble cause. For the guys who went and fought, it wasn’t their fault. They were doing what they thought was right, and they did it the best way they could.”<sup>195</sup> Leanna and Emery’s struggles to forgive the protestors and the federal government verified that many Native veterans felt immense guilt for being put into an unwinnable war. Emery acknowledged his guilt, “Well, there isn’t a day that goes by that I don’t think about it. There’s no way I can forget it because I got a disability from it. I probably feel a little bit guilty because there are more things I could have done. I don’t know what might have been.” Emery and Leanna both hoped for a different outcome or at least a justification for their military service and trauma, and in Emery’s case, a permanent disability. Vietnam, for many Native veterans, continued to be relived in their minds in the hope that one day they would wake up with answers and solutions as to why they sacrificed so much in the war effort.

Despite his contempt for protestors, Leanna remembered the strong support from tribal communities. That support he believed came, “from the old days when the Warrior

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<sup>194</sup> Leanna interview transcript, 32.

<sup>195</sup> Emery interview transcript, 28.

was always respected and fed . . . I think even now when they have all these Pow-Wows, they fly all the American flags you see around the Pow-Wow arena. All the American flags are for deceased vets.”<sup>196</sup> Those flags, Leanna believed, were directly from the caskets from those killed during their service. That support helped Leanna overlook the protestors and better reintegrate into his community. When asked if he would do it again, Emery doubted he would serve under the same circumstances unless he was brainwashed. He even acknowledged that under those same circumstances, he might have protested the war. Emery carried the scars of Vietnam with him, both mentally and physically, citing that he spent more than 13 months in the hospital in Denver. He also admitted that he was 40% disabled from a helicopter crash in Vietnam. After several surgeries to fix his injuries, Emery concluded that he had some feeling in his arm but could not decipher between hot and cold.<sup>197</sup> The physical and mental trauma from Vietnam, like so many other veterans in this chapter, would remain with him for the rest of his life.

Chuck Richards illustrated the difficulty that many Native veterans faced when they returned home to their isolated reservation communities. In hope of combatting stereotypes and providing a support group for Lakota Vietnam veterans after the war, Richards formed the Oglala Vietnam Veterans Association in 1982. The biggest issue that Richards saw, unlike other veterans, was an overall lack of access to federal resources. He stated, “a white guy or a black guy or a Chicano comes into Chicago. They give him a hard time and maybe spit on him and call him a baby killer. But he could go to a VA and get a VA loan to buy a house or he could go to the VA hospital and get treated like everyone else. . . . He could get a VA pension. . . . But we have to come back to Pine Ridge,

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<sup>196</sup> Leanna interview transcript, 35.

<sup>197</sup> Emery interview transcript, 29.

the reservation . . . [and] there's no housing [there].<sup>198</sup> Richards may have overstated the ability of other veterans to obtain resources and housing, but his point acknowledged that Native veterans had limited stability from the Veteran's Association or other federal entities that guaranteed resources to veterans.

Native people, due to ongoing federal policies and failed treaty obligations by the federal government, have struggled to find housing and economic opportunities in reservation communities, which included the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, where Richards lived. Native veterans returning home not only had to combat their trauma but also federal policies, such as the damming of the Missouri River in the 1950s and 1960s, that resulted in the loss of millions of acres for the Lakota and Dakota. These federal policies denied many Native people the opportunity to live in their traditional homelands.

Warrior societies helped many Vietnam veterans connect with others and served as important traditional factors in upholding military service, as an important commitment to individual communities. The most prominent society that formed was the Wild Horse Butte Tokala's in 1982. The Wild Horse Butte Tokala's, who participated in the honor guard during the Sinte Gleska University commencement ceremony, was a Lakota warrior society but their membership was open to all Vietnam veterans, including non-Native veterans. Their main function over the last 40 years has been to serve as honor guard at prominent Lakota and Dakota powwows, funerals, and other events.<sup>199</sup> The Wild Horse Butte Tokala's continue the legacy of protecting and honoring Lakota veterans, but, as was demonstrated during the commencement ceremony, they also serve in honoring other

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<sup>198</sup> Richards, interview.

<sup>199</sup> Al Carroll, *Medicine Bags and Dog Tags: American Indian Veterans from Colonial Times to the Second Iraq War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 151.

members of Lakota and Dakota tribes attempting to serve their communities. In addition to the Wild Horse Butte Tokala's, Chuck Richards cited his membership in the Red Feather Society, which "dates back to Crazy Horse's days. It's a warriors' society. To get into that society, you have to have been wounded three times in three different engagements or do an act of extreme heroism."<sup>200</sup> Roubideaux also acknowledged his membership in the Red Feather Society and the Kit Fox Warrior Society. There is limited information about Native veteran's societies, something that future scholars will need to explore more, but they importantly demonstrated that older traditions were repurposed in the late twentieth century to support Native Vietnam veterans.

Many Native veterans struggled with alcohol to suppress their PTSD and trauma after the war. Basil Heath explained his use of alcohol after Vietnam, stating, "It was one big party for twenty years and then finally . . . it can eventually create a problem . . . [even though] it was a problem all along."<sup>201</sup> Heath was able to function normally during his work week but waited for the weekends where he could binge drink alcohol to cope with his PTSD. After realizing it was a problem, he received alcohol treatment and has remained sober for more than 20 years. Dennis Rucker also admitted in his interview that he struggled with alcoholism. He realized that he used alcohol to subdue his memories from Vietnam. After quitting alcohol, Rucker began working for the Yankton Sioux Tribal Office in Wagner, South Dakota to help other veterans overcome their PTSD as well as claim military benefits and disability claims.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Richards interview.

<sup>201</sup> Tony Garcia and Basil Heath, interviewed by Robert Swan and Jaythan Chicoine, 24 July 2009, *Vietnam Book Project*. This interview was conducted with both Garcia and Heath, both Yankton Veterans. Garcia was not quoted in this chapter but was used in my MA thesis.

<sup>202</sup> Rucker interview.

Rucker realized the influence that Native military service had on non-Native leaders outside the reservation communities. He recalled a conversation with Senator Tom Daschle, who admired the patriotism of Native Americans, in particular, citing the high number of American flags on South Dakota reservations as a reflection of that patriotism. Rucker understood Daschle's reflection but also recognized that Native people were serving for their reasons despite the attempted genocide by the United States government, both cultural and physical, over the past century. Rucker reiterated, "We're a forgiving people and this is the only country that we know . . . and that's the reason I joined the service."<sup>203</sup> Military service, in some cases, healed old wounds and served as a way for Native people to be recognized and honored outside of their communities.

Out of all of the veteran's interviews used in this chapter, Lytle, Heath, Bruguier, Shanreaux, Rucker, Thomas, and LaMont openly admitted that they suffered from PTSD. Bruguier would eventually lose his job as the University of South Dakota American Indian Studies Director because he struggled to accept his trauma and continued to drink heavily throughout his tenure.<sup>204</sup> There was no doubt that others who suffered but did not claim it in their interview, especially because PTSD had such negative connotations associated with it. As time has passed, mental health issues have been discussed more openly, particularly about more recent engagements like Afghanistan and Iraq. Holm defined PTSD as, "extreme stress brought on by being involved in some natural or human-contrived disaster."<sup>205</sup> Most of their PTSD came directly from Vietnam; however, boarding

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<sup>203</sup> Rucker interview.

<sup>204</sup> As a former USD graduate student, I worked with many professors who knew Dr. Bruguier. I eventually learned that he was eventually sent to jail because of his second or third DUI in the mid-2000s. He passed away in 2009.

<sup>205</sup> Tom Holm, "PTSD in Native American Vietnam Veterans: A Reassessment," University of Minnesota Press: *Wicazo Sa Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Autumn, 1995), 83.

school trauma, forced removals, and other factors impacted Native veterans as well. Holm cited traumatic war experiences, survivor's guilt, and grief as the main factors in the high numbers of Native veterans with PTSD. Holm's RCS survey supported these conclusions: 80 percent out of the 172 Natives surveyed had bouts with depression and 77 percent had disorders that prevented them from sleeping. Those numbers continued: 71 percent had symptoms of rage and 64 percent battled frequent flashbacks. To cope with these PTSD indicators, 80 percent conceded to drinking heavily and 32 percent stated that they had used, or were currently using, hard drugs like cocaine.

For many Native veterans, participation in traditional ceremonies and the strong support of their communities helped them live with PTSD. Basil Heath was honored at a local powwow and had an honor song sung for him. He realized that moment was when he finally felt welcomed home.<sup>206</sup> Other veterans used their anger to help expand tribal sovereignty. As Holm concluded:

Many veterans return to a Native America, at last, coming to grips with an intolerable situation. Native Americans were openly questioning termination, relocation, the appalling poverty of the reservations, and their "responsible leaders." Native Americans took up a crusade to restore treaty rights, curb bureaucratic intrusions into their lives, change an educational system under which Indians were taught self-hatred, preserve a sense of tribal identity, and force their leaders to become more responsible to tribal wishes, rather than a distant federal government.<sup>207</sup>

These veterans participated in many of these movements and ensured that their voices would be heard. Many, like Bruguier and Lytle, earned advanced educational degrees and served as professors. Others returned home to their communities and participated in the movement that Holm described. Their accomplishments importantly demonstrated that

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<sup>206</sup> Heath interview.

<sup>207</sup> Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 171.

Native military service for the protection of their communities and the land extended beyond the battlefield into classrooms, courthouses, and tribal offices.

Unfortunately, many veterans succumbed to their addictions, PTSD, and survivor's guilt. In total, 235 Native veterans were killed during Vietnam. For many Native veterans, the war never ended. Statistics remain difficult to determine, but at least 24 Native veterans from South Dakota were killed in action during the war. Numbers to determine the service totals of South Dakota Lakota and Dakota Vietnam veterans are nearly impossible to find; however, the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation has accounted for at least 175 Vietnam veterans. Out of the 175, nine died during Vietnam. Their names are forever etched on a Memorial in Pine Ridge.<sup>208</sup> Nevertheless, Native soldiers, as reflected in this chapter, served for a variety of reasons, most importantly, citing the protection of their people, homelands, and to preserve and honor the long legacy of Native veterans that served in the military before them.

That service can best be summed up in a story that Thomas L. Roubideaux articulated after the war. As Roubideaux and his mother finished eating a meal at a local restaurant, he noticed an older couple outside the window:

I looked out the window and [saw] this old Indian couple there [that] didn't look too well dressed and they had probably seen hard times . . . They must have been waiting for my mother and I . . . because as soon as we got up . . . and were walking out . . . [the] old man came up, opened his wallet, and handed me a dollar. And he didn't have anything but a dollar in there. He said, "Take this and buy yourself some cigarettes or buy a yourself something to drink. I'm really proud of you."<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Joe Starita, *The Dull Knives of Pine Ridge: A Lakota Odyssey* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 292.

<sup>209</sup> Roubideaux interview.

Roubideaux could only accept the gift with gratitude, even if it was the elder's last dollar. For Roubideaux, it confirmed the importance of his military service to his reservation community. More importantly, the elder validated that Roubideaux had potentially sacrificed his time and both his mental and physical health to continue a legacy of military service among the Lakota and Dakota. That single dollar affirmed Roubideaux in ways that he never could have imagined when he left for Vietnam.

These oral interviews represented just a small fraction of the Lakota and Dakota soldiers that served in Vietnam. Nevertheless, they serve as a microcosm for Lakota and Dakota experiences before, during, and after Vietnam. These interviews challenged the stereotypical myths and perceptions that Native veterans succumbed to alcoholism and suicide after the war. Moreover, the oral interviews demonstrated the complexities of why they served in Vietnam. A majority of Native veterans volunteered to honor their ancestors and continue their family legacy of military service from World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. Other Native soldiers simply volunteered to find improved economic opportunities, avoid being drafted, or for educational opportunities through the G.I. Bill.

Native veterans grappled with fighting the Vietnamese, who they often related to physically and culturally. They witnessed racism from other non-Native soldiers and remembered their encounters with racism in their communities. Other Native soldiers noticed the similarities between colonialism towards Native people and the Vietnamese. Many veterans struggled with PTSD, alcoholism, and other trauma after Vietnam, but others lived with their trauma and became leaders in their communities. Native veterans serving in Vietnam continued the tradition of military service among Native people and inspired future generations of Native soldiers to serve in the United States military.

### **Chapter 3: Autobiographies**

In his 2004 autobiography, Potawatomi Vietnam veteran Larry Mitchell challenged criticisms about Native American military service: “People ask Native American Veterans: ‘Why did you go and serve in Vietnam and fight for a country that stole your lands?’ They should answer ‘We went to defend our homeland and protect our Nation...it was our duty.’ [emphasis added].”<sup>210</sup> Mitchell's statement demonstrated that many Native veterans enlisted in Vietnam, as well as other twentieth-century engagements, to protect their traditional homelands, tribal nations, and members of those nations. These veterans, as demonstrated by Mitchell's autobiography, often entered the military service for several reasons. Written in ballad form, Mitchell's autobiography traces his journey during and after Vietnam, documenting his struggles with Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), racial identities and tensions, as well as the process of adjusting to civilian life after the war.

Like many Native Vietnam veterans, Mitchell himself recognized the difficulties in fighting against the Vietnamese, who similar to Native people in the centuries before the twentieth century, fought for their traditional homelands and ways of life. Mitchell acknowledged, “One villager says to me, ‘Same, Same.’ Maybe there was a lot of truth in those two words. The Vietnamese fought for their country and their way of life against overwhelming odds.” He continued, “It was four and a half months of constantly dehumanizing the Vietnamese people... calling them gooks all the time. That was just a way of making killing easy when you got to Vietnam.”<sup>211</sup> Mitchell grappled with fighting

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<sup>210</sup> Larry Mitchell, *Potawatomi Tracks (The Ballad of Vietnam and Other Stories)*(San Francisco, California: Heliographica, 2004), 4.

<sup>211</sup> Mitchell, *Potawatomi Tracks*, 20-21.

the Vietnamese while also demonstrating that his military service was not for the expansion of the United States or in honor of the American flag. Rather it was in defense of his community and tribal nation.

This chapter analyzes a variety of Native American veterans' autobiographies with a particular focus on pieces written by or about Native American Vietnam veterans. By examining these stories, we better understand the complexities of Native people serving in the military for the United States. As scholar Birgit Däwes recognized about the Navajo Code Talkers: "Their experiences and memories – in oral histories, interviews, as well as in fiction and film – challenge the narrative of a glorious nation in unison, especially in light of the historical conflicts between American nationalism and Native American sovereignty."<sup>212</sup> Däwes' essay focuses on memory and World War II (often characterized as the Good War) within multiple mediums, including the major Hollywood film, *Windtalkers* starring Nicolas Cage and Adam Beach. *Windtalkers* portrays a Navajo Code Talker (Beach) under the guidance and protection of a combat veteran (Cage), partnered to ensure that the Navajo code remained unbroken by Japanese and German enemy soldiers. Cage and Beach's relationship, almost metaphorically resembling the federal trust relationship, also demonstrated the narrative that Native people willingly gave in to settler colonialism for their protection under the American nation and flag. This perspective limits the many reasons that Native veterans served during World War II and other twentieth-century military engagements.

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<sup>212</sup> Birgit Däwes, "Transnational Debts: The Cultural Memory of Navajo Code Talkers in World War II," edited by Birgit Däwes and Ingrid Gessner, *American Studies Journal* 59, No. 04 (2015): <https://doi.org/10.18422/59-04>.

Autobiographies, like that of Navajo code talker Chester Nez, often contend settler colonial historical narratives that have pinned Native people in the past, created stereotypes, and limited Indigenous presence in the twenty-first century. “These texts,” Dawes stated, “accentuate rather different parts of the story: instead of reducing the contribution of the code talkers to fragments of an exotic language, they contextualize the war effort with the longer history of Navajo-American relations.” Therefore, she posited, “they leave more room for the agency and merits of the Indigenous soldiers.”<sup>213</sup> Nez, for instance, remembered that “Navajo people had always been warriors, protectors. In that, there was honor. I would concentrate on being a warrior and on protecting my homeland.”<sup>214</sup> Nez continued, “We have always felt a deep allegiance to our motherland, our Navajo Nation, and our families. To this allegiance is linked a sincere desire to protect all three . . . And as protectors of what is sacred, we were both eager to defend our land.”<sup>215</sup>

In contrast to oral histories; autobiographies can tell more complete stories about Native experiences before, during, and after the war. Many oral histories, specifically the ones analyzed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, often concentrated specifically on Native veteran's military experiences during and after the various wars. The autobiographies examined in this chapter frequently encompass a chronological narrative. The author's detailed childhood experiences spent growing up in their respective communities which included reservations, rural border towns, and urban cities. Their experiences often contended with struggles in identity, racism, and poverty, engagements with tribal sovereignty, and difficulties overcoming the loss of traditional culture, language, and post-

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<sup>213</sup> Dawes, “Transnational Debts.”

<sup>214</sup> Chester Nez and Judith Schiess Avila, *Code Talker: The First and Only Memoir By One of the Original Navajo Code Talkers of WWII* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 6.

<sup>215</sup> Nez, *Code Talker*, 85-87.

traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Native veteran autobiographies, in particular, serve as a demonstration of a contemporary understanding and negotiating of Indianess, race, PTSD, trauma, and life after the war. In important ways, the autobiographies highlight other factors that contributed to Native military service, which included the potential educational opportunities guaranteed by the G.I. Bill.

This chapter does not explore biographies written about Native veterans, but they can also provide valuable insight into Native military service especially those written recently by Native authors or family members of Native veterans. These biographies portray accurate depictions about military service than many of the traditional historical works featured in Chapter 1. As Delphine Red Shirt argued in her biography of George Sword, a late twentieth century Lakota police officer, “In [his] own biographical statements he often gave the name of a significant person in his life who may have imparted cultural knowledge through narration and song; thus the cultural context for his narratives can be gained through his statements.”<sup>216</sup> Red Shirt examines the narratives of Sword, written and previously untranslated in the Lakota language, to illustrate his words as a form of oral narrative as well as the preservation of Lakota culture and tradition. Therefore, scholars should turn to biographies, not only to expand the historical narrative about Native Vietnam veterans but also to demonstrate their military service as an ongoing and innovative tradition among many Native Nations.

One example is the most recent biography of World War I soldier Francis Pegahmagabow, considered by many to be the most accomplished soldier in Canadian, and

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<sup>216</sup> Delphine Red Shirt, *George Sword's Warrior Narratives: Compositional Processes in Lakota Oral Tradition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 48.

possibly even the United States, military history.<sup>217</sup> The common narrative about Pegahmagabow, like many war narratives about Native American veterans, elaborates on his ability to blend into nature, the ways he would sneak over enemy lines while killing and capturing hundreds along the way. However, as Brian D. McInnes pointed out in his biography about his great-grandfather, “One cannot know his experience without an appreciation of the places he came from, the complex spiritual reality of the Ojibwe, the extremities of the Great War itself, and the dynamic oscillation of subjugation and liberation that has characterized settler-Indian relations since the beginning of contact.”<sup>218</sup> Pegahmagabow served as a sniper and scout in World War I from 1914 until 1919, finishing the war with 378 kills and the capture of more than 300 German soldiers. His impressive combat record has led non-Native scholars to scrutinize his accomplishments while simultaneously creating a variety of exaggerated stereotypes and stories from the Canadian press and historians, resulting in an individual steeped in myth and legend.<sup>219</sup>

McInnes’ biographical narrative on Pegahmagabow, titled *Sounding Thunder: The Stories of Francis Pegahmagabow*, sought to correct the narrative about his great-grandfather as being a fierce warrior, without any additional complexity of character. McInnes repositions Pegahmagabow as a father, a leader, a storyteller, a hunter, a family provider, and a carrier of traditional ways of Ojibwe life. Instead of only focusing on his World War I military service, McInnes frames the biography around First Nation Ojibwe traditions, histories, and language, thus centering Pegahmagabow within his community

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<sup>217</sup> Brian D. McInnes, *Sounding Thunder: The Stories of Francis Pegahmagabow* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016), 190.

<sup>218</sup> McInnes, *Sounding Thunder*, 18.

<sup>219</sup> Adrian Hayes, *Pegahmagabow: Life-Long Warrior* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010); Adrian Hayes, *Pegahmagabow: Legendary Warrior, Forgotten Hero* (Huntsville: Fox Meadow Creations, 2003).

and childhood expectations and experiences. As McInnes argues, “There was a need to tell these stories honestly and authentically – gently correcting any historical inaccuracies or cultural misinterpretations in the record.”<sup>220</sup>

Waubgeshig Rice concurred with McInnes in the foreword to the book: “I remember hearing how he struggled to keep the language alive. I also heard about how he led a delegation to Ottawa to advocate for Indigenous rights. Someone even told me once how Pegahmagabow was one of the last people from our community to cut his long hair in the face of colonial assimilation.”<sup>221</sup> Rice further observed, “These additional tales helped to clear some of the mystique around him while simultaneously painting a picture of a profoundly complex man fighting for a way of life that was fading away.”<sup>222</sup>

This chapter looks at eight autobiographies of Native American veterans encompassing more than eight distinct tribal nations (several individuals are descended from multiple tribal backgrounds). Chapter 2 featured the oral histories of Lakota and Dakota Vietnam veterans. To date, there are no Lakota and Dakota veterans' autobiographies written or published. The oral interviews served as a microcosm for Lakota and Dakota military service in Vietnam, a key emphasis of this dissertation. Through these autobiographies, this chapter provides a larger insight into the experiences of other Native American soldiers. The inclusion of Native autobiographies demonstrates many of the shared experiences that Native veterans and the Lakota and Dakota encountered in Vietnam.

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<sup>220</sup> McInnes, *Sounding Thunder*, 5.

<sup>221</sup> Waubgeshig Rice in “Foreword,” *Sounding Thunder: The Stories of Francis Pegahmagabow* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2016), xxi.

<sup>222</sup> Rice, “Foreword,” xxi.

Unlike the oral histories in Chapter 2, these autobiographies provide more detailed lifelong experiences. These veteran autobiographies ranged from early childhood memories to life after the war; nevertheless, several common themes were reiterated throughout each autobiography and the Lakota and Dakota oral histories. For one, many veterans, like Larry Mitchell, articulated a variety of reasons for service, most often describing military service in their unique terms. Secondly, Native veterans emphasized encounters with racism and stereotypical assumptions about Native American people. For instance, several veterans acknowledged being called "Chief" or other stereotypical and racist names. Third, veterans noted racial, physical, and cultural similarities with the Vietnamese soldiers and people they were fighting, struggling to understand their role and participation in serving for a settler colonial army attempting to deny and destroy an enemy that reflected many Native American peoples. Autobiographies, unlike oral histories in which the interviewer asked and followed specific questions and themes, allowed these Native veterans to control their narrative.

### **The Native Vietnam Veteran Autobiography**

Creek Vietnam veteran Vincent Mendoza affirmed in his 1996 autobiography, "I didn't know it then but that's what happened to the Indians a hundred years before. We would always make the best of a done deal."<sup>223</sup> Mendoza's autobiography traced his experiences from dealing with racism in elementary school to his military service before and after Vietnam. Mendoza encountered racism across a spectrum of experiences throughout his education in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Mendoza remained positive despite being held back a grade, which he presumed to be because he was seen as inferior due to his

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<sup>223</sup> Vincent L. Mendoza, *Son of Two Bloods* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 18.

Creek and Mexican background. As demonstrated by the quote above, Mendoza remained positive and attempted to overlook racist incidents such as this one.

Race, especially his Native heritage and background, characterized many of the stereotypes he encountered: from being forced to play the Indian chief in the Thanksgiving play, to listening as the teacher explained to the other students that Native people did not bathe, to being refused service at restaurants throughout the Midwest.<sup>224</sup> In his frustration at being refused service at a Nebraska restaurant with his family, Mendoza centered military service as an equalizer against race and racism. He also identified it as something that established Native and Chicano people as American's, stating to the reader, "I didn't like being treated like dirt. So what if we were Indians, so what if we were Mexicans. We are Americans! One of my uncles, who was almost full-blood Creek, died in Italy protecting his country." He continued, "My other Indian uncles served in the war also. Mexican Americans had won more medals of honor than any other ethnic group during World War II, yet these yokels in Nebraska had the gall to run us out of their restaurant."<sup>225</sup> For Mendoza, the respect garnered from military service should have been enough for racist restaurant owners to overlook their skin color. Interestingly, his comments demonstrated that Mendoza's generation would not tolerate, or at least would challenge, racism, especially against veterans. Earlier generations of soldiers and veterans, thus, planted the seeds of military service as an equalizer at a young age.

Vincent Mendoza acknowledged his previous generations of relatives who served in earlier twentieth-century military engagements, raised on the stories of military service from his Uncle Bill specifically. "He always told me stories about the Navy, and the way

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<sup>224</sup> Mendoza, *Two Bloods*, 20.

<sup>225</sup> Mendoza, *Two Bloods*, 57.

he described things, it was almost like being there with him.”<sup>226</sup> Despite his connection to these memories, Mendoza had no interest in serving in the military until his best friend Wayne was killed after volunteering for Vietnam. He reflected after the funeral “Being Indian, I believed in the invisible world. I accepted that my friend was near. It was then that I swore revenge for my friend . . . I never told anyone of my plans to enlist, or the reason why. College could wait.”<sup>227</sup> Mendoza saw little combat during Vietnam, feeling that while he had somewhat accomplished his quest to avenge his deceased friend Wayne, the war left him unfulfilled. He elaborated on the feeling, “I felt protected much like my ancestors who had had medicine made to protect them in battle. I had that feeling, or maybe it was the spirit that was protecting me. I cheated death three times in Nam and I got my revenge for Wayne, but I felt empty inside.”<sup>228</sup>

After his military service, Mendoza returned home to Tulsa and worked a variety of jobs. He married and had several children. His autobiography, unlike several others, features himself as an individual who readily adapted into civilian life, overcoming adversity including the death of his seven-year-old son and his wife from cancer. Instead of focusing on his military service, Mendoza documented many of his experiences with racism in Oklahoma. As he admitted, “As minorities, we all carried invisible scars.”<sup>229</sup> Mendoza’s autobiography importantly recharacterizes the experience of a Native Vietnam veteran, which is so often focused on embattlement with PTSD, alcohol, and drugs, demonstrating that many veterans lived normal lives after the war.

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 108.

Larry Mitchell, presented earlier in this chapter, detailed his experiences in ballad form during Vietnam, elaborating on the lingering effects of PTSD and survivor's guilt after the war. "I didn't know it then / But I carried Post Traumatic Stress Disorder with me / as I stepped off that freedom bird in Seattle... / PTSD would be some heavy luggage to carry around."<sup>230</sup> He continued, "There would be a lot of condemnation / a lot of discrimination, a lot of victimization / on the great Turtle Island / for the warriors that fought in Vietnam."<sup>231</sup> In contrast to Mendoza, Mitchell's autobiography rarely discussed his childhood or experiences before the war. He acknowledged several tribal members who left the Prairie Band Potawatomi reservation that remained forever changed after their service in Vietnam. After his tour in Vietnam, Mitchell reenlisted in the Army and was stationed in Germany. He turned to drugs and alcohol to suppress his survivor's guilt and PTSD. His addictions created more paranoia, and he ultimately went AWOL multiple times wandering around various parts of Europe including Spain and France. After the Army demerited Mitchell, he forged discharge papers and returned to his reservation before again being arrested for going AWOL and serving jail time. Due to his combat military service in Vietnam, Mitchell agreed to a general discharge and was released from jail.

After his general discharge, Mitchell used alcohol to suppress his trauma and struggled to find a job. He floated around various cities including Los Angeles, where he participated in a Bureau of Indian Affairs relocation program, as well as Lawrence, Kansas, where he attended Haskell Indian Junior College (now Haskell Indian University), earning a degree in graphic design. After moving to Minneapolis, Minnesota, Mitchell

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<sup>230</sup> Mitchell, *Potawatomi Tracks*, 32.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

sought out PTSD therapy and married his wife Katie. It was Katie, who helped change his ways and had a positive influence on him stating, “Katie would have a calming effect on my life. / Although the nightmares / never did go away. / There was still my struggle with depression and guilt.”<sup>232</sup> During this time, Mitchell reflected on his life experiences and struggles, recognized his trauma, embraced sobriety, and worked long hours as a nursing assistant. His two sons also served as inspiration for overcoming his trauma and guilt: “I always wondered why I lived in Vietnam when so / many / others died there. / I always thought there was a purpose in my life. / I believe in my heart that purpose / was raising those little boys of mine. / My two sons made my life worth all the pain and hurt I have gone through.”<sup>233</sup> For Mitchell, it was the community that he created, however small, of his wife and two children that saved him.

Mitchell’s service in Vietnam, like so many other Vietnam veterans, received little attention on his return home. Nevertheless, more than thirty years after his return, Mitchell received word that he would be his tribe’s honored veteran at their annual powwow. He accepted the offer, “Thirty-two years later... / I will get my parade; / People will shake my hand / and they will thank me for my sacrifices in Vietnam. / This is gonna mean a lot to me...”<sup>234</sup> Unfortunately, Mitchell’s mother passed away before the powwow but he directed the conclusion of his book to her stating, “I wish you could be at the Pow-Wow / to see our people welcome me home.”<sup>235</sup> Mitchell’s conclusion indicated that he loved his mother and fellow tribal members and sought their approval, whose land he volunteered to protect in Vietnam.

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 134.

Blackfeet Vietnam veteran Woody Kipp's 2004 autobiography detailed his life, military service, family history, and his activism and participation in the American Indian Movement. Kipp also documented the complexities of being an Indian in the twentieth century about his father, who "like so many Indians then and now, had become a cowboy."<sup>236</sup> As a result, Kipp's family turned to cattle ranching to survive. Like Mendoza, Kipp struggled mightily against racism during his childhood in Browning, Montana, a predominantly white border town located near the Blackfeet Reservation. He illustrated childhood memories that included racist incidents with teachers, fellow students, and community members. In 1964 after high school, Kipp volunteered for the United States Marine Corps, partially to avoid the hard farm labor he was required to do, but also to continue the legacy of military service in his family. He posited, "I was not the first person my family to serve in the U.S. military. Long before [my uncle] Big John joined the marines, my great-uncle William Jackson – grandson of Hugh Munro – scouted for General Custer."<sup>237</sup> Kipp, like many of the veterans featured in Chapter 2, served because of a long line of military service in their families.

Kipp was sent to Vietnam as a combat engineer in 1965. His assignment allowed him to avoid the frontlines. Ironically, one of his biggest battles might have been the racism and stereotypes he received from other veterans. "I was the only Indian in our outfit, and I went by the generic name of Chief. Today there are Indians in the military who resist this name being applied to them, but it didn't bother me then, as I was proud to be an Indian and glad that others knew it. Ignorance, not malevolence, prompted that

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<sup>236</sup> Woody Kipp, *Viet Cong at Wounded Knee: The Trail of a Blackfeet Activist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 8.

<sup>237</sup> Kipp, *Viet Cong*, 26.

title.”<sup>238</sup> Kipp acknowledged the similarities between the Vietnamese and Native Americans, concluding, “Like many other Indians in Vietnam, I was surprised at our physical resemblance to the Vietnamese people – brown skin, black hair. My biological mother was Oriental-looking; her nickname on the Blackfeet reservation had been Shanghai.”<sup>239</sup> Although racially problematic, these comparisons were something that Kipp noticed during his tenure in Vietnam but also later on in his activism. Kipp came to appreciate the local Vietnamese people, and, believed because of his skin color, he could easily go in and out of local Vietnamese villages. He did so on multiple occasions, discussing Vietnamese and Native American life with the villagers. He cited these positive interactions as the reason for why he volunteered for an additional six months in Vietnam.

Kipp characterized white soldiers as individuals who “cursed the dark-skinned people as being inferior.”<sup>240</sup> He also acknowledged an incident during which he watched a white soldier deliberately push an older Vietnamese citizen riding a bike over an embankment. Kipp remembered that experience when he participated in the American Indian Movement and wondered if the Vietnamese man survived, fathoming that in the United States, Native people were the Vietnamese. “I eventually realized,” Kipp articulated, “that what I had seen had in fact taken place over and over as the Europeans stormed into a so-called New World and into the American West. Other old men – my grandfathers – had suffered similar treatment at the hands of American soldiers.”<sup>241</sup> Kipp remembered these thoughts during the Wounded Knee Takeover several years later. When

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<sup>238</sup> Kipp, *Viet Cong*, 35.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

he attempted to enter the occupied area, which had been barricaded by the United States military, he recollected:

Suddenly a popping sound punctuated the night. I was shocked – I knew that sound. I had heard it every night for twenty months in Vietnam as security forces defended the airbase at Da Nang, unleashing flares to light up the Vietnamese night to see if Victor Charlie was coming through the concertina wire. In that moment in the ravine, I realized the United States military was looking for me with those flares. I was the gook now. No wonder the Vietnamese, looking at the Indian tattoo on my arm, had presciently told me, You same same Viet Cong.<sup>242</sup>

Kipp's autobiography concludes shortly after this story at Wounded Knee. His story demonstrated that Native Vietnam veterans were now fighting the same battle for freedom in the United States that the Vietnamese fought during Vietnam.

The “same, same” narrative was articulated several times in Chapter 2 as well as in this chapter. Native veterans have discussed this many times, that it must have been something that Vietnamese soldiers readily exploited. There is also the possibility that the “same, same” might be something that Native soldiers heard from others and began to repeat amongst themselves. Native soldiers related to Vietnamese in many ways. As Kipp noted, white soldiers (and probably other soldiers of color), treated the Vietnamese as inferior to them. That same type of racism would have been seen in Browning, Montana; however, it was Native people who were the target. In breaking down the “same, same” narrative, it becomes apparent that it does not just include skin color but rather common experiences around racism.

In his introduction to his 1999 autobiography, Jicarilla Apache Vietnam veteran Leroy TeCube claimed, “The Vietnam War was similar to the Indian Wars of a hundred years ago. I realize that my ancestors fought the same type of war against the United

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 126.

States.” He continued, “as would other American Indian tribes, they ended up fighting for the United States after treaties were made. Since then every succeeding generation continues to fight in our nation’s wars with a feeling that the land is still ours to fight for. We still live on it.”<sup>243</sup> TeCube connected military service to earlier Native American traditions. At the same time, he realized that America was the aggressor in both the Indian Wars and also against the Vietnamese.

TeCube’s autobiography documents his experiences almost exclusively during Vietnam, but he repeatedly cited older generations of military service as an influence on his service. He articulated a long legacy of military service among his own Apache community, but also among many Native American tribes throughout the US. “Our forebears,” he stated, “fought the wars with quiet distinction. In our youth we were aware of what these men did. They instilled a pride in you, knowing that one day you would be in their shoes. This is the way of my people. We have to carry on the warrior tradition.”<sup>244</sup>

As TeCube watched multiple individuals from his hometown volunteer or get drafted for Vietnam, including his brother, he realized that he would eventually have to enter the service. He volunteered for the Marines. TeCube believed his early childhood hunting trips with his uncles and cousins were what prepared him for Vietnam. Before leaving, TeCube’s aunt and uncle, who raised him, hired a medicine man to pray with him. This prayer would ease TeCube’s anxiety and fears both before and during Vietnam. After his friend from home wrote a letter telling him that a powwow was held in honor of local men in Vietnam, TeCube stated, “I didn’t know how, but I sometimes sensed the prayers

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<sup>243</sup> Leroy TeCube, *Year in Nam: A Native American Soldier’s Story* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), xviii.

<sup>244</sup> TeCube, *Year in Nam*, xix.

that were conducted for me . . . At times I could sense what was happening on the other side of the world. I knew my people and other tribes were concerned for our welfare. We were on their minds. Knowing this, I conducted myself with more confidence.”<sup>245</sup> Native communities, both past, and present were never far from the minds of Native soldiers during Vietnam.

TeCube, like his fellow Native veterans, encountered a variety of stereotypes, based on Hollywood portrayals, that caused non-Native soldiers to view Native people in problematic and outdated ways. Despite his protests, TeCube, like Kipp, was nicknamed Chief throughout the war. He believed, differently from Kipp, that the nickname was a term of endearment bestowed on him by his fellow soldiers, who watched Hollywood Westerns and likely believed this was a form of honor. TeCube acknowledged, “Most of the guys would call me Chief from [basic training] on although a handful of individuals called me by my real name. Up until that moment throughout my training no one even suggested calling me Chief . . . Perhaps because as trainees we were used to being treated as animals and were addressed by our last names. Now in Vietnam, everyone had an identity.”<sup>246</sup> TeCube battled stereotypical assumptions that because he was Native American, he had innate senses to walk, point, and track the enemy. Despite these stereotypical assumptions, TeCube believed that he was always “treated first as an American soldier and then as an Indian.”<sup>247</sup> Similar to other Native soldiers, TeCube noted the similarities between the Vietnamese and Native American soldiers fighting in Vietnam, both physically and culturally. One soldier attempted to antagonize him by stating, “I read

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<sup>245</sup> TeCube, *Year in Nam*, 72.

<sup>246</sup> TeCube, *Year in Nam*, 22.

<sup>247</sup> TeCube, *Year in Nam*, 108.

somewhere that the Indians come from Asia. If that's true, the gooks out there are probably your distant cousins." TeCube defused the tension by telling a joke about General Custer's shirt brand being Arrow.<sup>248</sup> Ironically, it appears, that the camaraderie of the other soldiers calling him Chief, led him to overlook these kinds of remarks, at least until after the war.

TeCube also recognized the appropriation and references to the Indian Wars of the nineteenth century through the use of official military terms. For instance, no man's land was verbalized as "Indian Country" while a Vietnamese soldier who scouted for the United States was referenced as "Kit Carson Scouts." He postulated, "Every now and then, I would compare my present situation with how my ancestors had fought against the United States . . . Now the circumstances were different. We now fought on the side of the U.S. government." He concluded, "And although the terrain was different, the enemy practiced a guerilla-type warfare, as my ancestors had."<sup>249</sup> This particular sentiment demonstrated the complexity of fighting for a settler colonial entity. On one hand, TeCube honored his ancestors while on the other he fought against the Vietnamese, who like Native people in the century before, were fighting for their land, freedom, and survival.

When reflecting on his return, Leroy TeCube admitted that "from any infantry standpoint, we all died. None of us came back the same person he was beforehand. We had gone through too much for that to be possible." Writing about his experiences in his autobiography helped him overcome some of the trauma that he witnessed and experienced during the war. The support and prayers that TeCube received from his community also enabled him to process his experiences more positively than others. As he concluded, "From an American Indian perspective we had similarities to our past. We found we still

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<sup>248</sup> TeCube, *Year in Nam*, 167.

<sup>249</sup> TeCube, *Year in Nam*, 166-167.

had a bridge to it. In many instances the warrior in us naturally took over. As a result we performed with pride and dignity.”<sup>250</sup> TeCube’s military service fulfilled traditional and community expectations but his writing also eluded to him questioning his service as well as others.

Dwight W. Birdwell articulated a variety of reasons for his year of military service in Vietnam. Birdwell, Cherokee from Oklahoma, served as an armored cavalryman in Vietnam claiming, “I was there because in my mind America was right. I also wanted my piece of the war. I wanted to make my ancestors proud.”<sup>251</sup> As he hinted at early on, his views dramatically changed as the war progressed. His open and honest autobiography, written with author Keith William Nolan, detailed his accounts of serving on the front lines as a tank commander. This included his participation and survival of the Tet Offensive, in which North Vietnamese troops coordinated surprise attacks against more than a dozen United States military bases resulting in thousands of civilian and American casualties in Vietnam. Birdwell witnessed dozens of deaths during his time in Vietnam and carried these tragedies with him throughout the war, but also after his honorable discharge.

Throughout Vietnam, Birdwell observed the lack of respect for Vietnamese human life by American soldiers, in particular noting stories he had heard about soldiers murdering and raping Vietnamese civilians and women. “They hated the way they looked,” he stated, “and they hated the way they talked. They hated the whole damn country and every man, woman, child, and water buffalo in it.” He continued, “I heard people bemoan the fact that the United States was so unpopular around the world despite its massive

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<sup>250</sup> TeCube, *Year in Nam*, 260.

<sup>251</sup> Dwight W. Birdwell and Keith William Nolan *A Hundred Miles of Bad Road: An Armored Cavalryman in Vietnam, 1967-68* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1997), 3.

foreign aid programs, I would think of these American boys and some of the things they did in Vietnam.”<sup>252</sup> As a result, Birdwell’s opinions and support of the war waned towards the end of the war. Birdwell’s attitudes, as well as those of other Native soldiers in this chapter, reflected that Native people often had more sympathy for the Vietnamese. They saw them as human beings while other soldiers, especially white soldiers, obeyed the commands to fight in the name of the United States.

Birdwell centered his experiences as an American soldier in combat against the Vietnamese first; however, like many of the other Native soldiers have written, he recognized the similarities between the Vietnamese and Native Americans. As the war progressed, Birdwell found himself more and more conflicted, not only because of racial and physical similarities but because of the economic livelihoods of the Vietnamese such as farming and living off the land. He confessed:

I still wanted to believe in the war – these so-called gooks were the people we were fighting for! – and blended in with all that was the thought of old cruelties inflicted upon the American Indians at the hands of the U.S. Army. Being of Cherokee heritage, I didn’t want to turn around three or four generations later and perpetuate the same sort of abuse myself, especially with people who were poor farmers just like my people were poor farmers, and who in some cases looked almost exactly like Indians I knew back in Oklahoma.<sup>253</sup>

After his initial tour, Dwight Birdwell reenlisted for an early-out, which meant that if he signed up for four additional months, he would be released immediately on his return to the United States, versus serving at a military base somewhere outside of Vietnam.

After his honorable discharge, Birdwell returned to his Cherokee community in Oklahoma. Life progressed quickly after the war and within a year, he was married, had a

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<sup>252</sup> Birdwell, *A Hundred Miles*, 134.

<sup>253</sup> Birdwell, *A Hundred Miles*, 139.

baby on the way, and was enrolled in Northeastern State University. Using the G.I. Bill, he earned a bachelor's degree in history and eventually went to the Oklahoma University College of Law, where he earned a law degree. Birdwell acknowledged the trauma he carried both during and after Vietnam. During the war, he attempted to suppress his trauma with alcohol; however, he realized he could not continue with that same pace after the war. While he did not specifically state his struggles with PTSD or alcohol beyond the war, he recognized that his wife stayed with him through both good and bad times suggesting that she might have had an easier life if she had not married a Vietnam veteran. He stated, "I pity the women who married Vietnam vets because many ended up with troubled husbands and busted lives."<sup>254</sup>

Birdwell also struggled with the guilt of having survived the war, especially while sitting in college classrooms when many of his fellow soldiers suffered from PTSD, bodily disfigurement, or has been killed. Despite his trauma, Birdwell successfully practiced law, opening his firm, before he was nominated by Cherokee Principal Chief William Mankiller to the Cherokee Nation's Supreme Court. While Birdwell did not always get along with his fellow soldiers, he concluded, "No matter how much I'd like to forget the war, we have been forever forged together in the crucible that was Charlie Troop of the Three-Quarter Cav [Birdwell's infantry during Vietnam]"<sup>255</sup> Birdwell dedicated his military service to his Cherokee community and continued that service beyond the war. In 2017, he was inducted into Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame.

Ron Wood, a Navajo and Seminole tribal member from Arizona, served as a radio operator for the United States Army during Vietnam. For the most part, Wood avoided

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<sup>254</sup> Birdwell, *A Hundred Miles*, 194.

<sup>255</sup> Birdwell, *A Hundred Miles*, 197.

major combat but still had to stay alert because radio operators were often targets of the Viet Cong troops. More than any of the other autobiographies I read for this chapter, Wood's grappled with fighting the Vietnamese, stating in his preface, "other than my height, I looked like and could relate to the browned skin Vietnamese people on a very personal level."<sup>256</sup> Wood taught English to Vietnamese civilians joking, "I was Vietnamese but I was born in America and came to Vietnam in the US Army and was relearning the language. This was always good for a laugh."<sup>257</sup>

Wood constantly compared and contrasted the Vietnamese people to his Navajo community noting that "they were honest, hardworking, reserved country people and I thought they were very similar to rural Navajos in aspects of their lifestyle and mannerisms."<sup>258</sup> Similarly, the Vietnamese and Navajo ate their meals on tablecloths spread out on the floor and cared for their traditional homelands and livestock. The main difference Wood distinguished was that the Vietnamese grew rice with major water sources and the Navajo grew corn with a limited water source. He also noted that many rural Vietnamese, like Native peoples during the 1960s, were flocking towards urban areas in search of employment opportunities.<sup>259</sup> Wood believed that growing up in families that raised sheep and cattle, with the respect of consuming nearly every part of the animal's body, prepared him for some of the exotic foods in Vietnam.<sup>260</sup>

On a rest and recover leave in Saigon, Wood paid a Vietnamese woman to have her family prepare a meal for him just because he was missing home. During the meal, Wood

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<sup>256</sup> Ron C. Wood, *Vietnam: Remembrances of a Native American Soldier* (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, 2011), viii.

<sup>257</sup> Wood, *Vietnam*, 22.

<sup>258</sup> Wood, *Vietnam*, 74.

<sup>259</sup> Wood, *Vietnam*, 73-74.

<sup>260</sup> Wood, *Vietnam*,

realized that Vietnamese people had preconceived notions about Native people based on Hollywood westerns. As he noted before the meal, “They [the Vietnamese] imagined the movies as depicting the US Army as the cavalry and the Indians as the Viet Cong. Since the Indians generally got beat by the cavalry, they liked the idea that the Viet Cong was also being beat by the US Army and Vietnamese military.”<sup>261</sup> Wood struggled to articulate who and what Native people were but told the family that after being defeated by the United States Army, Native people were now fighting for them to stop the spread of communism amongst the Vietnamese. For Wood, these comparisons never stopped during the war and it made his service more difficult, even when justifying it with stopping the spread of communism.

On his return, Ron Wood illuminated the comradery amongst other Native American veterans in the service. He stated, “There is a certain bond between Native Americans which grows stronger when we are removed from our native surroundings and are thrust into a totally non-Indian world.”<sup>262</sup> Wood became acquainted with Sargent George Walker, a Choctaw from Oklahoma, who had become a career military man, having first served in the Korean War and now Vietnam.<sup>263</sup> Walker, like Wood, joined the military because he had no idea what he wanted to do after high school. Despite being from separate tribes, the two related to being Native American and met repeatedly for drinks until they were discharged from Vietnam in 1968. Wood never heard from Sargent Walker after Vietnam, but he always hoped that his tribe welcomed him home with some

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<sup>261</sup> Wood, *Vietnam*, 36.

<sup>262</sup> Wood, *Vietnam*, 32.

<sup>263</sup> I have tried to find any information about Sargent George Walker but have not been able to.

sort of purification ceremony when he retired from his more than twenty years of military service.

Wood returned home to Flagstaff, Arizona and used the G.I. Bill to complete his undergraduate degree before working and retiring as a health administrator with the Indian Health Service. Wood appreciated his military service for multiple reasons. For one, seeing death up close, he “gained a greater appreciation for life and the beauty and joy of my journey through this life.”<sup>264</sup> Secondly, Wood straightened up his life, traveled the world, and gained a global perspective. He also earned a college education, something he fanaticized about during Vietnam to make his time go faster. Finally, Wood concluded, “I had always wanted to see the world and for a poor boy like me, the Army jump started my play to see many countries.” He reflected, “Being Native American, and living on an Indian Reservation poses additional challenges to many of our people but compared to many parts of the world, we Native Americans, here in America today, are fortunate.”<sup>265</sup> His military service taught him to appreciate and value his life more than he had before.

Delano Cummings, a Lumbee from North Carolina, enlisted in the Marines after his father passed away. Cummings, who had been out of high school for about two years, wanted to fulfill a promise to his father that he would take care of his mother and seven younger siblings. Cummings centered his Native background early in his autobiography: “The Lumbee are the largest tribe east of the Mississippi. We have never lived on reservations, having owned our own land. Like Lumbee Indians before us, my family

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<sup>264</sup> Wood, *Vietnam*, 107.

<sup>265</sup> Wood, *Vietnam*, 108.

worked and hunted the land in Robeson County, North Carolina.”<sup>266</sup> The Lumbee’s historical background, and lack of federal recognition, differed from many of the other Native soldiers from more Midwest and Great Plains tribes and the segregated South created a much different environment for Native peoples in those areas. Cummings detailed the tripartite Jim Crow segregation system in Robeson where there were three high schools, three drinking fountains, three sections in the movie theater, among many other segregated examples.

Cummings participated in Operation Hastings, which pushed the North Vietnamese Army back across the Demilitarized Zone in July and August of 1966. It was a risky and costly operation and Cummings saw more than a dozen of his fellow Marines killed when a helicopter that he was riding in was shot down. He narrowly escaped the operation. The rest of the time was spent as ground support throughout Vietnam. For his duration in Vietnam, Cummings walked point, something that he embraced:

I was going ahead pretty good—this point job felt better than walking behind. I could pick my own way, set my own pace, and I was up front and could see what was going on. I didn’t have any trouble moving; walking point just seemed natural to me. I think growing up in the woods, looking for snakes, coon hunting at night, working hard in the fields, and being Indian made it easier for me than some of the other Marines. I decided that if I had to go on patrol, point was the place for me.<sup>267</sup>

While Cummings embraced the job, it also invested in many of the stereotypes about Native people having more of a natural or innate sense to the outdoors. As I noted in Chapter 2, many Native veterans were killed or wounded due to walking point. His Native identity seemed to be something he was proud of. He used that pride to overcome his fears.

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<sup>266</sup> Delano Cummings, *Moon Dash Warrior: The Story of an American Indian in Vietnam, a Marine from the Land of the Lumbee*, ed. by Marian Novak and David Novak (Livermore: Signal Tree Publications, 1998), 2.

<sup>267</sup> Cummings, *Moon Dash Warrior*, 54.

For example, he repeatedly told himself things like, “You are a Marine, you are Indian—no more thinking things like that” when he encountered fearful or scary situations.

When Delano Cummings returned home, he encountered war protestors at a California airport. The showing angered him and he expressed to another soldier that he wanted to fight the antiwar activists as he would always be proud of his service. He was particularly mad because of the sacrifices that many soldiers made during Vietnam, including the death of his best friend nicknamed A.B. Ultimately, Cummings struggled to talk about the things he witnessed and participated in during Vietnam with his family. He stated, “My brothers asked, but I did not talk about Vietnam. Still, Vietnam stayed in my heard, and I could not relax or talk to people like I had before.”<sup>268</sup> After his initial service, Cummings was stationed at Camp Lejeune teaching a Night Attack Course to Marines heading over to Vietnam. He suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder as well as survivor’s guilt and eventually re-enlisted to go back over to Vietnam. As a result of his re-enlistment, he earned the rank of Sargent.

His survivor’s guilt and PTSD caused Delano to make risky decisions in Vietnam: “I had survived Vietnam once and made it back to the World, but for me the World had not been the same. I felt I needed to be in Vietnam looking for Albert Brigham—A.B. Was he still alive somewhere? Or was I just using that for an excuse? Had I got killing in my blood and needed a war?”<sup>269</sup> He continued to struggle after his combat tour came to an end, stating, “I was still proud to be a Marine—to be American, to be Indian. But I had lost something and could not figure out what.”<sup>270</sup> Cummings later went back to Vietnam for an

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<sup>268</sup> Cummings, *Moon Dash Warrior*, 198.

<sup>269</sup> Cummings, *Moon Dash Warrior*, 246.

<sup>270</sup> Cummings, *Moon Dash Warrior*, 253.

additional combat tour before finishing his enlistment in late 1971 after five years. He concluded his book with, “I got out of the Marine Corps not knowing what I was going to do with the rest of my life. All I knew that I wanted to get home to my family and my people, back to the Lumber River and the graves of my ancestors.”<sup>271</sup>

Gene Cully, a Seminole and Creek Indian from Oklahoma, enlisted in the Marines to get away from Oklahoma and gain useful training skills he could use after his service. Cully narrates his military service in chronological order alongside childhood experiences such as his attendance at boarding school, life in rural Oklahoma, and stories about his siblings and family. When he first traveled to Vietnam, Cully acknowledged the similarities between the Vietnamese and Native families arguing that “The Vietnamese people used what they had and did what they needed to for survival, much like my parents. I would have to be resourceful and rely on those same survival skills in the Vietnam jungles and mountains for the next thirteen months of his life.”<sup>272</sup>

Cully eluded to an admiration that “amid all the atrocities and bombs, life went on for the Vietnamese people.”<sup>273</sup> This admiration was likely helpful in overcoming his PTSD because he realized Native people had also survived more than a century of settler colonialism and forced assimilation attempts. Cully also noticed the similarities between the Vietnamese and his own family, who worked the land in rural Oklahoma, reflecting, “Watching entire families pitch in to plant and harvest rice, gather the tropical fruits, and work their gardens reminded me of my own life growing up in Oklahoma.”<sup>274</sup> At least four

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<sup>271</sup> Cummings, *Moon Dash Warrior*, 266.

<sup>272</sup> Gene Cully, *Warrior Forgotten: A Native American's Perspective of Vietnam* (Kast Publishing, LLC, 2016), 25.

<sup>273</sup> Cully, *Warrior Forgotten*, 34.

<sup>274</sup> Cully, *Warrior Forgotten*, 41.

Native veterans noted these similarities in their autobiographies, and it is clear that they remembered these comparisons decades after their service in Vietnam.

Unlike other Native veterans, who acknowledged racism in various forms (in particular in being called Chief) Cully felt as if he were treated with respect. He claimed, “I may have been the only Indian in the platoon . . . [but] I never worried about how I might be treated by the officers or other men. I’d earned the title of Marine and was respected as one.”<sup>275</sup> He, like most of the Native veterans, cited other Vietnamese national soldiers as claiming, “Number one, same, same.” Cully’s similar physical features also saved him from Vietnamese children selling him stuff when he went to town. He jokingly stated, “Although I didn’t mind them, sometimes it was nice to be left alone. There were times when it paid to be Native American.”<sup>276</sup>

Cully participated in multiple skirmishes and witnessed many friends and fellow soldiers killed and wounded in Vietnam. Throughout his tenure in the military, he questioned why he had not been severely wounded or killed but reflected on the tobacco a medicine man had provided him before he left for Vietnam. He made sure to use it the way the medicine man had instructed but also believed his training influenced his survival as well. He concluded, “The belief I had in my training, my medicine, and my faith in God made me feel safe.”<sup>277</sup> Curry believed in what he was doing in Vietnam, stating, “I was proud to be an American, a Native American Indian at that. There was much in my culture to be proud of.” He later reflected after watching a movie in Vietnam that played the

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<sup>275</sup> Cully, *Warrior Forgotten*, 79.

<sup>276</sup> Cully, *Warrior Forgotten*, 142.

<sup>277</sup> Cully, *Warrior Forgotten*, 183.

National Anthem, “To defend America was an honor, and hearing the National Anthem again brought that home to me hard.”<sup>278</sup>

Gene Cully, whose tour in Vietnam ended in 1968, was stationed in Camp Pendleton, California, and Hawaii for the remainder of his four years of service. After that ended, he re-enlisted and eventually had an entire career in the military. He retired as a first sergeant after serving twenty-three years in the Marines. In writing this book, Cully articulated, “Despite all the difficult memories stirred up while writing this book, I did enjoy doing it . . . Just like in Vietnam, I try to take things one day at a time. I really have a good life and enjoy it every day.” Cully’s brothers also served in Vietnam but he rarely discusses his service with them other than to say, “My brothers who’d also served in the military didn’t ask me about my experiences. Nor did I tell them anything. I knew they were proud of me and that was enough.”<sup>279</sup> It could also be assumed that he felt the same way about his Native community and family in Oklahoma.

This chapter analyzed the autobiographies of eight Native American soldiers and their experiences before, during, and after Vietnam. When these autobiographies are put into conversation with each other, it’s noticeable that all of the writers grappled with the idea of fighting the Vietnamese, who they related to on both physical and cultural similarities. The Vietnamese, as articulated by many of the soldiers, farmed and lived off of the land in the same way that many tribes did. More interestingly, these Native soldiers witnessed the Vietnamese as a group of people, who like their ancestors in the century before, fought for their cultural ways of life, people, land, and survival. They, unlike many non-Native American soldiers, felt empathy for the Vietnamese struggle for freedom. That

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<sup>278</sup> Cully, *Warrior Forgotten*, 178-180.

<sup>279</sup> Cully, *Warrior Forgotten*, 225-226.

empathy became even more tangible when they compared it with forced removals and assimilation attempts by the federal government. The racism that many saw against the Vietnamese drew connections to what Native soldiers saw before and after the war in border towns and throughout America against Native people. Native soldiers also quickly noted the physical similarities, especially their brown skin, which the Vietnamese seemingly exploited.

These autobiographies also highlighted a variety of complex reasons for military service. Most importantly, every single veteran in this chapter noted the influence of earlier generations on their service. Each of them cited grandfathers, fathers, uncles, and brothers, who had served in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. This reason alone factored the most into why Native veterans in this chapter chose to serve in the United States military and ultimately in Vietnam. Those attempts to honor earlier generations were questioned in Vietnam. Unlike World War I or World War II, which saw a greater common enemy in the German and Japanese armies that were threatening their communities and land, Vietnam had more uncertain and fragile motives. Despite those questions, these Native veterans proudly served in Vietnam.

As this dissertation is being completed, other Native veterans continue to write their stories, in autobiographical form, through newspaper correspondences or engaging with scholars and reporters' requests for interviews. Autobiographies contribute key insights into not only Native soldier's experiences during Vietnam but also their childhood experiences of trying to understand what Native identity looked like under settler colonial occupation. Through autobiographies, readers can see how Native people navigated and survived. These stories also demonstrated the survival and success of many of these

veterans. Many continue to struggle with PTSD, survivor's guilt, and trauma from the war; however, they raised families, earned educational degrees, and lived to share their lives with future generations. Their service, despite their internal conflict of fighting in Vietnam, will no doubt influence future generations of Native American soldiers in the United States military.

#### **Chapter 4: The Native Vietnam Veteran in Literature**

Survived the war, but was  
having trouble surviving  
the peace, couldn't sleep  
more than two hours  
was scared to be  
without a gun.  
Nightmares, daymares  
guilt and remorse  
wanted to stay drunk  
all the time.  
1966 and the V.A. said  
Vietnam wasn't a war.  
They couldn't help, but  
did give me a copy of  
the yellow pages.

*shrinking away – Jim Northrup<sup>280</sup>*

In this chapter, fictional literature, written predominantly by Native authors, will be analyzed to demonstrate how these texts promote the continuation and innovation of Native American culture through the United States military service. Vietnam military service in Native literature will remain the key theme in this chapter; however, military service throughout the twentieth century has been readily written about by Native authors. As Pueblo storyteller Simon Ortiz stated in a 1981 keynote, “In every case where European culture was cast upon Indian people of this nation there was similar creative response and development . . . It can be observed that this was the primary element of a nationalistic impulse to make use of foreign ritual, ideas, and material in their own – Indian – terms.”<sup>281</sup> Ortiz was discussing the development of national Native literature, but, as is discussed in other chapters of this dissertation, Native people have embraced and adapted non-Native

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<sup>280</sup>Jim Northrup, *Walking the Rez Road: Stories*. 20th Anniversary edition (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum, 2013), 3.

<sup>281</sup> Simon J. Ortiz, “Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism,” in MELUS 8, no. 2 (1981), 8.

culture to fit their own needs. Many of the works discussed in this chapter not only demonstrate that embrace but also underscore the tension between innovating older traditions into new ones. The first work, highlighted by the poem *shrinking away* at the beginning of this chapter, is Fond du Lac Ojibwe and Vietnam veteran Jim Northrup.

In *Walking the Rez Road*, Northrup compiles more than a dozen of his own short stories and poems, weaving descriptions of traditional Ojibwe culture and history into his work and describing everyday moments like a night at the bingo hall. Northrup's debut novel was celebrated with multiple awards including the Minnesota Book Award, the Midwest Book Achievement Award, and the Northeastern Minnesota Book Award. The most prominent theme in *Walking the Rez Road* is the return of Vietnam veterans to their community. Northrup hauntingly shares stories and poetry about his protagonist, Luke Warmwater. Many similarly echo Northrup's own experiences during and after Vietnam, while demonstrating the struggle of overcoming survivor's guilt and Luke's return to traditional culture. Importantly, his writing promoted the continued survival of Native veterans even after the tragedy of war. As Northrup/Luke concluded in the opening poem, "shrinking away": "I realized then that surviving the peace was up to me."<sup>282</sup>

Without knowing his own formal Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder diagnosis, Northrup turned to poetic prose, fictional and non-fictional short stories, and traditional storytelling to help alleviate his trauma and define his own story. Throughout Northrup's work, Luke serves as the main character alongside his cousin Lug, who is featured in multiple stories. While Luke and Lug's Vietnam military service, particularly their struggles to overcome trauma from the war, are highlighted, Northrup also documented

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<sup>282</sup> Northrup, *Walking the Rez Road*, 4.

reservation experiences, cultural ways of life, and Native humor. As Northrup, who served with Indian Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division from 1965 until 1966, stated in his 1997 autobiography, “I was in full blown denial about Vietnam for at least fifteen years. I had Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder before it had a name.”<sup>283</sup> He continued, “When I got back to the world, as we called the United States, I learned not to bring up the subject of Vietnam anywhere, anytime. I kept quiet about my experiences in the war. No one wanted to hear and I didn’t want to tell.”<sup>284</sup>

Northrup's characters, often based on individuals he served with, cope with a variety of struggles, both pre and post-war. Luke, as an example, grappled with the guilt of surviving Vietnam while others in his company died. In the short story, "Mine of Mine," Luke stepped on a land mine but before it triggered the explosive, another marine told Luke to calmly wait with his foot resting on top of the explosive. The unnamed Marine then removed the blasting cap and the explosive, therefore preventing the mine from exploding and saving Luke's life. A few minutes after Luke's narrow escape, the same marine who saved him, stepped on a landmine himself, losing both legs before bleeding to death in front of Luke. Luke blamed himself for not being able to save the marine who had saved him, carrying survivor's guilt with him for over twenty years. Luke eventually visited the Vietnam War Memorial, found the marine's name on the Wall, and offered tobacco in his honor. As Luke completed his tobacco offering, another marine greeted Luke, and understanding the trauma he carried, he hugged and welcomed him back from war. Despite having returned home from the war twenty years before, the interaction was

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<sup>283</sup> Jim Northrup, *The Rez Road Follies: Canoes, Casinos, Computers, and Birch Bark Baskets* (New York: Kodansha International, 1997), 185.

<sup>284</sup> Northrup, *Rez Road Follies*, 183-184.

the first time that Luke felt welcomed home. Each of these struggles aligns with the real experiences of Native veterans.

It is unclear if this story was based on Northrup's own near-death experiences, but he repeatedly referenced his own survivor's guilt in his autobiographical work and newspaper editorial. Luke Warmwater, as a result, likely serves as not only an alter-ego for many of Northrup's personal experiences, but also as a microcosm for many of the soldiers he served and interacted with before, during, and after Vietnam. Luke's story of guilt, at least in this particular instance, was one that many Vietnam veterans could relate to.

Northrup himself visited the Vietnam Veteran Memorial Wall, a memorial in Washington, D.C. completed in 1982 to honor those killed during the Vietnam War. He later reflected, "there was the feeling of gratitude for having survived the experience, followed quickly by a feeling of guilt. When I found a name on the wall I knew, I immediately remembered all of the circumstances of that marine's death."<sup>285</sup> Northrup, like many veterans, had issues justifying why he was able to survive the war, when other family members, friends, and fellow soldiers did not.

For many Native veterans, coming home meant more than just readapting to civilian life. It also meant returning to their traditional ways of life. Northrup demonstrated those struggles in a short story titled, "Victory Dance," featuring Luke's cousin Lug. Lug, who similarly struggled with survivor's guilt, denied his Ojibwe culture after the war and contemplated suicide, once telling his sister, "I found a friend's name on the Wall. He died after I left Vietnam. I felt like killing myself."<sup>286</sup> After discussing his near-death experiences, Lug's sister Judy encouraged him to go to a month-long treatment for his post-

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<sup>285</sup> Northrup, *Rez Road Follies*, 197.

<sup>286</sup> Northrup, *Walking the Rez Road*, 19.

traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). While he was at treatment, Judy beaded Lug a pair of moccasins and found her own husband's traditional regalia, which had been packed away since he died in Vietnam. Judy gifted both to Lug after he was released from his hospital treatment. Northrup concluded the story with, "When the veteran's song began Lug moved back to join his sister. Both of them had tears as they danced the veteran's honor song together," signaling Lug's return to his family and traditional ways of life.<sup>287</sup>

This particular story also documented the complications of the United States' place in colonizing the Vietnamese people during the war, who like Native people in the twentieth century, appeared to be fighting for their survival and freedom. Lug remembered one story in which he killed a Vietnamese soldier, only to find out that it was a woman. He stated, "Her hair looked like grandma's hair used to look. Remember her long, black shiny hair? The woman had hair like that. I knew killing people was wrong somehow but this made it worse when it turned out to be a woman."<sup>288</sup> Native soldiers, like Lug, grappled with fighting the Vietnamese, especially when considering their shared struggles against colonialism.

In using Luke and Lug in his stories, Northrup used the vehicle of creative fiction to illuminate the real experiences of many Native Vietnam veterans, including himself. These few examples from Northrup's *Walking the Rez Road* demonstrated the importance of examining Native American Vietnam literature. As will be further examined later in this chapter, many Native authors exposed these commonalities – including survivor's guilt, PTSD, and struggles to fight the Vietnamese – in their fictional writings. The Native authors used in this chapter, many of whom were Vietnam veterans, rooted their writing in

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 22.

the commonalities of the experiences of Native Vietnam veterans. The use of Native American veterans as primary or secondary characters in Native American and American literature has been a significant theme in the second half of twentieth-century Native literature. Native authors like Northrup, N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, Susan Power, and Philip H. Red Eagle have all used Native American veterans as primary and secondary characters in their works. Their works created a literary movement that not only documented the experiences of Native Vietnam veterans but reflected twentieth-century military characteristics about Native men in their writing. Put simply, Native veterans, especially those returning home from Vietnam, wrote about what they knew or saw before, during, and after Vietnam.

These writings were not limited to those that served in the United States military. Authors like Susan Power and Louise Erdrich witnessed veterans returning home from the war in their respective communities. Hundreds of Native veterans returned home after World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam and influenced understandings of what it meant to be Native in the twentieth century. Observing these veterans returning home, watching them struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder, and hearing stories about fighting a foreign enemy that many often related to, influenced a generation of writers, both Native and non-Native.

More interestingly, we can see a variety of patterns and themes that Native authors expanded on. Much like the oral histories and autobiographies in Chapters 2 and 3, written literature mirrored many similar themes. The biggest theme that arises is the "same, same" narrative in which Native soldiers relate to the Vietnamese (Japanese during World War II) based on both physical and cultural characteristics. Non-Native soldiers also noted these

similarities throughout the Native literature and used it as a justification of the perceived inferiority of Native American people. PTSD as well as survivor's guilt, as demonstrated in the oral histories (Chapter 2) and autobiographies, continue to be strong themes in Native American literature; however, these shift slightly to include anxiety and difficulty in returning to traditional and cultural Native ways of life. By writing about Native veterans, Native authors cemented the experiences of many Native American soldiers reinforcing the "same, same" paradigm as well as struggles to fight the Vietnamese, PTSD, alcohol, and drugs.

It's important to remember that while these experiences were not true to every Native veteran's experiences, examining Native literature uncovers the way Native veterans are perceived inside and outside of Indian Country. These fictional accounts highlighted the complexities of being a Native American soldier for the United States during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Whether the "same, same" model was a real experience that many Native soldiers combatted, it has become a trope for writing about the fictional Native Vietnam experience as something referenced in oral histories and the historical record multiple times. Consequently, it is essential to analyze the way Vietnam, both veteran, and non-veteran, Native and non-Native, has been written about in popular culture and the perceptions created about Native veterans during that time. This extends beyond literature into film, art, comic books, and even the way veterans viewed themselves and their experiences in the oral histories and autobiographies from Chapters 2 and 3. Native veterans may or may not have been influenced by the pressure to have certain experiences like the "same, same" paradigm. This is not to suggest that these

experiences did not happen, but that these narratives were readily available to a variety of audiences beginning as early as the 1970s.

During the Native American Renaissance from the late 1960s until the 1980s, a period coined by Kenneth Lincoln that began with N. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *House Made of Dawn* (1968), Native authors such as Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko used Native veterans as main characters in their works.<sup>289</sup> Most prominently, these authors elaborated on Native veterans returning home from various twentieth-century wars. *House Made of Dawn* and Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) both focused on Native veterans who returned home from World War II to their communities and struggled with PTSD and adapting to post-war reservation life.<sup>290</sup> Robert Warrior, a Native Studies scholar, wrote, "Momaday's ideas on words and language help us understand the lives of Indian people who are surrounded, even imprisoned, by politics and policy and by the words through which policy is propagated."<sup>291</sup> Thus, Momaday and Silko established a literary framework for later generations of Native authors, even Native Vietnam veterans like Northrup and Red Eagle, to write about Native veteran experiences before and after Vietnam.

Momaday and Silko focused more on Native veterans returning home from war and their struggle to be reintegrated into their tribal communities. In contrast, Native authors like Northrup often highlighted military service concerning traditional, cultural, and historical expectations. Northrup's characters did have PTSD from Vietnam, but their

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<sup>289</sup> For information about the Native American Renaissance see Kenneth Lincoln, *Native American Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

<sup>290</sup> N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (Harper Perennial: Modern Classics, 2010 [1966]); Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (Penguin Classics, [1977] 2006).

<sup>291</sup> Robert Allen Warrior, *The People, and the Word: Reading Native Nonfiction* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 169.

communities supported them in overcoming that trauma. Northrup's poem *ogichidag*, which translates to "warriors" in Ojibwe, for example, emphasized the multi-generational layers and expectations of Native American military service.<sup>292</sup> Northrup in his autobiography stated, "I knew from the old stories that the Anishinaabe were warriors and my family expected me to join the service."<sup>293</sup> These expectations were reflected in Northrup's fictional elements of his work but also in other Native author's stories. Susan Power's *The Grass Dancer* (1995), for instance, strongly exhibited the relationship between Native military service and the powwow. The Native Vietnam veteran returning home continued to be a strong and recurring theme; however, these later authors recurrently elaborated more on pre-war life and military service in connection with their culture.

Unlike World War I and World War II, Vietnam veterans were protested, spit on, and called baby killers for their service. Northrup acknowledged, "We didn't get a parade. Instead we got blamed for losing an unpopular war. We were the visible symbol of the failure of America's policies. I remembered how some veterans returned their medals to the U.S. government. I heard about other veterans getting spit on by American citizens after their return from Vietnam."<sup>294</sup> As a result, Native veterans found themselves in the middle of a debate over the morality of the Vietnam War. Other Native authors, while not veterans like Northrup, documented these interactions, both positive and negative in their works. Most importantly, Native authors articulated military service as an ongoing tradition passed down and supported by earlier generations.

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<sup>292</sup> *Ogichidag* is most commonly translated as "warrior" but sometimes "soldier."

<sup>293</sup> Northrup, *Red Road Follies*, 156.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

Creative non-fiction gave Native authors more freedom to create complex characters that more accurately represented Native veterans. This in contrast to the historical literature from Chapter 1, which often relied on federal and BIA archives, to present their stories. As a result, their narratives were constructed around the early twentieth-century assimilation narratives. Reaching beyond the archive – that is the traditional archive that includes government documents, military papers – allowed Native authors to portray the ways military service was intertwined into Native culture. Thus, Native authors better reflected the norms of Native communities, veterans, military service, and contemporary Native culture. This included the singing of honor and veterans’ songs at traditional powwows but also in hosting powwows designed to specifically honor veterans. These authors also documented the struggles with alcohol, drugs, and suicide on local reservations. Native veteran authors, like Northrup and Philip Red Eagle, relied on their archives of experiences during and after Vietnam to write their stories serving as an expansive portrayal of Native American military service, expectations and encounters with issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol, and suicide rates. Non-veteran Native authors can never fully understand the realities of warfare and post-traumatic stress disorder; however, these authors witnessed the impacts of war and military service on Native veterans, both positive and negative, returning home after many of the twentieth-century engagements.

As has been demonstrated throughout this dissertation, military service, at least for many Native soldiers, was under the premise of protecting traditional homelands and reservation communities. It also directly challenged the narrative that Native people became assimilated with their military service. Native authors have similarly participated by acknowledging the large number of Native veterans returning home after twentieth-

century military engagements. By examining Native authors who used Native American veterans as characters, we can see the complexity of Native American military service. More specifically, we can see community expectations of military service, how those traditions developed throughout the twentieth century, and the struggles many veterans encountered during and after the war. After seeing the horrors and technological advancements of war, many veterans begin to doubt or see their culture as outdated. Other veterans connected their PTSD as something that stemmed not only from their experiences during the war but also from the ongoing legacy of colonialism, genocide, and forced assimilation.

Non-Native authors also used the figure of the Native veteran in their works. These depictions, while often stereotypical and inaccurate, nevertheless, reflected the influence on popular culture – including Hollywood movies, comic books, and best-selling novels like *Rambo: First Blood* – of the thousands of Native veterans returning home after World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. For non-Native authors, the inclusion of Native veterans mattered less on the accuracy of their experiences but rather on the fact that Native themed characters readily sold. Native Vietnam veterans, in particular, have most often been cast in specific roles as guides and support systems for white soldiers. In these particular stories, military service characterizes Native people as fierce, stoic, warriors with inherent abilities to guide, track the enemy, and kill. More importantly, military service, for non-Native authors, served as a way to assimilate Native people into mainstream American culture.

### **The Return of the Vietnam Veteran**

Didja ever hear a sound  
smell something

taste something  
that brought you back  
to Vietnam, instantly?  
Didja ever wonder  
when it would end?  
It ended for my brother.  
He died in the war  
but didn't fall down  
for fifteen tortured years.  
His flashbacks are over,  
another casualty whose name  
will never be on the Wall.  
Some can only find peace  
only in death.  
The sound of his  
family crying hurt.  
The smell of the flowers  
didn't comfort us.  
The bitter taste  
in my mouth still sours me.  
How about a memorial  
for those who made it  
through the war  
but still died  
before their time?

*wahbegan* – Jim Northrup<sup>295</sup>

Native authors have used the figure of the Native veteran, in particular the Vietnam veteran, in multiple ways. Many of the works that I analyze focus on a variety of characteristics. For one, many focused on the struggle to return to their particular tribal communities, but more specifically, their own unique cultures and traditions. Several characters used alcohol, drugs, intimate and complex relationships with women, and sometimes suicide in an attempt to overcome or completely halt their PTSD. In the process, those veterans often denied their culture – or perhaps better said – struggled to accept their traditional and seemingly old and outdated ways in light of seeing the advancement of new technologies to destroy and kill people, buildings, and even cities.

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<sup>295</sup> Northrup, *Walking the Rez Road*, 9.

Most of these authors used this narrative arc with many, but not all veterans, returning to their culture and overcoming their struggles with alcohol. For instance, Leslie Marmon Silko, wrote *Ceremony* partially to understand what happened to many World War II veterans who returned home and struggled with PTSD. She reflected in her 30<sup>th</sup>-anniversary edition of *Ceremony*:

It was supposed to be a funny story about Harley, the World War II veteran whose family tried but could not keep him away from liquor. But as I wrote about Harley's desperate thirst for alcohol, it didn't seem so funny after all, and I realized I wanted to better understand what happened to war veterans, many of whom were survivors of the Bataan Death March, cousins and relatives of mine, who returned home from the war and stayed drunk the rest of their lives.<sup>296</sup>

Several authors emphasized the importance of traditional expectations for military service. This is shown through gossip about Natives in the novels who dodged the draft or refused military service. More purposefully, these authors highlighted events such as powwows to promote how veterans were celebrated and honored in their communities. Native authors sometimes relied on stereotypical characteristics such as the portrayal that all Native men were fierce, stoic warriors. Multiple authors referenced these characteristics of fighting but often traced them to specific tribal histories, such as the Lakota/Dakota killing General Custer, storytelling, and even contemporary expectations from having uncles, fathers, or cousins who fought in earlier twentieth-century wars. Nonetheless, some Native authors were still prone to romanticizing contemporary Native military service because of a seemingly innate ability to fight and track enemies.

Finally, these authors demonstrated the continued survival and innovation of Native American traditions into the twentieth century and beyond. As portrayed in many of these

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<sup>296</sup> Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (Penguin Classics, [1977] 2006), xvi.

works, we see the innovation of traditional song, dance, and the powwow to incorporate veterans from twentieth-century wars. More importantly, instead of relying on stereotypical assumptions about Native peoples as warriors struggling to be assimilated into American society, these stories demonstrate Native people as products of both a traditional way of Native life while also casting them as veterans of contemporary war. Even smaller issues the characters in these stories encounter, like trying to find a bingo game or gas money, might seem meaningless but portray Native veterans in a real and humorous light moving away from stories that only focus on the embattlement with drugs or alcohol. alleged

Native veteran literature begins – at least when considering the mass production, consumption, and acceptance of a Native author into mainstream American culture – with N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*. These two works highlighted Native World War II veterans, but due to their high acclaim and distribution, they influenced later generations of Native authors. As demonstrated in both these works, the Native veteran is often narrated as an individual returning home from war. On their return, the focus is often on their struggle to adapt to both reservation life and a complicated and continuously transitioning Indian identity under a settler colonial system. Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* (1968), written during the early height of the Vietnam War, featured Abel, a Jemez Pueblo World War II veteran and his return to the reservation. Throughout the book, Able struggles to adapt to reservation life and his severed connection between his language, ceremony, and other traditional ways of life. Able struggled with alcohol and murdered an albino man. After serving time in jail, Able was released from jail but continued to struggle with alcohol. After many personal battles, the story eventually

comes full circle and Able returned to his traditional ways of life but only after his grandfather, who desperately pushed his return to his culture, passed away. Able's story, as will be demonstrated, is not unique in that it's a framework that many Native authors choose to use: a Native veteran returns home, struggles to connect to culture or his community, and then either reintegrates into his culture, commits suicide, or succumbs to his addictions.<sup>297</sup>

Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) centered on Tayo, a half-Laguna Pueblo and half-white World War II veteran (and like Abel) was suffering from what is now documented as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Tayo's recurring trauma resulted from his capture and imprisonment in a prisoner of war camp. Similar to Able, Tayo suppressed his trauma and loss of traditional ways of life with alcohol. As the narrator described, "Liquor was the medicine for the anger that made them hurt, for the pain of the loss, medicine for tight bellies and choked-up throats."<sup>298</sup> The struggle with alcohol is a common theme throughout literature featuring Native characters that are veterans. The typical theme revolved around Native veterans struggling to be incorporated into their communities, their resistance to returning to a traditional or cultural protocol, and ultimately their permanent removal or reintegration into those communities.

Native characters, like Able and Tayo were ultimately cast off as wild, independent, stoic, and isolated from society. Both Silko and Momaday documented the return of their main characters to their traditional ways of life but also the transition and innovation – sometimes not as quickly or easily as anticipated – of Native American cultures. Tayo's journey, in particular, to be healed through ceremony came to a halt when

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<sup>297</sup> N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1968).

<sup>298</sup> Silko, *Ceremony*, 37.

he could not acknowledge if he had killed anyone in the war. The traditional ceremonies were designed to alleviate trauma based on warfare in which soldiers would know if they had or had not killed someone. As Tayo described this tension: “But the old man would not have believed white warfare—killing across great distances without knowing who or how many had died . . . Ku’oosh would have looked at the dismembered corpses and the atomic heat-flash outlines, where human bodies had evaporated, and the old man would have said something close and terrible had killed these people. Not even oldtime witches killed like that.”<sup>299</sup> Nevertheless, at the end of *Ceremony* Tayo completed the ceremony. Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1968, and Silko’s national bestseller *Ceremony*, influenced the next generation of Native authors.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Northrup’s *Walking the Rez Road* was organized around Luke’s return home to the reservation from Vietnam but also the difficulty in transitioning back into civilian life. In weaving Luke’s present-day experiences with those he encountered during Vietnam, Northrup exhibits the ongoing impacts of PTSD, guilt, and war trauma. In “Open Heart with a Grunt,” the first story featured in *Walking the Rez Road*, Luke carried a severely wounded soldier who turned gray as doctors attempted to revive him. Because Luke and his fellow soldiers had seen many soldiers turn gray and never come back, the soldiers knew it was the end for the wounded soldier. The story concluded with, “Luke still sees the gray marine in his nightmares every couple of months.”<sup>300</sup> The fact that this was the first story in the novel indicated that it was important for Northrup to center the ongoing trauma from war not only for Luke but the other veterans featured in *Walking the Rez Road*.

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

<sup>300</sup> Northrup, *Walking the Rez Road*, 8.

Northrup structured his poetry between many stories about Luke. Several of these poems, especially the ones that focus on Native Vietnam veterans, are presented in full throughout this chapter. The poem, *walking point*, verbalized the tension and fears, real and imagined, of leading fellow soldiers through the jungle. As indicated by the lines, "Is any of this real? / Is this a green nightmare / I'm going to wake up from?" and reiterated in the closing lines, "The shooting is over in five second / the shakes are over in a halfhour / the memories are over never," *walking point*, even without the potential physical harm, created long-lasting mental trauma that many veterans failed to overcome.<sup>301</sup> This mental trauma was articulated in several of the novels, especially because many Native soldiers, due to their perceived ability to survive in the wilderness, were placed on the frontlines. It was also confirmed in the autobiographies and oral histories in Chapters 2 and 3. Northrup importantly documented the stress, tension, desperation, and fear that Native veterans endured while *walking point*.

For Northrup, humor, documented through Luke's narrow escapes with the law and attempts to earn or find money, serves as a method of survival. For non-veterans, and even non-Native people, the humor might seem dark or an act of desperation but for Native people, it has readily served as a way of living. This was validated in the story, "Blood Money," in which Luke spends all day giving plasma for \$10 only to find a \$4 parking ticket on his car. Luke laughs off the ticket and eventually finds money in the forms of former debts owed to him.<sup>302</sup> Nevertheless, the central theme of Northrup's humorous stories can be seen as Native people finding ways to survive, and in some cases laugh off the things thrown at them. Northrup's use of humor labels Luke, the other characters, and

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<sup>301</sup> Northrup, *Walking the Rez Road*, 14-15.

<sup>302</sup> Northrup, *Walking the Rez Road*, 35-37.

even Northrup himself as survivors of a traumatic war and settler colonial system rather than victims of homelessness, lack of money, or alcoholism and drug addicts.

In “Your Standard Drunk,” Luke and his cousin Dunkin spend over three weeks binge drinking alcohol. During the third week, while Luke and Dunkin are reminiscing about their younger days, another friend pulled up with a deer that he had killed. Luke, Dunkin, and others helped cut up the deer, started cooking the meat, and drank alcohol into the night. In the morning, two of Luke’s cousins pulled up in a semi-truck that was owned and operated by a white man, who came to the reservation to drink but was passed out in the cab. Luke and Dunkin, amazed at their luck, started passing out the cases of beer that semi-truck driver was supposed to have delivered. After the beer is handed out, either Luke and Dunkin proclaimed (it’s unclear who said it), “Let’s send everyone home when we run out of beer.” The other responded, “Yah, time to get ready for ricing anyway.”<sup>303</sup> In this context, Northrup’s stories relayed messages about Luke’s continuation of cultural and tribal traditions. For Luke, despite being drunk for over three weeks, it was important that he and the other individuals drinking with him practiced being a good relative and continued ricing and other Ojibwe traditions. When the friend pulled up with the dead deer, for instance, he disclosed that he laid down tobacco for the deer’s spirit. By cutting up and sharing the deer (and even alcohol), all of the individuals practiced supporting their community. Northrup’s story highlighted that Native Vietnam veterans, notwithstanding the use of alcohol, continued to be Native American. The story encouraged the idea that Luke and Dunkin had control over their own decisions instead of the stereotypical narrative that often-projected Native veterans as spiraling out of control until their eventual

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<sup>303</sup> Northrup, *Walking the Rez Road*, 65-67.

death. Control, even limitedly defined, was something that Northrup contradicted in his short stories and books while other authors, Native and non-Native, focused more on loss and trauma.

The loss of culture, interconnectedness of family and community, as well as the influence and removal of Native people by the government, was a major theme in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984). *Love Medicine* won the National Book Critics Circle Award and featured over sixty years of history from multiple Chippewa families. In addition to these family histories and struggles, Erdrich presented Henry Lamartine Jr., a Chippewa Vietnam veteran returning home from the war. In referring to Henry's trauma, his mother Lulu stated, "All his life he did things right, and then the war showed him right was wrong. Something broke in him. His mind gave way. He was all past touch when he returned."<sup>304</sup>

Henry's return focused on his inability to overcome his PTSD. In one particular encounter, Albertine, a fifteen-year-old girl from the same reservation and a family friend, saw Henry at a bus station in Fargo and followed him. Henry was presented as having just returned three weeks earlier after nine months of combat in Vietnam and before being captured and spending six months as a prisoner of war. After he acknowledged Albertine's presence, the two went to a bar and eventually retreated to a hotel. The entire time, Henry suffered flashbacks to Vietnam, in particular, Albertine's physical characteristics reminded him of a Vietnamese woman who he watched die. As he described, "They had used a bayonet. She was out of her mind. You, me, same. Same. She pointed to her eyes and his eyes. The Asian, folded eyes of some Chippewas. She was hemorrhaging."<sup>305</sup> This

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<sup>304</sup> Louise Erdrich, *Love Medicine* (Bantam Books, 1984), 227.

<sup>305</sup> Erdrich, *Love Medicine*, 138.

particular example, like Northrup's character Lug, revealed the physical similarities between Native people and the Vietnamese while also validating the guilt that many of these veterans struggled to overcome. The next morning when Albertine tried to wake Henry up, "He shrieked. Exploded."<sup>306</sup> After startling Albertine and forcing her into hiding, she heard him crying in the room. Not only did Native veterans observe the similarities and characteristics of Vietnamese people, but they also felt immense guilt for things they did during Vietnam.

In the next chapter, Erdrich shifted the story to the perspective of Henry's brother Lyman, who stated, "It was at least three years before Henry came home. By then I guess the whole war was solved in the government's mind, but for him it would keep going."<sup>307</sup> As Lyman's story indicated, Henry was different after his return. He described him as uneasy, jumpy, and mean. Most notably, Henry also did not care about the car that they purchased together and fixed up before the war suggesting that the trauma from the war made Henry apathetic towards life. After Lyman trashed the car to get his attention, Henry worked on fixing the car for over a month before agreeing to go out for a ride to the local before. Once they get to the river, Henry briefly appeared to act like himself before jumping into the cold water and drowning. After Lyman's failed attempt to save Henry, he plowed the car into the water and framed his death as a car accident to protect Henry's and the family's reputation.

Erdrich's story articulated PTSD as lingering for years, even decades, and for many veterans like Henry, something that might only be overcome with their deaths. *Love Medicine* exhibited a reality that many veterans, Native or non-Native, chose to end their

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 147.

struggles with PTSD: suicide. As Northrup recognized about Vietnam, “A war that saw 58,000 killed in action. A war that caused over 60,000 of the veterans to kill themselves after the fighting was over. Tragic isn’t it, more Vietnam veterans have killed themselves than actually died in the war?”<sup>308</sup> There is no official number for Vietnam veteran suicides but author John Ketwig has estimated that over 150,000 Vietnam veterans have committed suicide, but that number could go as high as 200,000. Ketwig, a Vietnam veteran himself, noted that the United States military or armed forces do not keep such statistics but also probably would not release this information if they did due to the negative impacts on future military recruits.<sup>309</sup> Nevertheless, Northrup’s assumption about suicide numbers being higher than the total killed in action numbers is likely an accurate estimate.

For Native authors like Erdrich, who did not serve in the military, these descriptions were based on her own experiences of growing up in Wahpeton, North Dakota, where her parents taught at a federal boarding school for Native students. Military service was proudly celebrated in many Native communities and reservations, but many authors witnessed the struggles many veterans encountered when they returned home from the war. Henry’s tragic end, and the attempt to cover up the death by his brother Lyman, also demonstrated that admitting PTSD and the subsequent suicides, alcoholism, and other ways that veterans survived trauma, might have been a conversation that many communities and family members denied, avoided, or had limited understanding of to discuss.

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<sup>308</sup> Northrup, *Rez Follies*, 195.

<sup>309</sup> John Ketwig, “More Veterans Commit Suicide than Were Killed in Vietnam,” *The Roanoke Times*, November 10, 2017: [https://www.roanoke.com/opinion/commentary/ketwig-more-veterans-commit-suicide-than-were-killed-in-vietnam/article\\_2d841f24-c167-50bd-9e0b-02e42feb98d1.html](https://www.roanoke.com/opinion/commentary/ketwig-more-veterans-commit-suicide-than-were-killed-in-vietnam/article_2d841f24-c167-50bd-9e0b-02e42feb98d1.html).

Philip H. Red Eagle's, *Red Earth: A Vietnam Warrior's Journey*, introduced two separate stories featuring Native Vietnam veterans. Red Eagle, a Dakota-Salish veteran, served two tours in Vietnam, one on the USS Somers from 1969-70 and a second tour from August 1970 to January 1972 as a riverboat mechanic. These two tours, in particular the second tour, influenced his writing, which served as a form of therapy that enabled Red Eagle to find his voice. *Red Earth* drew directly from his experiences during and after Vietnam. In *Red Earth*, PTSD was a major theme that each of the characters struggled with. Red Eagle acknowledged his struggles with PTSD in a 2017 interview in which he admitted avoiding rest and recover dates because his PTSD would flare-up. He stated:

I knew what it was like out there, because you go right into PTSD, so whatever it was that I had, which I didn't ha [have] a name for; nobody had a name for. I didn't want to go through that again. That whole week I was drunker than a skunk. And when I got back in the country [Vietnam] again, I felt comfortable. I felt more at ease in the war than I did out there in R&R.<sup>310</sup>

Therefore, *Red Earth's* short stories echoed the struggles of many veterans to readapt after Vietnam. For many, it was easier to just stay on the frontlines or near the battlefield rather than deal with the possibility of depression and PTSD.

The first story from *Red Earth* featured Raymond Crow-Belt, a young Dakota and soon-to-be Vietnam soldier. Raymond's family, which featured his grandfather, a World War I veteran, and his father and uncles, who served in World War II, exhibited the importance of Dakota military tradition to their family. The narrator also addressed the PTSD that resulted from those earlier wars and hindered his community and family stating, "Raymond remembered those crazy men that used to hang around the reservation bars . . .

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<sup>310</sup> Philip H. Red Eagle, Tacoma Community History Projects, May 2, 2017, University of Washington Digital Library: <https://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/digital/collection/tacomacomm/id/649>.

The others would say, "Oh, they're just the Vets."<sup>311</sup> Raymond also remembered the sadness in his uncle's eyes, who was never the same after he returned from World War II and eventually committed suicide. The fact that crazy and hanging around near bars were synonymous with veterans indicated that Native communities understood the long-term impact of PTSD. As Raymond's story implied, most communities accepted these characteristics especially in light of their military service for the protection of their communities.

Raymond recognized his own PTSD as "his body survived. That pain in the intervening years made him realize that survival is a relative term. The pain survived. Certainly, the nightmares. Every smell, every sound and the movement survived."<sup>312</sup> Raymond's story repeatedly flashes back and forth between the cultural lessons taught by his grandfather during his childhood and his experiences during Vietnam. Raymond traced his PTSD to specific moments in Vietnam where fellow soldiers and a Vietnamese woman he had a relationship with were killed. To deal with his PTSD, Raymond traveled back in time to fix those events and save their lives thus alleviating his PTSD and guilt.

On multiple levels, this first story demonstrated the struggles of fighting against the Vietnamese. The first level came in the form of a Vietnamese sex worker named Phoung that Raymond had a relationship with. Raymond chose her because she looked like the "mixed-blood Chippewa girls from Minnesota and North Dakota."<sup>313</sup> When Phoung first approached Raymond, she compared their skin colors, teased him about not looking

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<sup>311</sup> Philip H. Red Eagle, *Red Earth: A Vietnam Warrior's Journey* (Duluth, Minnesota: Holy Cow! Press, 1997), 18.

<sup>312</sup> Red Eagle, *Red Earth*, 36.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

American, and stated, "Same, same."<sup>314</sup> Raymond and Phoung developed a deeper relationship and he made her a variety of traditional items such as a medicine wheel. The similar physical characteristics created a feeling that reminded Raymond of home, but that attachment ultimately enhanced his PTSD after Phoung's death.

In a later story, Jimmy Johnny, another Dakota soldier in Vietnam killed before Raymond entered the war, stated in his last dying words to a Vietnamese soldier, "We don't fight for them [the United States]. We fight for us. My Grandpa fought in World War One, my dad and uncles in World War Two and Korea, and I'm here. We fight for honor. It's a tradition that we keep for ourselves. We're warriors, I guess."<sup>315</sup> Jimmy Johnny's dying words challenged the Vietnamese soldier's question about why a Native American would fight for the United States reiterates the importance of fighting for his community and honoring his ancestors. Both of these stories established the difficulty for Native people to fight for the United States, who had similarly sought their destruction less than a century before; nevertheless, it articulated that Native soldiers often had their reasons for military service.

The second short story from *Red Earth* introduced Clifford Goes-First, a Dakota soldier, who cursed the *wasicus* [translate it] that made him do terrible things during Vietnam.<sup>316</sup> The narrator eluded multiple times throughout the chapter that Clifford was forced to kill multiple women and children. As a result, Clifford struggled mightily with PTSD and the perceived guilt of these killings. Similar to the first story, the narration

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 81. Wasicu is most commonly associated as a term for a white person in Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota. Its translation has been subject to debate but mostly assumed to be translated as, "one who takes the fat."

jumped back and forth between Clifford's post-Vietnam experiences to his experiences during Vietnam. The story also centered on the honor of serving in the military. Clifford's grandfather believed in the "Honor in serving. Honor in being an Indian man, an Indian warrior. In Dakota culture warriors served the people. Warriors died for the people." His grandfather continued, "Being a peace maker was a great honor . . . There was no honor in killing woman and children . . . No honor. No peace. Just the darkness."<sup>317</sup>

This quotation foreshadowed Clifford's suicide towards the end of the novel. Right before Clifford shot himself, he gifted James Hailstone (nicknamed Stoney), a fellow Dakota soldier that he trained, eagle feathers that his grandfather had given him stating, "Now they're yours, Stoney. Go learn about them. Take them and make my grandpa proud. You're one of us. I trained you myself. As much as I could. You're one of Grandpa and me."<sup>318</sup> Clifford honored his ancestors by sacrificing his mental and physical well-being, but he realized he could never earn the eagle feathers aka honor for his participation in the murder of innocent women and children. Thus, he passed along his traditional knowledge to Stoney. Stoney, on the other hand, served honorably and did not kill any woman or children. After Stoney went outside to put the feathers in his car, Clifford shot and killed himself. Clifford's tragic ending began when his grandfather, who had promised to use traditional medicine to heal him after the war, passed away. Clifford's father also refused, most likely due to his own PTSD, to discuss his experiences during World War II. His other uncles died during the war and another one died from alcoholism. Clifford could not turn to his traditional ways of life to heal him. Red Eagle eluded to war trauma in his book but also acknowledged in an interview the trauma from genocide in an interview stating,

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 116.

“A lot of the roots of the PTSD problem with Native Americans now is not rooted in their military experience; it's rooted in their Native American experience in America.”<sup>319</sup>

Unlike Clifford, Stoney was raised without his traditions. Consequently, in giving Stoney the eagle feathers, Clifford's dying wish was for Stoney to find out more about his culture to heal himself. After Clifford's death, Stoney worked odd jobs before making his way to Wahpeton, North Dakota struggling with alcohol and depression. Stoney eventually attempted suicide by jumping into a freezing river. He was rescued by a local deputy named Robert, a Metis Green Beret Vietnam veteran, who offered Stoney a job, a place to live, and encouraged his sobriety. Stoney was able to discuss his PTSD, but more importantly, after traveling for many years after the war, he found a home.

Red Eagle's novel, unlike so many others featuring Vietnam veterans, promoted the survival of Native veterans. As Northrup indicated earlier, the suicide rates were high for Native veterans; nevertheless, many veterans survived. Some struggled with alcohol, but others did not or were able to gain sobriety. As Red Eagle's novel indicated, Vietnam veterans encountered a variety of experiences on their return home, but many successfully reintegrated into society. Many, like Stoney, searched for a place to call home while others turned to their culture, which included events like powwows, healing ceremonies, and other events.

Susan Power, *Standing Rock Dakota*, underscored the importance of powwow song and dance in honoring Native veterans for their service in her first novel and national bestseller titled *the Grass Dancer*. One particular scene takes place at a local powwow and acknowledges a Veteran's Song that is sung dating back to World War II translating it as:

*They're sending Sioux boys to Germany –*

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<sup>319</sup> Red Eagle, Tacoma Community History Projects.

*Hitler better look out.*<sup>320</sup>

As the singer's transition later into a Kahomni Song – or what is described as a love song – the lyrics become translated as:

*As the young men go by, I was looking for him.  
It surprises me anew that he is gone.  
It is something to which I cannot be reconciled.*<sup>321</sup>

Power's use of the powwow songs demonstrated the impact of military service on Native traditions but also the influence on local communities. A Kahomni Song would traditionally be sung by a woman who is missing her boyfriend, lover, husband, or even a close relative that has gone to war. Power also emphasized how "Leonard [Fire Cloud], a much-decorated veteran of the Vietnam war, had been given the honor of carrying the American flag at the head of the procession know as Grand Entry."<sup>322</sup> Furthermore, these particular songs featured veterans from World War I, World War II, and the Korean War dancing together. Thus, Power demonstrated the interconnectivity of the powwow and its use as a way to honor support and foster Native veterans.

Power challenged stereotypical assumptions about Native people's ability to track the enemy. As a decorated Korean veteran named Calvin documented:

The COs always made Indian boys scout for them. It went back to the movies, I think to Custer's Last Stand and all that. They told us, right to our faces, that we could track like bloodhounds and move so quietly we might as well be invisible. That our vision was so sharp it was supernatural. They said this without looking at our files. Pulled it out of every story they'd heard. Scouting was a dangerous business.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Susan Power, *The Grass Dancer* (New York: Berkley Books, 1994), 30.

<sup>321</sup> Power, *Grass Dancer*, 31.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 203

The narrator concurred with Calvin's assessment but also elaborated on that fact that many Native individuals felt pressure to fulfill these stereotypical roles stating, "I could picture the boys advancing on their own, young and frightened, but proud too, determined to make the stereotype valid, trying to convince themselves the officers had read their hearts and were speaking from wisdom rather than ignorance."<sup>324</sup> Power peeled back the complicated and complex layers of military service in Indian Country, which included the investment of Native people into Western stereotypes.

One of the recurrent themes in her novel was the continuous transformation of Native culture and expectations. For example, Pumpkin, who was planning on attending Stanford before her death in a car crash, was honored at the powwow. The powwow emcee acknowledged, "Let's hear it for this little Menominee girl from Chicago. What an accomplishment!"<sup>325</sup> After the announcement, an honor song was sung, and Pumpkin was centered in the powwow arena where attendees can shake her hand and congratulate her. Pumpkin's accomplishment, that is high school graduation and acceptance into college, was placed on the same level as military service signaling an expansion to include education obtainment.

Linda Hogan's, *The People of the Whale*, presented a complicated love story between Thomas Just and his wife Ruth on a fictional Northwestern reservation. Thomas and Ruth were childhood sweethearts and married as teenagers. Shortly after the marriage, Thomas gets drunk with some of his local friends and joins the Marines. Thomas is eventually sent to Vietnam. Shortly before leaving, Ruth informs Thomas that she is pregnant and begs Thomas to get out of the service. Thomas wants to honor his

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 47.

commitment and heads to Vietnam. After about six months, he goes missing in action and is presumed dead. Ruth fearing that her husband is dead raises their son to the best of her ability and earns a livelihood with her mother as local fishermen.<sup>326</sup>

After missing in action for several years, the United States Army finds Thomas living in a small Vietnamese village and forces Thomas to return his Native community. Due to his PTSD, he isolates himself from the community, completely avoiding Ruth and their son. Thomas's PTSD resulted from his guilt for killing other American soldiers, who were about to kill Vietnamese women and children. He admitted his guilt to another soldier:

I killed my own men. I looked at their faces, I looked at the children they were going to kill, the women they were going to hurt; and I shot the Americans, those men. They looked so white. It was like it was happening to us Indians. They were going to kill the children. One of them was going to rape a little girl. It was like us, our history, like one more group of murderers . . . I shot them. I had to.<sup>327</sup>

Thomas struggled to fight a war against the Vietnamese citing their physical and cultural similarities. He also feared his fellow soldiers. As Murph, a fellow soldier, stated while pointing an M16 at him stating, "You even look like one of them."<sup>328</sup> After killing Murph and other soldiers in his unit, Thomas faked his death and lived as a farmer in the village eventually marrying a Vietnamese woman that he had a child with. Due to his similar physical characteristics, Thomas lived among the Vietnamese for several years before the United States government found him. Instead of participating in the killing and raping of innocent Vietnamese women and children, Thomas murdered the American soldiers. Similar to Clifford in *Red Earth*, Thomas may have also been triggered by PTSD

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<sup>326</sup> Linda Hogan, *People of the Whale* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008).

<sup>327</sup> Hogan, *People of the Whale*, 255.

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

stemming from hundreds of years of American colonization. The line, “It was like it was happening to us Indians” and “It was like us, our history” indicated that Thomas connected what the United States soldiers were doing to the Vietnamese with his own tribal (and national intertribal) history.

Hogan paralleled the struggles between fighting for the United States against the Vietnamese with his struggles to return to his community. This parallel expanded beyond Thomas's experiences but incorporated the struggles for other reservation community members to overcome their trauma from colonization. Thomas attempted multiple times to return to his culture to overcome his PTSD including his participation in the return of the traditional whale hunt in 1988. Other community members desperately participated in an attempt to go back to their traditional ways of life; however, none had the training that Thomas received from his grandfather, one of the greatest whalers in his People's history. The whale hunt failed and resulted in the drowning – discovered later to be a murder – of Thomas's son Marco, who had been pushing the whale hunt as a way to reconnect to traditional ways. The murderer; however, wanted to use the whale hunt as a form of economic development and something that would allow him to continue embezzling tribal money. Like *House Made of Dawn*, Hogan's underlining theme focused on the struggles to maintain traditional culture into the late twentieth century.

Thomas eventually traveled to Washington, D.C. and visited the Vietnam War Memorial. Because he had been presumed dead, Thomas saw his name etched on the wall. He eventually went to the Pentagon, returned his war medals, and confessed the killings to government officials, who told Thomas that it was in the past and time to move on. Thomas returned to his community and began living with elders to learn the old ways.

Thomas, like many of the other characters in these works, alleviated some of his guilt by returning to his traditional ways. Thomas, like so many other Native veterans, both real and fictional, spent years, sometimes even decades, finding themselves and overcoming trauma after Vietnam. Thomas and other characters such as Luke Warmwater found comfort in their traditional ways of life while others, like Henry Lamartine Jr., became victims of the legacy of the Vietnam War.

### **Non-Native Literature and the Native Vietnam Veteran**

I ran into one last week.  
I could tell he was a phony.  
He didn't have the eyes.  
Was he a door gunner or a lump?  
No, he was a green beret, river boat,  
Seal, Ranger, Recon Marine.  
I listened to his story,  
He talked about the jungles, the  
rice paddies, the firefights,  
the weapons.  
I listened.  
He talks about mosquitoes,  
snakes, gooks, and the NVA.  
I listened until I realized we  
had both seen the same Vietnam  
war movie.  
Nice try, fella  
don't steal my war.

*wanna be* – Jim Northrup<sup>329</sup>

As indicated by Northrup's poem, *wanna be*, military service has been used as a symbol of authentic masculinity for non-Native (and sometimes Native) individuals. Vietnam, in particular, has frequently been romanticized and used as a trope to represent the horrors of war both during and after for Vietnam veterans. In contrast to Native authors, whose works not only represented Native veterans' struggles with PTSD after the

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<sup>329</sup>, *Walking the Rez Road*, 38.

war but also reintegration into their communities and traditional ways of life, non-Native authors often illustrated the Native Vietnam veteran in stereotypical and problematic ways. Many of these authors were interestingly non-veterans. Nevertheless, even veteran non-Native authors have written stereotypically about Native Vietnam veterans. Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, for instance, focused on the stereotypical and animalistic qualities of Native people to fight and find the enemy, guide troops through jungle landscapes, and thrive under difficult and harsh conditions.<sup>330</sup> Another example would be Craig Johnson's *Another Man's Moccasins: A Walt Longmire Mystery*, which flashed back and forth between Sheriff Walt Longmire's experiences during Vietnam as well as his sidekick Henry Standing Bear, who served in Vietnam as a Green Beret. Longmire frequently refers to Henry in stereotypical manners, such as when they meet in the jungle early on in the novel and Walt jokingly stated, 'You've gone Native' to which Henry replied, 'I have always been native.'<sup>331</sup> Throughout the novel, Henry was noted for his physical features, innate ability to survive in the wilderness, and at one point, he was signified as, "illuminating pride."<sup>332</sup>

Unlike many of the Native authored texts analyzed in this chapter, non-Native authors created assimilationist narratives elaborating on the need for Native veterans to leave their reservation communities and "dying" culture in search of better opportunities. Non-Native authors fixated on a twofold paradigm that placed Natives *against* the United States Army in the nineteenth century and then presumably assimilated and fighting *for* the United States in specific twentieth-century engagements. One of the best examples where

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<sup>330</sup> Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998).

<sup>331</sup> Craig Johnson, *Another Man's Moccasins: A Walt Longmire Mystery* (Penguin Books, 2008), 55.

<sup>332</sup> Johnson, *Moccasins*, 54.

this stereotypical trope is in David Morrell's 1972 best-selling novel, *First Blood*, where readers are introduced to Vietnam veteran Rambo. Rambo, who later becomes John Rambo in the blockbuster film bearing the same name and played by Sylvester Stallone, is confronted by a local Sheriff named Teasle in a small town in Kentucky. After driving Rambo outside the city limits twice, Teasle arrested Rambo and sentenced him to over 30 days in jail for vagrancy and resisting arrest. Rambo cooperates until he is placed in a small, wet, jail cell and forced to have his hair cut, triggering his trauma from being a prisoner of war during Vietnam. Once triggered, Rambo leads Teasle, his police department, and the National Guard on a wild chase through the Kentucky woodlands, killing over 20 men along the way. Rambo returns to the town of Madison, Kentucky, where the original confrontation began and continues his destruction on the local buildings in town before finally being killed by Col. Trautman, the same individual who trained Rambo in the Special Forces.

In the *First Blood* novel, there are few references to Rambo's cultural, racial, or ethnic background other than a few details provided by Col. Trautman. Trautman stating:

I hardly told you anything about him. Maybe some party-game psychiatrist could build up a theory about his mother dying of cancer when he was young, his father being an alcoholic, about when his father tried to kill him with a knife, and how he ran from the house that night with a bow and arrow that he shot at the old man, nearly killing him.<sup>333</sup>

Other than this brief allusion – to Rambo's childhood – his identity, including his first name, is completely hidden in the original novel. The details the reader knows are that Rambo fought in the special forces in Vietnam, was captured as a prisoner of war, and after being tortured for six months, escaped into the jungle where he narrowly survived.

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<sup>333</sup> David Morrell, *First Blood* (New York: Hachette Group, 2000), 193.

The *First Blood* screenwriters adapted the ending so that Rambo is captured and imprisoned instead of being killed at the end, thus allowing Hollywood to create three additional films based on his character.<sup>334</sup> In later films, which were adapted into books based on the screenplays by the original author, David Morrell, Rambo's identity opened up to include his half-Navajo and half-Italian ancestry, as well as his conversion from Catholicism to Buddhism. As the book's narrator declared in *Rambo: First Blood Part II*:

His religious training had been complicated. Born of an Italian father and a Navajo mother, he'd been an altar boy at the Catholic church in Bowie, Arizona, and had as well been initiated into the sacred Indian rites of his mother's tribal village outside of town.<sup>335</sup>

Similarly, Rambo's identity in the *First Blood II* film adaptation, Rambo is of German and Indian descent (no tribe is specified), making Rambo according to Major Marshall Murdock, "One hell of a combination."<sup>336</sup>

The decision to make Rambo half-Navajo or "of Indian descent" in the novel and films provided a framework for Morrell and James Cameron, who developed the rough screenplay for *First Blood II*, for character development. Most importantly, it embraced stereotypical ideas about Native Americans that were well circulated and understood by audience members. As scholar Juan José Cruz noted, "The John Rambo character draws on several archetypes associated in American popular culture with masculine and national strength. His combined white European (German) and Native American ancestry gives him superior physical endurance and helps him survive in hostile environments."<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> It was announced in 2018 that a 5<sup>th</sup> Rambo movie would begin production in 2019.

<sup>335</sup> David Morrell, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 1985), 62.

<sup>336</sup> *First Blood II* Movie.

<sup>337</sup> Bret E. Carroll, ed. *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2003), 384.

In the *First Blood II* novel, Rambo rejects superior weaponry in favor of his favorite weapon of choice or as General Murdock described it, “A goddamned bow and arrow.”<sup>338</sup> Rambo’s decision to use a bow and arrow reflected Morrell’s usage of stereotypical ideas about Native people. According to the narrator of the book: “Because of his half-Navajo ancestry, Rambo had learned to be an expert archer. The rifle had replaced the bow as the primary hunting weapon in his mother’s village, but many Navajos had still been proficient with it.”<sup>339</sup> By embracing this particular (and popular) stereotype, Morrell neglected the fact that Navajos rarely (if ever) used bows. Morrell instead relied on generic archetypes about Native people that reassured Rambo as a fierce warrior. As Guy Westwell concluded, “Through his knife, headband and bow-and-arrow he signifies the Native American, appropriating a mythologized experience that foregrounds bravery in battle, cunning, and also a vicarious sense of victimization.”<sup>340</sup>

It is difficult to ascertain whether or not David Morrell intended for Rambo’s character to be Native American but his chosen hometown of Bowie, Arizona was nowhere near any local Navajo reservation or communities contradicting the sequel, which placed Rambo’s mother in a Navajo community near Bowie. James Cameron made the initial decision to make Rambo part-Native American. Morrell never questioned his decision but instead doubted Rambo’s other chosen ethnic background stating:

I liked the idea of continuing the theme of Zen warrior. That made me think about the background the shooting script gave Rambo: part Native American, part German. I confess I paused. None of this was in my novel. I like the Native American concept and knew that I could blend the idea of a Native American archer with a Zen one. But German? Since when did Sylvester Stallone look German? Obviously, I needed to make him part

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<sup>338</sup> Morrell, *First Blood Part II*, 39.

<sup>339</sup> Morrell, *Rambo*, 95.

<sup>340</sup> Guy Westwell, *War Cinema: Hollywood on the Front Line* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2006), 72.

Italian, which gave me the idea that Rambo would be Roman Catholic on his father's side and would follow the Navajo faith on his mother's side.<sup>341</sup>

Because of Sylvester Stallone's actual Italian heritage, the decision to make Rambo Italian instead of German was fairly simple. Nevertheless, as documented by historian Phillip Deloria, Americans have often embraced Native imagery, stereotypes, and histories in the creation of a national identity or have "used Indian play to encounter the authentic amidst the anxiety of urban industrial and postindustrial life." As Deloria continued, "In each of these historical moments, Americans have returned to the Indian, reinterpreting the intuitive dilemmas surrounding Indian-ness to meet the circumstances of these times."<sup>342</sup>

In this particular case, Rambo's Native ancestry, as noted by Juan José Cruz, "make Rambo a modern hero of the mythic American frontier . . . the films present a white, muscular male American hero who patronizes and protects non-whites abroad, strengthening the myth of benevolent imperialism that had come to define U.S. foreign policy during the twentieth century."<sup>343</sup> Rambo's commitment to defying orders from an overarching United States government to save his fellow prisoners of war, something that seemingly stemmed naturally from his half-Navajo ancestry, aided in the process of redemption for many Americans. Rambo's character demonstrated a masculine Native American warrior that refused to quit even when challenged by insurmountable odds. Consequently, many Americans, whether consciously or subconsciously, used the figure of a half-Native American warrior named John Rambo to reshape their identity and justify the loss of the Vietnam War.

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<sup>341</sup> David Morrell, *Rambo (First Blood Part II) (Rambo: First Blood Series Book 2)*. Kindle Edition. Morrell Enterprises INC, 2012), ix.

<sup>342</sup> Phillip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>343</sup> Carroll, *American Masculinities*, 384.

## **Walking the Road Home**

In his 2014 novel, *Dirty Copper*, a prequel to *Walking the Rez Road* [1994], Northrup expanded Luke Warmwater's story in more detail. *Dirty Copper*, like *Walking the Rez Road*, featured Luke and other Vietnam veterans but instead of short stories and poems, the prequel documented Luke's story after the war. Surviving PTSD, Native humor, and quirky stories about bingo and drinking alcohol remained subjects in *Dirty Copper* but the expanded narrative allowed Northrup to demonstrate how Luke survived life after Vietnam. Like the other books analyzed throughout this chapter, *Dirty Copper* contained many similar themes, such as Native veteran's shared struggle with the Vietnamese against racism. Luke Warmwater, for instance, encountered racism and stereotypes from his fellow soldiers, grappled with PTSD and used alcohol as a coping mechanism for his trauma and survivor's guilt. Northrup detailed more of Luke's everyday life, a seemingly simple story, but an important one that acknowledged that some Native Vietnam veterans had healthy relationships, maintained steady jobs and survived their post-war experiences without downward spiraling. Unfortunately, *Dirty Copper* would prove to be Northrup's last published book, as he passed away from cancer in early August 2016.

*Dirty Copper*, similar to *Walking the Rez Road*, detailed Luke's experiences during the Vietnam War and his life once he returned home to his reservation community. The main difference between Northrup's final novel and the others presented in this chapter is that Luke Warmwater, despite everything that is thrown at him in life, often has agency over his responses. For example, Luke experienced racism not only in Vietnam but afterward as a small-town cop in a predominantly white town. Luke ignored racism and

worked to make an impact on how the police treated Native people. Instead of letting that racism determine his reactions, Warmwater either deflected it with humor, disregarded it, or let his performance at work create change.<sup>344</sup>

Warmwater's agency, no doubt a lifelong reflection of Northrup's post-war years, would be considered by many to be an act of survivance, a term coined by Gerald Vizenor in the late 1990s. Vizenor defined survivance as, "an active sense of presence, the continuation of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry."<sup>345</sup> Luke's story articulates an individual redefining his war trauma but continuously challenging racism and oppression. Luke, for example, reports for a job as a district attorney and has an interaction with a jailer he formerly knew suggested his nickname be changed from "Chief Lockemup" to "Chief Unlockem." Luke retorted, "Fuck that 'chief' shit. I wasn't in the U.S. Navy. How about just plain Luke and I'll call you the name your momma gave you."<sup>346</sup> Luke actively chose not to be a victim throughout the novel and used humor not only to overcome PTSD but also settler colonial dominance, stereotypical assumptions, racism, and his tragedy. He returned home from Vietnam, questioned the reasons for the war, and challenged racism before establishing himself as the first local Native American cop. His positive service as a cop ultimately changed the way his fellow officers viewed Native people.

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<sup>344</sup> Jim Northrup, *Dirty Copper* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2014), 56-61.

<sup>345</sup> Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: Nebraska, 1999), 165.

<sup>346</sup> Northrup, *Dirty Copper*, 194.

Luke recalled his PTSD when he was arresting another Native Vietnam veteran for resisting arrest, eluding the police, and drug-related offenses. Luke later enunciated, "Mr. Lately had an extensive history of drug-related offenses. Lately was also a Marine veteran of Vietnam but he handled his PTSD differently than Luke."<sup>347</sup> After returning home to his girlfriend (soon to be wife), Luke realized how lucky he was to have survived the war but also understood that he was fortunate to be able to process his PTSD and trauma differently. *Dirty Copper* importantly demonstrated that Native authors could write about Native veterans as survivors instead of individuals barely clinging on – or in many cases completely outside – to society and struggling with alcohol, drugs, and PTSD. In the novel, Luke overcame Vietnam, the loss of his wife from cancer, and later his girlfriend's unexpected and shocking death in a car crash. Instead of spiraling out of control, like so many of the narratives presented in this chapter, Luke can maintain a steady and even optimistic life. A life that included positive and loving relationships, abstinence from alcohol and drugs, and control, for the most part, over one's agency. Luke carries PTSD and survivor's guilt with him but remains grateful that he survived the war.

More importantly, Northrup allowed Luke to somewhat distance himself from his PTSD. Once Luke began dating and eventually married his wife Carrie, she became his purpose. As Northrup reflected, "Luke noticed his flashbacks were getting farther and farther apart. Maybe because being a deputy took his mind off of the war. He also thought he was fighting a new kind of war—this one was him against crime and racism. Carrie was a big help in his readjusting to civilian life, especially the racism part."<sup>348</sup> Luke, and most likely Northrup, continued to suffer from PTSD, night terrors, survivor's guilt, and other

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<sup>347</sup> Northrup, *Dirty Copper*, 71.

<sup>348</sup> Northrup, *Dirty Copper*, 67.

trauma from the war but they were able to find purpose through their employment, volunteering, and personal relationships.

Northrup himself became a strong opponent of warfare, something he questioned throughout his non-fiction writing but also in his weekly editorials. In a 2003 editorial, he stated about the war in Afghanistan, “I am already mourning the people who will get hurt or die in the upcoming war. I shall grieve for their families as I grieve for America. I don’t want to hear war stories, especially new ones. I have heard enough from the old war stories to know it is always bad. Tell me again why are going to be killing people in the name of peace?”<sup>349</sup> He later reiterated in 2011, “As a Marine veteran of the Vietnam War, I watched the news where four Marines in Afghanistan were pictured urinating on three bodies. War is terrible, and terrible things happen. I think the Marines were aiming at the wrong targets. They should have been aiming at the politicians who put them in harm’s way, perhaps the war profiteers who are raking in millions of dollars.”<sup>350</sup> Northrup realized the importance of his voice, especially as someone who had gone through warfare and survived, and advocated for soldiers, both Native and non-Native to question the reasons for their service. While his novels and editorials frequently questioned the war, he also positively acknowledged his survival into the twenty-first century stating, “I am blessed, never thought I would make it past the Vietnam War.”<sup>351</sup> Despite Northrup’s untimely death, his novels, memoirs, and editorials have continued to be published and shared via social media and will remain important sources for understanding the Native American experience during and after Vietnam. Northrup’s final published words provided a glimpse

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<sup>349</sup> Jim Northrup, *Rez Salute: The Real Healer Dealer* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2012), 23.

<sup>350</sup> Northrup, *Rez Salute*, 216.

<sup>351</sup> Northrup, *Rez Salute*, 29.

of Native Vietnam veteran's agency over themselves, their frequent challenges to racism and oppression, and the establishment of tribal sovereignty.

Literature, especially written by Native American authors and/or veterans, provides a window into the history or experiences of Native American veterans and an opportunity to see the impact that military service had on the reservation, rural, and urban Native communities. As in oral histories and autobiographies, Native literature reiterates a variety of themes, such as the "same, same" narrative. The return home, and subsequent loss, refusal, or struggle to return to their traditional ways, was also a central theme for many authors. Other stories focused on the struggle of overcoming, and in some cases succumbing, to alcohol, drugs, PTSD, and survivor's guilt. These narratives, while not the same for all veterans, served at least in some context as a microcosm for the experiences of many Native veterans during and after Vietnam. Thus literature, in many ways, has become a way for many Native authors to present accurate and representational stories about Native veterans and their experiences before, during, and after the war.

**Chapter 5: The Sovereignty of Sound: Native Veterans and the Continuation of  
Lakota Music**

*Tunkasila yapi, tawapaha ki han oihanke sni (he) nanjin kte lo. Iyohilateya, oyate ki han  
wicacagin kta ca, lecamun welo.*

“The President’s flag will stand (without end) forever. Under it, the people will  
grow, so I do this”<sup>352</sup>

Created in the home of James Emery in 1954, the Flag Song, often referred to as the Lakota Flag Song or Sioux National Anthem, has for decades connected Lakota military service in the United States armed forces with much earlier akíčhita traditions of protecting the land, people, and culture. The influence of twentieth-century military service can be seen in the form of honor guards presenting their tribal nation flags and the American flag before powwows, to the Flag Song being sung before the start of the day's games at the popular Lakota Nations Invitation basketball tournament in Rapid City, South Dakota. For many, the Lakota Flag Song has represented one way in which Lakota and Dakota tribal members honored returning Native American veterans from World War I and World War II. For others, it served as a way to continue and innovate older traditions, similar to movements in powwow dancing and singing.

Before its now most common presentations at the openings of basketball games, rodeos, and other local Lakota events, the Flag Song was created to honor Native American veterans from World War I and World War II. This chapter analyzes how Native people used the Lakota Flag Song as well as hundreds of other songs to continue their traditions. I label the strategic use of Native music for its survival as the sound of

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<sup>352</sup> Ben Black Bear, Sr. and R.D. Theisz, *Songs and Dances of the Lakota: Cokatakiya Waci Uwo! Come Out to the Center and Dance* (Aberdeen, South Dakota: North Plains Press, 1976), 32-33.

sovereignty. Native people, as will be demonstrated, understood that using the sound of sovereignty allowed them to continue their singing, dancing, and cultural practices, which were banned by the federal government during the early and mid-twentieth century. Under the premise of patriotism, Native openly people challenged the federal government and local reservation agents to allow them to perform their traditional songs and dances in ceremonies and celebrations that welcomed home Native veterans. Reservation agents found themselves in a difficult bind: continue the cultural bans and risk being labeled as unpatriotic or allow them to be performed. Native people recognized that opportunity and ultimately used it to their advantage.

The Lakota Flag Song represents just one example of many in this chapter that exhibited the sound of sovereignty. It is one of the most prolific songs sung not only at Lakota events, ceremonies, and powwows but at events throughout Indian Country. The Lakota lyrics have been attributed to both Chris Big Eagle and Ben Black Elk from the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Indian Reservations. According to the late Ben Black Bear Sr., a Lakota elder knowledgeable in traditional songs and dance, Black Elk “made up new words to fit an earlier song probably composed by Ellis Chips . . .”<sup>353</sup> Speaking in Lakota, his first language, Black Bear Sr. reflected on the Flag Song’s foundation:

*He le ins Lakota nan wasicu nan toka oyate ki lena ena toka kciyapi tka. Lehanl unk’unpi ki le maka witawa el unk’unpi ki le wanjila oyate tima unk’unpi ki lena iyuha kola inkiciyapi kte nanhan waunjilapi kte. Ho heun nanunkicijinpi kte. Ho heun wowapi ki le iyohlate unk’unpi. United States flag ki he e waunjilapi kte. ho heun olwan ki he unkahiyapi. Ho hecetu.*

In this the Lakota, the white people, and the “foreign people” (other Indians) used to consider each other as enemies. Now we exist as a country and as one people, we will consider each other as friends. So, because of that, we will gather ourselves under this flag. We will die for it, or defend for each other under it. So that is the reason we will live under

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<sup>353</sup> Black Bear, Sr. *Songs and Dances*, 33.

the flag, the United States flag. We will be as one. So be it. That is why we sing this song. So be it.<sup>354</sup>

In contrast to Black Bear Sr., Maka Clifford, a Lakota Social Studies teacher at Red Cloud Indian School in Pine Ridge, critiqued labeling the song as a “flag song.” He instead has suggested its history and role be honored by calling it a Lakota honor song. Clifford speculated that the history behind the Lakota Flag Song should be attributed to the *Sotká Yuhá*, also known as the Lance Owners Society, who served as the last line of defense in protecting women and children when traditional Oceti Sakowin camps were being moved or raided. Clifford stated:

The *Sotká Yuhá* warriors would stand in a line at the edge of their village and plant their staff or lance in the ground, forming a human shield so that the women, children and elders would stand a better chance at escape, and therefore survival . . . They were not allowed to leave or move their staff unless another member of the society removed it for them. Facing the incoming opposition required intense bravery and determination, as the warriors knew that their chance of survival was slim.<sup>355</sup>

Deconstructing the lyrics differently than Black Bear Sr., Clifford translated *Tǎwápaha* as a staff or a lance to be carried, something that would have been more common in Lakota culture in pre-European contact society, rather than a flag. He also interpreted *Tǎŋkášilayapi* as Creator or God, versus President. Under this adjustment, the lyrics would change to “The staff of the Creator will stand, indestructibly.” Clifford concluded: ‘*yóǎlateya oyáte kiŋhán wičhíčhaǵiŋ kta čha, léčhamuŋ weló*, can be translated as ‘because of [the staff] the People shall live and flourish.’ Thus, the final lyrics would be: “The staff of the Creator will stand, indestructibly. Because of the staff, the People shall live and

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<sup>354</sup> Ben Black Bear, Sr., *Songs and Dances*, 32-33.

<sup>355</sup> Maka Clifford in “Drawing Lessons from an Anthem: ‘Tǎwápaha Olówan’ (Lakota Flag Song).” *Red Cloud Indian School*, February 28, 2014, Line 14: <https://www.redcloudschool.org/news/2014/0228/drawing-lakota-lessons-from-an-anthem>.

flourish.” Consequently, Clifford’s translation connected the Lakota Flag Song as something that developed before the twentieth-century military service. Clifford's interpretation reimagines Lakota's twentieth military service as a continuation of the nineteenth century (and probably even earlier) military traditions.

By closely examining the lyrics of the Lakota Flag Song, we can see how the Lakota affirmed their unique status as a sovereign nation. As Black Bear, Sr. translated, "So that is the reason we will live under the flag, the United States flag. We will be as one. That is why we sing this song." In contrast to many of the histories on Native American military service, such as Allison Bernstein's *American Indian's and World War II* which emphasizes Native military service as an indicator of assimilation, Native American music, particularly powwow songs, have underscored how Native people *continued* many of their traditions under the pretext of military service, honoring Native veterans, and patriotism. This assessment is not to suggest that Native people were not sincerely honoring returning veterans with their music but stresses that they used military service as an opportunity to honor as well as continue traditions into the twentieth century.

As historian John Troutman reflected, “the Lakota used the practice of music as a means to redefine U.S. citizenship and the rhetoric of patriotism to serve their own needs.”<sup>356</sup> Troutman’s first major work, *Indian Blues*, documented the impact of Native American music on federal Indian policy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Troutman, “Music mattered, as a means not simply of resistance but of active involvement in the shaping and implementation of federal policy initiatives. Music operated in a decisively political matter, just as it operated in other social and

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<sup>356</sup> John W. Troutman, *Indian Blues: American Indians and the Politics of Music, 1879-1934* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 23.

cultural contexts.”<sup>357</sup> Troutman stressed how Native people strategically wielded powwow music through the context of twentieth-century patriotism to ensure the survival of songs, dances, language, and most importantly, their sovereignty as Native Nations. Native people, as Troutman contextualized, readily adapted their songs and dances to fit the widespread American patriotism that developed during World War I and World War II. It was under this context that Ellis Chips, Black Elk, and Big Eagle composed the song that would later develop into the national anthem of the Lakota. In continuing traditions under the premise of American patriotism, the Lakota practiced and articulated the sound of sovereignty through innovation that included veteran’s songs, flag songs, and traditional dances that honored Native veteran’s returning home from both World War I, World War II, Korea, and eventually Vietnam.

Regardless of the differences in Black Bear Sr. or Clifford’s translations, the Lakota Flag Song validated the Lakota sound of sovereignty in continuing traditional music into the second half of the twentieth century and through to the present day. Either version or translation of this song demonstrates the Lakota flag song as something that has carried older traditions into the present. One of the most evident ways in which this continuation can be seen is by examining the Native American recording industry that flourished during the mid-1960s until the late 1970s. Many of the vinyl records recorded during that time contained variations of the Lakota Flag Song as well as honor songs. In analyzing these records and other literature written about the Native American recording

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<sup>357</sup> John Troutman, *Indian Blues*, 5.

industry, we can see how songs, in particular Lakota songs, shifted from World War I and World War II to include and honor veterans from the Korean War and the Vietnam War.<sup>358</sup>

Informed by the different translations and reflections on Lakota flag and honor songs, this chapter will examine how Native people embraced recording technology to innovate and preserve tribal and family traditional songs. I will utilize my father's vinyl record collections as well as my own, which contain dozens of recordings of traditional Native music from various drum groups throughout the nation. My father's records, that he gifted to me in 2014, encompass various Northern style drum groups throughout the Great Plains and included the some of the most well-known drum groups of the time: the Bad Land Singers, the Porcupine Singers, Fort Kipp, Rocky Boy, the Hwo Sju Singers, the Denver Indian Singers as well as live powwow and tribal compilations.<sup>359</sup> My collection of records which I started after the acquisition of his, ranging from Navajo love songs to field recordings conducted by the Smithsonian. The majority of these records were created during the mid to late 1960s and early 1970s and were influenced by veterans returning home from World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Not all of the singers were veterans, and the liner notes, unfortunately, do not delve into a great deal about their status as veterans, but it can be assumed that singers, songwriters, and those recording the music were influenced by the large number of Native veterans returning home from twentieth-century conflicts.

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<sup>358</sup> I refer to these songs as Lakota but many contained versions of Dakota and Nakota as well. I will designate these when possible. Lakota appears to be the most commonly used language for music. My father, who is Dakota and Yanktonai, sings in Lakota. I assume this is because of the vast numbers of Lakota speakers versus Dakota or Nakota.

<sup>359</sup> Native powwow music is divided into two separate categories: Northern Style and Southern Style. Most of the records in the collection are Northern, although I have added several Southern Style records over the last couple of years.

I will demonstrate through my evaluation of these records, that they represented a form of Indigenous narrative, as Native peoples not only participated in but also served as, mediators and narrators of traditional songs to be preserved. These drum groups and the records they recorded symbolized a form of Native survivance.<sup>360</sup> For many, the term survivance has been simplified to mean the act of survival as resistance. However, these albums demonstrated that Native peoples and their traditions not only survived but thrived; and under that process transformed and adjusted to incorporate new traditions. As Gerald Vizenor states, “The practices of survivance create an active presence, more than the instincts of survival, function, or subsistence.”<sup>361</sup> I will be using Vizenor’s fourth person or voice as a representation of survivance. The fourth voice establishes oral traditions, histories, and memories as important ways of cultural continuation as well as individualistic preservation and perseverance. In examining oral traditions and stories from Ojibwe elder Charles Aubid, Vizenor acknowledges, “His stories were intuitive, visual memories, a native sense of presence, and sources of evidence and survivance.”<sup>362</sup> The fourth voice includes memories, stories, legends, traditions, and, as I will argue, these album's songs, lyrics, and liner notes, which were passed down from previous generations and are now preserved for future generations. Special attention of my analysis will be given to vinyl records containing Native American veteran or honor songs, as are in mine and my father's collections, especially those that have provided lyrical translations, transcriptions, and descriptions. When provided, the liner notes often root and establish

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<sup>360</sup> Gerald Vizenor, *Survivance: Narratives of Active Presence*, introduction.

<sup>361</sup> Vizenor, *Survivance*, 11.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

songs to specific singers, songwriters, and tribes guaranteeing this place on the historical record for future generations.

The reflection on memories in the fourth voice is exhibited through the experiences of the singers and songwriters who typically reproduced these songs from earlier generations with the expectation that their voices would live into the future. As an example, the Denver Indian Singers vinyl record in my collection contains the voice, memory, and songs of my uncle Conrad Little who passed on in 2010. Despite his death, his voice survives in many of the personal recordings collected by my father over the last 40 years, and his memory continues to live in the songs he wrote, and that has continued to be sung by my father and now new generations of family members. In willingly recording these songs, my father, uncle, grandfather, and various other singers and songwriters participated in a centuries-old tradition of passing down oral histories, music, and tradition to later generations. Surviving as a fourth voice, these types of recordings, resistance, innovation, and survivance were essential to the continuation of Native culture and important steps into language and cultural revitalization, as well as honoring Native American military service in the twentieth century.

Similar to historian John Troutman's work on Hawaiian sovereignty and music, in which he argues the steel guitar "became the preferred messenger of [Hawaiian] sovereign sounds," I contend that Native powwow music and the development of transportable recording technologies served as a way for Native Americans to demonstrate their sovereignty in urban areas, reservations, and powwows across the United States.<sup>363</sup> As Troutman argues, "With the instrument in the center of our view, however, we can move

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<sup>363</sup> John W. Troutman, *Kīkā Kīla: How the Hawaiian Steel Guitar Changed the Sound of Modern Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 39.

nimbly across space and time, cresting the waves of the instrument's greatest prominence in several cultural landscapes and movements, while contemplating its disappearance in the breaks elsewhere."<sup>364</sup> Similarly, in centering Native drum groups alongside their songs and musical recordings such as vinyl records, eight tracks, and cassette tapes, we can trace how Native people transported musical traditions, culture, and ways of life between cities and urban areas. We can also see how music celebrated cultural aspects in constant transition, such as the development of military service from World War I and World War II to the Korean and Vietnam Wars and even into more recent military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan.

To preserve these traditions and transitions to fit the era, it's essential to challenge recent historical scholarship that has romanticized Native American music and the powwow community. For example, performance scholar Ann Axtmann states in her work that her motivation for examining powwow culture is “a deep appreciation for Native dancers who have grown up within the powwow circle and dance the way they do because of their own cultural and spiritual traditions . . .”<sup>365</sup> Axtmann romanticizes powwow culture, especially the dancing aspect, and overlooks the role of music, dance, and song in preserving language and culture for future generations. This chapter also critiques all-encompassing histories that compare and categorize together powwows, music, and Native American culture. John-Carlos Perea, for instance, examines powwows across the United States, culminating in a brief analysis that simplifies the uniqueness of the powwow and

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<sup>364</sup> Troutman, *Kīkā Kīla*, 6.

<sup>365</sup> Ann M Axtmann, *Indians and Wannabes: Native American Powwow Dancing in the Northeast and Beyond* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2015).

songs in different communities.<sup>366</sup> Likewise, Craig Harris cultivates a work rich in oral histories but overwhelms the reader with over-romanticized and simplified versions of Native American history, music, culture, and the powwow.<sup>367</sup> Axtmann, Perea, and Harris created studies that established the intertribal aspect of powwow culture and limited the complexities of individual tribal dances, songs, and culture.

Scholars, like R.D. Theisz, a non-Native musicologist who sang with the Porcupine Singers and continues to sing at local Albuquerque powwows, better understood the role of music and connected Lakota military contributions during the twentieth century to veteran and honor songs, he stated:

During this most transitional period of Lakota history, the quest for war honors, paradoxically, led warriors to serve in the U.S. military, their former adversary. Young men now sought to escape the monotony of reservation life, especially as it emasculated Lakota manhood, via the meaningful socially rewarded excitement of warfare in the United States military. Only the anguish over the purpose and morality of the Vietnam conflict eventually tarnished, in Lakota eyes, the glory of fighting for one's family, community, and nations.<sup>368</sup>

Theisz accurately argued that young Lakota men and other Native American's used military service in the United States military to emulate earlier traditions. By recording and singing traditional veteran, flag, and honor songs, young Native men participated in the ongoing legacy of military service. In other words, the inclusion of veterans and honor songs on each record not only allowed singers and songwriters to participate in a common Native American experience, but it also permitted them to evoke traditional concepts of masculinity and emulate expectations for military service through the drum. Regardless of

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<sup>366</sup> John-Carlos Perea, *Intertribal Native American Music in the United States: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>367</sup> Craig Harris, *Heartbeat, Warble, and the Electric Powwow: American Indian Music* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016.)

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

the "purpose or morality of the Vietnam conflict," the sovereignty of singing music allowed Native Americans to participate in a tradition that honored and protected language, culture, and community. Veterans returning home from military service greatly influenced the Native American recording industry subsequently creating mid-twentieth century standards that required the use of veteran and honor songs to create authentic, traditional music. As will readily be seen on almost all the vinyl records analyzed below, these standards separated "authentic" music from non-authentic powwow music. Consequently, veteran and honor song songs associated with contemporary powwow singing with not only military service but also older musical traditions.

For the recording industry, the use of veteran's songs seemed to provide the records with a sense of an "authentic" Native experience. There was, in other words, due to the vast number of Native veterans returning home from wars and military service, nothing more authentic than having a vinyl recording full of veterans and honor songs. Many of the records examined below provided detailed liner notes that attempted to "authenticate" the singers and songwriters by connecting them to specific reservation communities and genealogies of earlier singers and songwriters. Other records like those from Indian House, Inc. provided more generic titles but seemingly relied on veteran and honor songs to do the work of authenticating the music for them. For instance, *Selection IR 175 18 Arickara Songs* provided a generic black and white photo with Natives dressed in regalia, ostensibly trying to sell buyers with stereotypical images. Side One simply stated, (10) Grass Dance Songs while Side Two listed: Flag Song, Honoring Song (American Legion War Dead), Honoring Song (Old Scout Song), Honoring Song (Vietnam Song) indicating that consumers might easily be enticed by the flag, veteran, and honor songs plus Edward S.

Curtis style cover photos.<sup>369</sup> *Selection IR 1194 16 Sioux Songs* similarly detailed eight grass dance songs but emphasized (1) Original Sioux Flag Song and (5) Veterans Honoring Songs while featuring a photo of famed Hunkpapa Lakota leader Sitting Bull.<sup>370</sup>

Likewise, *Selection IR 1191 Sioux Songs (Standing Rock)* carried more of a variety but featured, the Sioux National Anthem, War Dance Songs, Veterans Honoring Songs, and Fast War Dance Songs with a picture of Hunkpapa Rain-In-The-Face, a major contributor during the Battle of Little Bighorn.<sup>371</sup> Thus, in looking at records, even generic ones, we can see the marketability and influence of veteran and honor songs on the Native recording industry. In tracing the history of the records, we can also see how Native music allowed veterans and non-veterans to participate in honoring the ongoing tradition of military service.

This chapter establishes Native music, lyrics, performance, and translations as an Indigenous archive. As a result, I have chosen to leave the Lakota lyrics in whatever orthography that the author chose to publish them in. There are more than a dozen Lakota and Dakota orthographies, each developed during different periods and by different people. For this chapter, it matters more the singers and songwriters used Lakota and Dakota music as a vehicle for preserving culture and tradition rather than focusing on how they chose to drive that vehicle.<sup>372</sup> The many different orthographies used throughout this paper not only

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<sup>369</sup> Arikara Singers, *Selection IR 175 18 Arickara Songs*, Vinyl (Fay, Oklahoma: Indian Records, Inc., 1972).

<sup>370</sup> Unlisted, *Selection IR 1194 16 Sioux Songs*, Vinyl (Fay, Oklahoma: Indian Records, Inc., Unlisted). The singers are listed as Leonard Metcalf, Francis Fire Cloud, Dan Fire Cloud, Robert Touche, and Hollis Medicine Crow.

<sup>371</sup> Sioux Singers, *Selection IR 1191 19 Sioux Songs (Standing Rock)*, Vinyl (Fay, Oklahoma: Indian Records, Inc., 1972).

<sup>372</sup> Lakota orthography, and even its use, is a strong debate among Lakota and Dakota communities. Some individuals, especially fluent speakers, argue that the language should only be taught orally. Others argue that it is important for the language to be written.

reflect the many different perspectives and backgrounds of the singers and songwriters but the transition of Lakota language from first language speakers to second language learners. Native music has played a role in the revitalization of language and culture creating an archive layered in tradition but also contemporary Indigenous expressions.

### **(Re)Imagining Musical Tradition**

*Lakol wicoh'an kin tohanl abluštan kin / Oiyokipi wanicin kte lo yo. /*

*Waci wicaša hena yaun ca: Tamuka sni yelo.*

*“Whenever I stop doing Indian activities / Happy times will be no more. /*

*The dancing men say this: ‘There will be hard times.’ (Hard times ahead.)”<sup>373</sup>*

In his work on the late twentieth-century Native American recording industry, historian Christopher Scales emphasized: "Many powwow groups see their songs and their role as singers and song makers within a larger historical context. Songs become understood as cultural items to be treasured, memorialized, and recognized as existing within the flow of history."<sup>374</sup> Native drum groups, as exhibited by Scales, understood the power in controlling the sovereignty of their sound for cultural needs as well as for future generations. While recording Native American music and cultural traditions was not a new concept in the 1970s, it was in direct contrast to earlier anthropological based recordings premised on the idea that Native Americans and their culture were on the verge of extinction. Francis Densmore, alongside other twentieth-century anthropologists, ethnographers, and hobbyists collected hundreds of musical recordings for the Smithsonian

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<sup>373</sup> R.D. Theisz, *Sending Their Voices: Essays on Lakota Musicology* (Lakota Books, 1996), 9.

<sup>374</sup> Christopher A. Scales, *Recording Culture: Powwow Music and the Aboriginal Recording Industry on the Northern Plains* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 246.

Museum of Natural History in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These hundreds, if not thousands, of Native musical recordings incorporated religious, cultural, and powwow songs, ranging from the Lakota in Pine Ridge, South Dakota to the Seminoles in Florida.<sup>375</sup> Densmore's recordings included dozens of songs recorded before World War I that focused on intertribal warfare during the twentieth century. Many of these songs – in direct contrast to Densmore's salvage ethnomusicology – were innovated to include enemies from foreign wars.

In the twentieth century, anthropologists often expressed shock when learning that Native culture not only remained but continued through oral traditions. During a graduate trip to study traditional Kiowa music, anthropologist Jane Richardson Hanks observed in a letter to a colleague, "First, the Indians are alive and real individuals, with pride and real knowledge in their own culture. I had no idea it would be alive—for I thought it would live only in their memories."<sup>376</sup> Hanks later pronounced, "some of the little ones have the old lore in mind. They know all the songs and dances! I hope to god they keep it."<sup>377</sup> Similarly, scholars in the 1940s focused on Lakota and Dakota powwow as something only "full-bloods" could practice while claiming "mixed-bloods," that is, those considered less Indian, participated in more assimilated musical traditions. These claims, which proved to be stereotypes that limited Native culture to the past, were documented in *Warriors Without Weapons*, a social study on Pine Ridge Indians indicated these categories:

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<sup>375</sup> Frances Densmore, ed. by Joseph A. Fitzgerald, and forward by Charles E. Trimble, *World of the Teton Sioux Indians: Their Music, Life, and Culture* (The Library of Perennial Philosophy. Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2016); Frances Densmore, *Mandan and Hidatsa Music* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Pub., 2006); Frances, Densmore *Music of Acoma, Isleta, Cochiti, and Zuñi Pueblos* (Smithsonian Institute: Forgotten Books, 2016); Francis Densmore, *Seminole Music*. (Smithsonian Institute: Forgotten Books, 2015).

<sup>376</sup> Jane Richardson Hanks to Ann Wyckoff, July 21, 1935, in Jane Richardson Hanks: Kiowa Papers Field Work, Ayer Modern MS Hanks, Box 1, Folder 1, Special Collections, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>377</sup> Richardson Hanks letter.

If the visitor goes to an evening dance at the school, he will find his full-blood friends dancing the Omaha Dance, performed as in the old days only by men and women in Indian dress, or the Rabbit Dance, which as a concession to white ways, is danced with Indian reserve by couples. Upstairs the young mixed-bloods and the Agency employees will be dancing the waltz and foxtrot to fiddle and concertina. The older full-bloods are the nucleus of a large group which tries to maintain what it can of Indian life. Their dancing symbolizes their cultural position and attitudes—preserving the old and making slight concessions to change. Their chief satisfactions come from doing things the Indian way.<sup>378</sup>

Contrary to those anthropological based studies, which often sought to capture songs of the vanishing race, Native people recorded their own music for their purposes and future generations of Native people. Powwow drum groups continued a long line of Native tradition that innovated oral traditions to preserve their language, music, and culture. For example, the Lakota and Dakota embraced writing in their languages and recording technologies throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>379</sup> In the introduction to *Lakota Tales and Texts*, a work written in Lakota compiling a variety of Sioux narratives from various elders, Father Paul Manhart, a non-Native, affirmed, “A people’s ways are told in a variety of ways . . . such forms as novels, plays, comic strips, motion pictures, television [sic] plots, and the like—all of which, for some time now, the Sioux have been looking at carefully to see how they might widen the scope of their traditions through the use of new tools.”<sup>380</sup>

In writing down his own experiences as a member of the well-known Lakota drum group, the Porcupine Singers, Severt Young Bear concurred with Manhart by using the

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<sup>378</sup> Gordon Macgregor, Royal B. Hassrick, and William E. Henry, *Warriors Without Weapons: A Study of the Society and Personality Development of the Pine Ridge Sioux* (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 23-25.

<sup>379</sup> Based on the English alphabet\*

<sup>380</sup> Ivan Stars, Peter Iron Shell, Eugene Buechel, Ed. Paul Manhart, SJ, *Lakota Tales and Texts: Wisdom Stories, Customs, Lives and Instruction of the Dakota Peoples* (Pine Ridge: Red Cloud Lakota Language and Culture Center, 1978), xvi.

Lakota phrase *tohan mate sni ehatan* (as long as I'm alive). Young Bear translated the phrase as a way of maintaining family and tribal traditions elaborating, "this book will be the way for my family and myself to go on; our traditions, our way of life will never end, because now we documented it in this book. Our songs are recorded; we retained the good side of it."<sup>381</sup> Young Bear, who recorded six vinyl recordings with Canyon Records and the Porcupine Singers, knew, much like many of the voices analyzed, that musical recordings preserved music for future generations and that his own recorded voice would long outlive him.

R.D. Theisz confronted non-Indian specialists who attempted to transcribe Lakota and other Native music into Western musical notation. Theisz conceded the importance of these recordings while noting that because they were based on Western musical notations, they "cannot record the uniquely 'Indian' quality inherent in the tribal music."<sup>382</sup> He continued, "The Indian people themselves, on the contrary, quickly utilized tape and cassette recorders once they became available to the layman."<sup>383</sup> By embracing technological recording, Native American drum groups and singers extended the ways their family and tribal songs were and continue to be told. These types of embraces indicated that Native Americans could not only grasp technologies but incorporate them to cultivate "uniquely Indian quality" powwow music. Theisz sustained, "Songs are not improvised on the spot, but rather have to be learned from other singers today often with the help of a tape recorder. The stock of songs ranges from songs of an interminably

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<sup>381</sup> Severt Young Bear and R.D. Theisz, *Standing in the Light: A Lakota Way of Seeing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), xxii.

<sup>382</sup> Ben Black Bear Sr. and R. D. Theisz, *Songs and Dances of the Lakota* (North Plains Press, 1984), 10-11.

<sup>383</sup> Black Bear and Theisz, *Songs and Dances*, 10.

ancient tradition which have been handed down, to those of recent composition which may even have been composed by a member of the group singing them.”<sup>384</sup> Recording technology also provided Native singers and drum groups with the opportunity to choose which songs could/should be recorded and how they could/should sound. This way, they could incorporate both old and new songs on their vinyl recordings, permitting sovereignty over their musical traditions and their future.

In returning to Vizenor’s fourth voice, as well as Christopher Scale’s methodology of studying vinyl records (and songs) as having distinct “social lives,” one can see the multilayered process of how songs and traditions were and are created, innovated, and transported throughout Indian Country. In studying music as the fourth voice – that is as a living, breathing, continuing, organism, one can also see how Lakota and Dakota songs, if properly acknowledged, respected, and sung, transcend time and place while also maintaining connections to original singers, songwriters, and traditional homelands.

Furthermore, songs have been redeployed to incorporate new and continuously innovating traditions. Native American veteran's songs, for example, have continued from late-twentieth-century honor songs to incorporate military service in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. These songs are still sung at powwows today to honor twentieth-century veterans as well as those who currently serve in the military. As Troutman examined, the Lakota and Dakota used the guise of United States citizenship and ideas about American patriotism to assist in the maintenance (and even the development) of traditional ways of life.

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<sup>384</sup> Theisz, *Songs and Dances*, 13.

Beginning with World War I, Native Americans began serving in the highest per capita rates of any race or ethnicity in all major American conflicts. As a result, local reservation government agents and federal officials were limited and somewhat content in their abilities to stop Native peoples from the celebration of returning veterans.<sup>385</sup> Severt Young Bear similarly concurred, “we had to get permission to dance and we soon figured out if we picked non-Indian holidays, we were allowed to have some dances.” He continued, “We also were allowed to dance at fairs in late summer or early fall because there would be displays of vegetables, rodeos, and other signs that we were becoming good modern citizens instead of sticking to all that old ceremonial and warriors stuff. But we still got to dance.”<sup>386</sup> Young Bear’s words unveiled how Native people used the sovereignty of sound to challenge reservation agents into allowing them to perform and continue Lakota music and traditions.

Despite maintaining their connections to specific homelands, singers, and songwriters, the songs allowed for some innovations and adaptations throughout the twentieth century. For instance, certain victory songs shifted from traditional enemies such as the Pawnee or Crows to include new foreign enemies that included the Germans and the Japanese. World War I and World War II resulted in the creation of new victory style songs, while the Korean and Vietnam War veterans were usually honored with slightly altered songs. Young Bear accredited Gordon and Rushville, two predominantly white border and railroad towns near the Pine Ridge reservation to which many veterans returned, as foundational to the continuation of veteran honor songs.<sup>387</sup> Gordon and

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<sup>385</sup> John W. Troutman, *Indian Blues: American Indians and the Politics of Music, 1879–1934* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 51-54.

<sup>386</sup> Young Bear, *Standing in the Light*, 55.

<sup>387</sup> Young Bear, *Standing in the Light*, 83-84.

Rushville might not have been where the songs were created, but their acknowledgment revealed how songs and Indigenous culture traveled.

Before recording became more accessible, songs and other traditions relied heavily on oral transmission. Young Bear reiterated, “You caught the song and learned it if you were good at catching songs by ear and mind, and you could even store a lot of songs away in your mind, but with travel being so limited, so was the spread of songs.”<sup>388</sup> In acknowledging Gordon and Rushville, Young Bear continued traditional song protocol. Singers were not only expected to learn drum patterns, song lyrics, and meanings but also expected to know where those songs came from, why they were sung, who they were created by, and their meanings. Acknowledging and understanding these questions contributed to the life of a song. Theisz concurred, “The songs and/or dances presented . . . [could] be considered a cross section of a beautiful and living musical tradition.”<sup>389</sup>

### **The Sovereignty of Sound**

*Tehan natanpe lo (5 times) / Lakota hokšila hena hecunpe lo. / Kowakatan  
Tokyo eyapi kin onapobyape lo. / Tehan natanpe lo (2 times). / Lakota  
hokšila hena lo.*

“They are charging from afar (5 times). / The Lakota have done this. / A  
place called Tokyo they are bombing. / They are charging from afar (2  
times). The Lakota have done this.”<sup>390</sup>

In his short collection of essays on Lakota musicology, Theisz affirmed that Lakota Veteran’s Songs “reinforce the modern manifestation of the warrior ethic in which the

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>390</sup> Theisz, *Sending Their Voices*, 24.

soldier is greatly respected and honored whether at a celebration or on days when veterans receive special respect.” He continued, “Some songs are used only for a deceased veteran; others may also be used for the living (whether still in the service or as a veteran).<sup>391</sup> Thiesz then listed five veteran songs from various twentieth-century engagements. Each song had a specific role. Song #8, Song #9, and Song #10 were designed to honor deceased veterans while Song #11 commended bravery in battle and possibly for a wounded soldier. Song #12 acknowledged a mother whose son joined the armed forces. Like many veterans or honor songs, each of his examples was designed to fit the name of the deceased, honored soldier, or as in the case of song number 12, the son’s mother. Out of the entire list, only Song #10 articulates a specific war repeating the phrase: “Šota tanin natan yelo” (three times) before “Koreata šota tanin natan yelo” and then finally (Name) “šota tanin natan yelo.” Thiesz translated the song as: In the center of the attack, (three times) / He could be seen in the center of the Korean attack. / The Lakota [or name of a soldier] was visible in the center of the attack.”<sup>392</sup> For many, this may seem like a simple song, but it is importantly reaffirming military service among the Lakota. The first and second portions of the song established the bravery of the soldier and also the place where he was serving. Finally, the last portion allowed the individual to be honored for his military service.

Thiesz has written extensively on the development and creation of Lakota music, and he divides powwow music into two separate periods. The first period, 1917 to 1945, resulted in the creation of Lakota songs that often mirrored earlier songs but promoted military service against new enemies such as the Germans and Japanese. "World War I, then," Thiesz stated, “resulted in the composition and popularization of many songs

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<sup>391</sup> Thiesz, *Sending Their Voices*, 10.

<sup>392</sup> Thiesz, *Sending Their Voices*, 11.

honoring the soldiers' efforts against foreign enemies." Theisz provided an example of an older song (Example 1) and also a newer song (Example 2) that was similar style and structure lyrically but emphasized new twentieth-century enemies:

**Example 1:** Pسالoka kin natan ahiye lo; / Blotahunka unyan napapi yelo.

The Crow Indians came attacking / Their leader was left behind.

**Example 2:** Lakota hokšila Iyašica tamakoce kin / Ota iyacu ca ekta winwicaceyape lo.

Lakota boy, you have taken many of the German lands, So they are crying like women there.<sup>393</sup>

Theisz listed a variety of songs that developed during this time, many of which were continued on the vinyl records further analyzed. He pointed out multiple themes in each of these songs. For one, many referenced the Lakota charging, attacking, or withstanding while the enemy is made to cry, retreat, or surrender. Thus, the songs emphasized Lakota bravery and defeat of the enemy. Secondly, songs mentioned *T̥h̥uŋkášila*, often translated as Creator, God, Grandfather, or the President of the United States asking the Lakota for help in defeating the enemy. Third, almost all of the songs had key components that were interchangeable, in particular, Lakota names could be substituted to honor brave deeds or military service, enemy and ally cities, and places could be added to distinguish where battles occurred, and enemies could be changed to other enemies.<sup>394</sup>

The Ethnic Folkways vinyl album *Music of the Sioux and the Navajo*, conducted by the Smithsonian in the late 1940s and early 1950s, documented several songs that fit under Theisz first category. Nevertheless, the non-Native individuals who recorded the songs and wrote the five-page pamphlet entirely missed the point of articulating that Native peoples

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<sup>393</sup> Theisz, *Sending Their Voices*, 22-23.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

continued their music despite ongoing attempts to destroy it over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Side 1, Band 3(b) described an Omaha Dance that had "lost its functionalism and become a social dance. Formerly restricted to warrior members of the society it is today a vehicle for brilliantly costumed dancers who not only find emotional release in their exhibitionistic and individualistic dancing but provide entertainment for the onlookers."<sup>395</sup>

Willard Beatty and Rene d'Harnoncourt, who wrote the pamphlet designed to accompany the album, accentuated that the songs were used more so for monetary gain and/or entertainment, instead of highlighting that they were still used to honor "warrior members" or veterans or military service members returning home from the war. They did elaborate that the Omaha dance song was "inspired by the recent World War II in which so many Indians of all tribes gave their lives." The authors then provided translations of the song: "From across the ocean / The Japanese came charging. / The president wanted our help / So the Sioux boys went over there."<sup>396</sup> These errors in understanding Native music, especially by individuals deemed "experts" in their fields of anthropology and ethnomusicology, confirmed the importance of Native American's starting to record, distribute, and contribute their definitions to the liner notes during the second period that Theisz described. Both Beatty and d'Harnoncourt acknowledged the new lyrics but focused on authenticity, or in the case of the Omaha song, unauthenticity because it failed to meet their demands for staying in the past.

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<sup>395</sup> Willard W. Beatty and Rene d'Harnoncourt, "Music of the Sioux and the Navajo," *Ethnic Folkways Library Album No. FE 4401*, Folkways Records and Service Corp: 1949), 3.

<sup>396</sup> Beatty and d'Harnoncourt, "Music of the Sioux and the Navajo," 3.

During that second period, beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s until the late 1980s (when Theisz published the article), there was a push for a renewal of other songs and dances including the Rabbit, Owl, and Kahomni (Round Dance). Despite this push for renewal, round dance songs, as documented on the album “Songs of the Sioux,” were also important in demonstrating the importance of supporting Native American veterans but also the United States in winning the war. Song Six on Side Two presented one round dance song with the lyrics translated as, “The war leader, they say, likes to donate so I’m coming to see him.”<sup>397</sup> These lyrics articulated the importance of donating money or buying war bonds, something that the Lakota and Dakota tribes readily did. By 1945, Native Americans, in total, purchased fifty million dollars in war bonds.<sup>398</sup> Thus, round dance songs and other songs not traditionally used to honor veterans were expanded to include those fighting the war on the home front.

The album also featured multiple tracks that honored Native American veterans of twentieth-century wars. Song 5 described an Omaha Song as:

The Sioux are proud of the fact that many Sioux soldiers served valiantly in WW I, WW II, the Korean War, and in Viet Nam, and there are songs to commemorate this service. This song dates from WW I and says: ‘Indian boys, you went overseas. So the Germans, our friends are retreating and regretting their action.’ The reference to the Germans as friends implies that they, and all men, are brothers and should be friends, not enemies.<sup>399</sup>

Song 5; therefore, established the long tradition of military service among Lakota people during the twentieth century. It importantly urged the commemoration of military service no matter what war or enemy. It also interestingly exhibited the complexities of fighting

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<sup>397</sup> Canyon Records, “Songs of the Sioux,” Year not listed.

<sup>398</sup> Jere’ Bishop Franco, *Crossing the Pond: The Native American Effort in World War II* (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 1999), 101.

<sup>399</sup> Canyon Records, “Songs of the Sioux,” Year not listed.

against other humans, and instead of bragging about their victory, conceded that the Germans retreated and accordingly regretted their actions. These actions could imply a specific battle during, but its beginning as an honor song for World War I veterans indicated that it likely represented regret about the entire war.

Interestingly, F. Dennis Lessard, a non-Native individual who lived among the Sioux, was invited by Canyon Records to comment on the album jacket notes. Ben Black Bear Sr. was quoted as saying: “Listen: As Indians we should make our voices heard on these occasions. And the voices we hear, men and women singers, will all be a remembrance. Even after we pass away our voices will still be alive. For this reason we do this.”<sup>400</sup> Due to his prolific knowledge about Lakota music, it can be assumed that Ben Black Bear Sr., who sang in many of the songs along with Iva Black Bear, John Good, Frank Picket Pin, Rudy Runs Above, and Steve Spotted Tail, provided the lyrical translations. Lessard commented, “To record a song is to preserve it. But a recording session is more than that. It is also a time of happiness; a time of getting together and singing for the sheer joy of singing . . . We hope you enjoy these songs as much as the singers enjoyed singing them.”<sup>401</sup> Lessard importantly reminded the listener and reader that music on the album was not only an attempt at Lakota preservation but also meant to be reflective of a time of joy. Joy, especially in the face of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century attempts to destroy traditional Native American culture, articulated Vizenor’s survivance theory. Native people despite the attempted cultural and physical genocides prevailed over these attempts but also enjoyed themselves while doing it.

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<sup>400</sup> Ben Black Bear, Canyon Records, “Songs of the Sioux,” Year not listed.

<sup>401</sup> Canyon Records, “Songs of the Sioux.”

“Songs of the Sioux” also listed Kettle Dance Songs, often used to bless the food, but in this reiteration stated, "Your friends walk with great effort . . . Your friend walk proud" indicating it was probably meant for wounded soldiers returning home. The time frame is ambiguous, so the song could be acknowledging Lakota warriors returning home from a raid, or those returning home from the frontlines of World War I. One additional Kettle Song also mocked Ree (Arikara) Natives and their defeat. The Kettle Dance Songs predated twentieth-century American military conflicts but accentuated the use of old songs on the album, possibly to create a more "authentic" album. The Arikara song also validated those old rivalries, even in a joking context such as referring to the Ree as crying, continued into the twentieth century.

The album, *The Great Plains Indian Singers and Songs*, a compilation of five popularly requested songs from Canyon Records and previously unheard songs from various singers and drum groups, promoted “singers or song-owners, who expressed their pride in being able to be part of the growing archive of authentic Indian music—to be made know to today’s listeners and preserved in its integrity for the future.”<sup>402</sup> For the album, Canyon Records repurposed a song by Willie Horncloud, Ben Sitting Up, and Frank Afraid of Horses, all from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation. The album notes described their song as a modern-day song originally published in 1954 and honoring a Korean War veteran returning home. Canyon Records does not provide translations or transcriptions on this particular album but did acknowledge that the Korean Memorial Song “sings of the ‘Indian of the Peace Pipe being shot at in Korea.’” The liner notes argued that the song would “become a classic recording because of the particular singers

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<sup>402</sup> Various Artists, *The Great Plains Indian Singers, and Songs*, Vinyl (Phoenix, Arizona: Canyon Records, 1966).

who participated, and also because of the topical interest of the song itself”, therefore indicating that memorial and honor songs were widespread, and even more importantly for Canyon Records, consumable.

The description also indicated that Canyon Records understood that putting a revered singer like William Horncloud on any album in combination with veteran songs would sell records. Canyon Records desperately sought the potential to sell Lakota songs to Lakota consumers, indicated by the line, “The Sioux, one of the largest of the North American Indian nations, were chiefly hunters. . . Today they live chiefly in North and south Dakota, Nebraska, and Montana, and have sent many of their young men to the U.S. Armed forces where they have served with bravery and distinction.”<sup>403</sup> The prominence of Lakota songs and vinyl records during the 1970s indicated that Plains Style music, especially Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota, sold to a variety of Native and non-Native consumers. Canyon Records thrived in part because of the mass distribution of Lakota songs.

The Fort Kipp Singers, a local group from the Ft. Peck Indian Reservation, an Assiniboine or Nakota Tribe from Northern Montana recorded their first album, *Fort Kipp Sioux Singers: At Fort Qu’ Appelle* in 1971 with Canyon Records. On their debut album, they were described as “one of the great singing groups of the Northern Plains. They’ve been singing together since leaving the U.S. Armed Services after World War II.”<sup>404</sup> It can be assumed then that the Fort Kipp Singers were originally organized as an all Native veteran drum group. Their original lineup changed over the production of their three vinyl

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<sup>403</sup> Various Artists, *Great Plains Singers*, Vinyl.

<sup>404</sup> Fort Kipp Singers, *Fort Kipp Sioux Singers: At Fort Qu’ Appelle*, Vinyl, (Phoenix, Arizona: Canyon Records, 1971).

records during the 1970s but the group appeared to provide veteran comradery, and more importantly, a support system for individuals after World War II.

*Fort Kipp Sioux Singers: At Fort Qu' Appelle*, presented two different versions of a flag song. The first flag song on the album was listed as a Canadian Flag Song by the Sioux Valley Singers, a drum group from Griswold, Manitoba. The notes translated the song lyrics as, "When the Queen needs me, / under the flag will I serve, / Above me it will always be flying."<sup>405</sup> Through this description, the record demonstrated that powwow music did not restrict itself to the borders of the United States, as well as highlighted similarities of how music continued in Canada. The Sioux Valley Singers, like the Fort Kipp Singers, were considered to be part of the Oceti Sakowin, the Great Sioux Nation, but the encroachment of settlers onto the Plains disrupted the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota tribes. During the twentieth century, members of the Oceti Sakowin fled not only to Canada but also to Western states such as Montana. Those who fled carried their culture, and in this particular example, their musical traditions. The Sioux Valley Singers Canadian flag song reflected the innovation of musical tradition under different settler entities, the Canadian and British governments.

The second flag song sung on the record was chosen because the powwow committee, most likely recognizing the kinship ties between Canadian Sioux and the Lakota and Dakota of the United States, wanted to honor the United States flag. According to the notes, the song was translated as, "We respect the Constitution of the United States / And the Red, White, and Blue. / May it wave long and proudly, and never fall."<sup>406</sup> The inclusion of two flag songs to open the Fort Qu' Appelle powwow articulated the role of

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<sup>405</sup> Fort Kipp Singers, *At Fort Qu' Appelle*, Vinyl.

<sup>406</sup> Fort Kipp Singers, *At Fort Qu' Appelle*, Vinyl.

military service among both First Nation and American Indian Nations. Both songs stressed the importance of respecting the Constitution and Queen but seemingly distanced Native people as distinct sovereign nations, who when called by either the Queen or the Constitution, would willingly sacrifice and serve. To many, it might appear as a submission to the United States or Canadian governments, but at the same time, the song subverted how Native people continued their songs, dances, language, and culture in the name of the Queen.

The third album by the Fort Kipp Singers, *Fort Kipp Celebration*, a live recording featured a variety of contemporary and recently written grass dance songs and one war song composed by the Fort Kipp Singers. As one of the members of Fort Kipp Singers, Jerry White Cloud, elucidated, the war song “honors Indian G.I.’s of World War II. It tells of the Indian G.I. going on patrols, being alerted that snipers are sitting in the trees, and with the imminent victory by the American forces the enemy abandons the islands.” He continued, “Honoring songs are composed according to a person’s involvement in Indian culture and traditions and the position that the person may hold in celebrations and ceremonies that involve the pride of Indian people. These honoring songs are for very special people and private. They should not be used by any other singing group or person without the permission of the Fort Kipp Singers.”<sup>407</sup> While White Cloud acknowledged the song as private, he then placed it on an album that would be nationally distributed by Canyon Records. Despite the risk of being used by other groups without permission, the inclusion of the song indicated that honoring veterans publicly was more important than

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<sup>407</sup> Fort Kipp Singers, *Fort Kipp Celebration: Fort Kipp Singers*, Vinyl, Vol. 3, (Phoenix, Arizona: Canyon Records, 1977).

song ownership, or the group would not have risked putting these songs onto an album for public distribution.

Like the Fort Kipp albums, the self-titled *Denver Indian Singers* album connected the post-World War II relocation programs to the rapid development of Native music in urban settings stating, "The [Native] people no longer live in a tribal village, but as individuals all through the City of Denver. They hold jobs in the government, are skilled craftsman in industry, [and] are part of urban Denver."<sup>408</sup> Contrary to many of the other albums analyzed in this chapter, which were recorded at powwows or venues in reservation communities, the *Denver Indian Singers* album was recorded in Denver, Colorado. Denver, due to ongoing relocation programs in the 1960s and 1970s as well as its proximity to several reservations (Rosebud and Pine Ridge are about a five to six-hour drive), served as a major destination for Native people from the Midwest but also throughout the United States. The album notes recognized that Native people could live in urban areas, work in a variety of industries, and continue to practice traditional singing and dancing.

The *Denver Indian Singers* album contained a variety of powwow songs including a Vietnam veteran song. According to the liner jacket, "The song for the Vietnam Veterans was composed by Ralph Wells, Jr., a leading White Shield singer, now passed on."<sup>409</sup> Thus, the Vietnam Veteran's song on the album. worked in multiple ways. For one, it honored the legacy and service of Native Vietnam veterans. Secondly, it preserved the voice and song of Ralph Wells, even after his death, into the present further establishing Vizenor's fourth voice as a form of survivance. These songs were sung to honor, have fun,

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<sup>408</sup> Denver Indian Singers, *Denver Indian Singers*, Vinyl (Phoenix, Arizona: Canyon Records, 1972).

<sup>409</sup> *Denver Indian Singers* vinyl.

but also carried family legacies, traditions, and languages into the future. Finally, the album importantly demonstrated that traditional music could be sung in an urban context, while also clearly coupling the singers with other drum groups established by their relatives and connected to reservation communities. The liner notes, for instance, connected Don Malnourie and Keith Fox to the White Shield Singers via the Ralph Wells, Jr. Vietnam Veteran song. These connections validated the Denver Indian Singers in their urban context, which included relocated members from the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Ft. Berthold, and Pine Ridge, as an authentic drum group. In this particular case, that connection was made through a veteran honor song demonstrating the importance of honoring veterans in both reservation and urban contexts.

*Porcupine Singers: At Ring Thunder*, the group's first vinyl recording (and probably the most difficult for collectors to find), presented the same Lakota National Anthem that Black Elk and Big Eagle wrote the lyrics for.<sup>410</sup> The lyrics were translated identically. The album also introduced a veteran's song that was designed to follow the Lakota National Anthem in raising or lowering the United States flag. The Lakota lyrics were presented as:

Heyuha natan pe / Tunkasila yapi tawapaha ca / Heyuha natan pe / Lakota  
hoksila (he) ohitika ca / Heyuha natan pe. Tunkasila yapi tawapaha ca. /  
Neyuha nata pelo.

They are charging / The U.S. flag, they are charging / The Lakota warriors  
are brave / They are charging. The U.S. flag, they are charging.<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> This record is not in my collection.

<sup>411</sup> Porcupine Singers, *Porcupine Singers: At Ring Thunder*. Vinyl, Vol. 1, (Phoenix, Arizona: Canyon Records, 1977).

The album does not provide any context behind the meaning of the song, but the lyrics demonstrated a song that could be seen as both supporting and subverting resistance against the United States flag. On one hand, the Lakota warriors could be seen as charging with the United States Flag, but on another, the song could be seen as Lakota warriors charging and stealing the American flag. The latter assumption reflects some Lakota histories and legends, in which the Lakota honor the American flag because it was taken at a battle against the United States, most commonly cited as the Battle of Little Big Horn.<sup>412</sup>

The album places the Porcupine Singers among a long tradition of musical preservation. "This music has survived," the album stated, "through many attempts at suppressing it and has still maintained its beauty and strength. The members of the Porcupine Singers like many others are exemplary of the fine traditional Indian leadership that still prevails among their people. Music has been their tool in demonstrating leadership."<sup>413</sup> The liner notes recognize the members of the group individually as a professor at the local tribal college, an Indian school principal, a tribal councilman, and various other roles in the community. Their most important role, as singers, was "sharing the beauty of Indian music as well as the beauty of being Indian" indicating that these two things were the same. That singing role could not be fulfilled without a thorough knowledge of not only veterans and honor songs but also the roles that Native veterans played in tribal communities.

*The Porcupine Singers: At the University of South Dakota*, the Porcupine Singers' fourth Canyon Records album, was designed "to provide a greater understanding of the

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<sup>412</sup> I don't have a citation for this, but I have heard it growing up. It was also referenced in the introduction of the dissertation by Butch Felix.

<sup>413</sup> Porcupine Singers, *At Ring Thunder*, album notes.

role of music in Native American life." Each of these particular songs was selected to articulate the meaning, why it was sung, and the roles of the singers and drum group. The album, in other words, was marketed as an educational tool for anyone wanting to learn traditional songs. The liner notes, written by R.D. Theisz, Severt Young Bear, and Francis Menard, presented intertribal powwow songs, New Year's songs, horse give away songs, penny songs, and veteran's round dance songs. The veteran's song on *At the University of South Dakota* was dedicated to Francis Menard, also listed by his Lakota name, Wanbli Wakakiseya, translated as Eagle Who Causes Trouble for the Enemy. The song was listed as:

*Kowakatan okicize ca. Wanbli Wakakiseya ek ta iyaye. "Mama Temahila ca. Heyina akicita iyaye.*

A warrior went overseas. Wanbli Wakakiseya went. "Mother loves me."

Saying this, he went away as a soldier.<sup>414</sup>

The underlined portion of the song, where Francis Menard's Lakota name was placed, denoted that the portion of the song that could be used to incorporate other veteran's names. Lakota hoksila (Lakota boy) could also be placed there as well for more of a generic veteran's song. It is unclear if Menard served in Vietnam but due to the age of many of the Porcupine Singers, it is probable that Menard he did, demonstrating the ongoing musical innovation and tradition. Unlike the other songs in this chapter, this particular veteran's song emphasized the impact of military service on the home front. Moreover, it accentuated that veterans were fighting and thinking about their mothers as well as other relatives during their military service. No matter where they were, Native

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<sup>414</sup> Porcupine Singers, *Porcupine Singers: At the University of South Dakota*, Vinyl Vol. 4 (Phoenix, Arizona: Canyon Records, 1979).

veterans carried their communities with them. The same could also be said about local communities constantly remembering their veterans during the war. The sacrifice of military service, especially when soldiers were killed or wounded in action, was not reserved for the soldiers themselves but impacted entire communities and families, especially mothers and grandmothers.

The back of the album further detailed, “During the years when Indian dancing was outlawed, many secret social dances occurred. Windows were covered and smaller drums were used to keep the sound down so the police would not hear the drumming.”<sup>415</sup> This description indicated how many songs and traditions continued under the watchful eye of reservation agents and police who were attempting to extinguish the Lakota song and dance. These songs were a key component in keeping alive those traditions, privately, but more importantly, in the public eye to celebrate veterans returning home from the war. These types of songs created a dilemma between agents, especially those who did not want to seem unpatriotic by stopping Native veterans from celebrating returning veterans. In the end, the mass development of American patriotism benefitted Native people in ways that the federal government could never have imagined. On one hand, they wanted the deep commitment and dedication that Native people showed during the war. On the other hand, Native people strategically crafted ways to continue their traditions under the premise of patriotism.

The Ho Hwo Sju Lakota Singers album, *Traditional Songs of the Sioux*, described the group as “In an age when many tribal singing styles are blending together, groups are seeking the latest songs, and songs are traveling rapidly from tribe to tribe, there are some

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<sup>415</sup> Porcupine Singers, *Porcupine Singers: At the University of South Dakota*.

singers who still enjoy the old-time styles and songs. Such are the Ho Hwo Sju Lakota Singers from Red Scaffold, South Dakota.”<sup>416</sup> Judging by the description, the Ho hwo sju Lakota Singers were considered to be traditional because their album contained a variety of older veteran songs. Steve Charging Eagle, one of the singers of the group, provided the translations and comments for the album cover. Side one, song one presented the Sioux National Anthem recognizing its origins as being “made in Pine Ridge, and first sung at the victory celebration there after World War II, about 1945.” Charging Eagle offered a slightly alternative translation for the Sioux Flag Song stating “Under the nation’s flag, generations will stand forever. So do I.”<sup>417</sup> His interpretation of the same Flag Song created by Big Eagle and Black Elk, like the alternative translations by Ben Black Bear and Maka Clifford, demonstrated that the Lakota language could be translated in multiple ways. His definition emphasized the sovereignty of sound among the Lakota singers. “Nation’s flag” could be translated as either the American flag but also as the flag of the Cheyenne Eagle Butte Nation, where the Ho Hwo Sju Lakota Singers were originally organized and based.

The second song on the album was listed as an honor song for veterans. Charging Eagle translated the song as, “When people are celebrating and having a good time, / I want to be remembered, says our Indian boys.”<sup>418</sup> Charging Eagle’s commentary: “This song has been used for many years. Usually we put in someone’s Indian name, but here we used Indian boys, to mean all Indian veterans.” Song 5 was also an honor song with the lyrics, “A Sioux warrior got wounded in battle. / They are carrying him back.” The song

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<sup>416</sup> Ho Hwo Sju Lakota Singers, *Ho Hwo Sju Lakota Singers: Traditional Songs of the Sioux*, Vinyl (Taos, New Mexico: Indian House, 1975).

<sup>417</sup> Ho hwo sju Lakota Singers, *Traditional Songs*.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, album notes.

was described as a “Very old song. We can put a man’s name in there, but here we put Sioux warrior.”<sup>419</sup> These two songs, as demonstrated by Charging Eagle’s comments, were older songs used to honor veterans in a contemporary context. In putting "Indian boys" and "Sioux warrior," instead of names, Charging Eagle contextualized that the songs honored veterans from all wars, past, and present. The differences between using generic names such as "Sioux warrior" or an actual soldier name, validated singers in owning their sound sovereignty over deciding whether to honor one specific veteran or all veterans.

Side Two carried three more veterans’ songs and a rabbit dance song. The first song was a World War I veterans’ song that was interpreted as, “You have to honor the flag. So I did. / There this dance is mine.” The lyrics themselves demonstrated that the singer and/or songwriter believed that American military service and/or honoring the American flag (or possibly a tribal nation’s flag) allowed the Lakota to dance in victory during and after World War I. Charging Eagle illustrated the song and dance more specifically:

We don’t hardly use this one anymore. A veteran carries a small flag in [the center of the circle at a powwow], then he chooses a partner, and gives it to this lady. At a certain place in the song, this lady goes and gives the flag to another man, and this man has to go get another partner, and it goes from there until everyone is out on the floor. Nobody can refuse this flag, because they have to honor this flag . . .<sup>420</sup>

This particular song and dance reaffirmed the importance of preserving songs and traditions that may have otherwise been forgotten.

The album contained an additional World War I veterans’ song without translations but instructions that it would be sung, “After everyone is out on the dance area, then this song is sung” indicating that all powwow attendees were expected to honor the flag, which

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid., album notes.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid., album notes.

likely originally meant the United States flag but now includes the tribal flags. Song 3 included a Veterans' rabbit song with the lyrics, "Indian boys are saying, "I honor my flag, country, and freedom."<sup>421</sup> This song presented lyrics that were perceived by reservation and government agents as pure American patriotism; nevertheless, they easily could referencing a Lakota tribal flag, Lakota traditional homelands, and the freedom created under the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, which granted lands now located in western North and South Dakota, as the Great Sioux Reservation.

One of the reasons that these hidden meanings become more apparent is the next song, titled Lover's rabbit song, which according to Charging Eagle, "was made by a man from Bridger about 1932. They tried to arrest him after he made the song." Charging Eagle was referring to the early twentieth century, in which Lakota drum music was banned and closely monitored by reservation agents. The lyrics presented, "They've been watching me, I can't meet you here, / but when I die, I'll meet you in heaven" indicated that the songwriter was aware he was being watched by the reservation agent but wrote and sang the song anyway to honor a loved one. The deception is indicated when Charging Eagle claimed, "They used to sing it every Friday and Saturday night at the old Red Scaffold village camp" to honor the singer/songwriter's resistance to federal government policies.

*Ironwood Singers: Traditional Songs of the Sioux (Live at Rosebud Fair)*, the group's first album (and cassette tape), was recorded at the 102<sup>nd</sup> Rosebud Fair Wacipi on the Rosebud Indian Reservation. The Ironwood Singers were formed in 1973 and contained multiple singers from the Ironwood Community in Rosebud including Ben Black Bear Sr. The album encompassed a variety of songs, and like many of the albums

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid., album notes.

listed above, presented a Sioux Flag Song “from the Canadian Sioux” with the lyrics: “I fought for the President’s country / So I take courage / The President’s flag will stand forever.”<sup>422</sup> This particular song reflected the influence of the Lakota Flag Song on Northern Siouan tribes in Canada. It also promoted the continued kin relationships of the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota despite forced removals and the creation and enforcement of settler borders.

The third song captured an honor song “for a deceased person, sung here to honor John Attack Him Sr.” The lyrics were transcribed in English as, “I remember my friend / My friends are saying this / All across the country, / the dancers are saying this as they are coming / The Eagle Takes Him Back, / I remember my friend / My friends are saying this / All across the country, / the dancers are saying this as they are coming.”<sup>423</sup> Because the song was meant to honor John Attack Him Sr., it is assumed that the lyrics, “The Eagle Takes Him Back,” was probably his traditional Lakota name. The song inevitably emphasized honoring Attack Him Sr. locally at the powwow but also “across the country” in a national context, indicating that Attack Him Sr. was a prominent individual who should be celebrated for his contributions.

Song five, titled Killing-of-the-Enemy Song, originally commended bravery in battle and the defeat of an enemy; however, according to the description, it has been converted “for picking up a feather which has fallen from a dancer.” Under that protocol, “veterans are asked to dance to pick up the feather for the dancer.” The lyrics for the song were, “Who is charging without hiding? / They are leaving without one of their men /

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<sup>422</sup> Ironwood Singers, *Ironwood Singers: Traditional Songs of the Sioux (Live at Rosebud Fair)*, Cassette Tape (Taos, New Mexico: Indian House, 1980).

<sup>423</sup> Ironwood Singers, *Ironwood Singers*, liner notes.

Lakota boy / Who is charging without hiding? / They are leaving without one of their men / They are charging / The Germans are crying.”<sup>424</sup> Side Two presented another Killing-of-the-Enemy Song with the lyrics: “Your brother is looking for something, your brother is walking bravely.”<sup>425</sup> These two songs, like so many others, highlighted the conversion of traditional songs to celebrate bravery towards a contemporary context in which veterans pick up fallen eagle feathers, items considered sacred for Lakota people.

Song four on side two, listed as an Enemy Song, taunted opposing enemies: “Where are you now? / They are standing there afraid / The Sioux are not afraid, so where are you? / They are standing there afraid.” The next song labeled as a Victory Song but also called a Scout Song or Trying to-bring-him-back-in-battle Song, elaborated on a young warrior who was wounded during a battle. According to the notes, “the group charges to recover their fallen warrior, but the enemy pushes them back so they cannot reach the young warrior. This happens three times but on the fourth time the group succeeds in retrieving their fallen warrior.” Because of the four attempts, the song, like many of these veteran and honor songs, was sung on four repetitions. The translations for the song were: “They are walking with him / The strong Sioux boy, they sent him out, / but they are walking with him.” The Killing-of-the-Enemy Song, Enemy Song, and Victory Song were older songs repurposed into twentieth-century military service. The Killing-of-the-Enemy Songs could easily reference both intertribal warfare or twentieth-century military service for the United States.

The final song on the Ironwood Singers Live album was identified as a Peace Song, sung for a visiting congressman to the Rosebud Fair. The liner notes characterized, “This is

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<sup>424</sup> Ironwood Singers, *Ironwood Singers*, liner notes.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, liner notes.

a peace song between the white man and the Indian. It is sung for a white man who likes the Indian ways." On this particular occasion, Miss Rosebud and Miss Indian America accompanied the congressman while the song was sung. The lyrics were detailed as: "My friend, the white are saying / that they like the Indian ways / This day belongs to you." This particular song verified the layered complexities of Native music. For one, it served as a way to honor a non-Native individual, but that honor, at least during the early twentieth century, was probably given as a strategic way for Lakota people to be allowed to sing traditional music but also gain influence over leaders with authority that might let the Lakota practice and sing their traditions.

As the liner notes concluded, "[They] can sing many kinds of songs, but their specialty is their traditional songs, and their ability to sing exactly the right song for a particular occasion, and to sing it well. This requires a tremendous repertory of songs, a lot of practice, and the ability to come up with the correct song on a moment's notices – that is where the Ironwood Singers excel."<sup>426</sup>

### **"The President Joyfully Gave the Flag Back to the Sioux Nation"**

In 2015, my father Kenneth Little, lead singer and sole survivor from the 1972 Denver Indian Singers recording of their self-titled album sat down for an interview about his career as a singer and song maker. Little reflected on the transition of the Denver Indian Singers to the Denver Dakota Singers in the 1980s, before eventually, the group took the name Black Tongue Dakota in the early 1990s, in honor of his mother, Emma Black Tongue. He stated, "When they put us on reservations, they took all our culture and our Native ways away but eventually they [the United States] gave us a social dance and

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<sup>426</sup> Ironwood Singers, *Ironwood Singers*, liner notes.

song back."<sup>427</sup> After sharing these words, Little sang a Kahomni (Rabbit Dance Song) dating back to the late 1800s translating, "Thunkasina means grandfather. And thawapaha means flag. The president joyfully gave the flag back to you, the Sioux Nation so that they could do the social dance." After translating he stated, "So most of our songs previously, back in the earlier days (1800s to early 1900s), was kind of like social dances because they didn't want us to any warlike songs that might cause an uprising . . ."<sup>428</sup>

While the United States government "gave back" songs during the 1930s through the Indian New Deal and a government permitted the ability to practice songs, it was Native American singers who took the initiative throughout the twentieth century to redeploy and fit their traditional songs under new categories such as honoring military service. Those strategies succeeded in keeping Native American tradition, culture, music, and various other aspects alive, even under the watchful of reservation and government agents. By actively recording their music, Kenneth Little, as well as his brother Conrad and the other singers of the Denver Indian Singers, participated in that initiative to preserve, protect, and continue traditional singing into the present. The same idea can be applied to the other albums and drum groups reviewed in this chapter. The innovation of Native music, especially underground, would have continued; however, connecting it to military service enabled it to actively continue in public spaces in front of United States military and government officials, who due to strategic use of American patriotism, unable to stop it.

The Kahomni song that Little sang in the 2015 interview, demonstrated that Lakota and Dakota people used social dances to emulate traditional singing under the auspices of

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<sup>427</sup> Kenneth Little interview.

<sup>428</sup> Kenneth Little interview.

honoring Native veterans and the United States flag. That singing shifted throughout the twentieth century from World War I and World War II to Vietnam and eventually to the present day, where Native people continue to serve in the military in the highest per capita numbers of any race or ethnicity. Most importantly, the Denver Indian Singers, as well as the other albums reviewed in this chapter alongside the hundreds of other albums that were recorded and distributed in the 1970s and 1980s preserved culture, language, and song for future generations. Ultimately, the sovereignty of sound allowed singers to participate in earlier and ongoing traditions that were influenced by twentieth-century military service.

## **Conclusion: Continuing the Fight**

In 2018, an exhibit titled, *Patriot Nations: Native Americans in Our Nation's Armed Forces*, began traveling across the United States. The exhibit featured 15 six-foot-tall poster panels presenting information about Native American military service in the United States armed forces. The second poster, labeled "*Why Do American Indians Serve?*," contested, "It doesn't seem to make sense: Why would American Indians serve a government that overran their homelands, suppressed their cultures, and confined them to reservations?"<sup>429</sup> Answering its complex question, the panel explained:

For thousands of years, American Indians have protected their communities and lands. A warrior's traditional role, however, involved more than fighting enemies. Warriors cared for people and helped to ensure their people's survival, including laying down their lives. Many American Indians view service in the U.S. armed forces as a continuation of the warrior's role in Native cultures."<sup>430</sup>

This exhibit, funded and produced by the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians and the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), documented the history of Native service from the Civil War until present day service in Afghanistan and Iraq and was designed to promote and fundraise for the National Native American Veterans Memorial. In 2015, the NMAI officially began working to begin consultation with Native communities, tribes, and veterans for a memorial that would properly recognize and acknowledge the thousands of Native veterans that served and continue to serve in the United States military.

After these consultations, a process that included visiting at least 35 Native communities, the National Native American Veterans Memorial committee created a

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<sup>429</sup> National Museum of the American Indian, *Patriot Nations: Native Americans in Our Armed Forces*, 2018, Poster Exhibit (<https://americanindian.si.edu/static/patriot-nations/>).

<sup>430</sup> Patriot Nations exhibit website.

shared vision and set of design principles that would inform a design competition in November of 2017. The committee was co-chaired by Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell and Lieutenant Governor of the Chickasaw Nation Jefferson Keel. According to the NMAI website, over 120 proposals from across the globe were submitted. Those 120 plus submissions were narrowed down to six finalists before the Harvey Pratt's design concept, *Warriors' Circle of Honor*, was unanimously selected as the winner.<sup>431</sup> Pratt, a Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal member, served in Vietnam from 1962 to 1965. His works included a memorial in Denver for the victims of the Sand Creek Massacre.

Since the 1980s, rumors about attempts to build a national Native American veterans memorial had been circulating. A 1986 article in the South Florida Sun Sentinel, detailed the creation of a Grandfather Plaque, created in the 1980s, to honor Vietnam-era Native veterans near the grave of Ira Hayes, perhaps the most famous Native veteran of all-time and known for his participation in raising the American flag after U.S. troops captured Iwo Jima during World War II.<sup>432</sup> The Grandfather Plaque, about the size of a small headstone, was intended to honor Native Vietnam veterans. Oglala Lakota Vietnam veteran, Chuck Richards, featured in Chapter 2, discussed visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. He described the anger he felt in seeing three bronze soldiers presented representing black, white, and Hispanic Vietnam veterans. He stated to the reporter, "Forgotten again," as he pointed out that Native veterans, who served in the highest per capita rates in Vietnam, went unnoticed as part of the Vietnam Veteran's

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<sup>431</sup> Patriot Nations exhibit website.

<sup>432</sup> Hayes was memorialized in a Johnny Cash song and was later played by Adam Beach in *Flags of Our Fathers*. Hayes, unfortunately, struggled with alcoholism and eventually died homeless after the war.

Memorial.<sup>433</sup> Enos Poorbear, an Oglala World War II veteran, concurred with Richards stating, "Indian veterans are the most overlooked ethnic minority in the country."<sup>434</sup>

The lack of acknowledgment for Native veterans in any other twentieth or twenty-century wars meant that this plaque served as the only form of national recognition among Native veterans. As Poorbear questioned, eerily similar to the second panel on the Patriot Nations exhibit, "So what did [Native veterans] fight for? They fought to fight."<sup>435</sup> Ed Catches, an Oglala Vietnam vet agreed, "If there is a war on, we're expected to go fight . . . because we're honoring our ancestors, the warriors."<sup>436</sup> Both Poorbear and Catches statements not only reinforced a few of the many reasons covered in this dissertation, that Native veterans served in the armed forces including the Vietnam War, but also the reasons that their service needed to be honored.

It would take more than thirty years before the idea of a Native veteran's national memorial would shift from conversations towards to an in-progress movement. As I am concluding this dissertation, the NMAI, according to their website, has estimated that the creation of the fifteen million-dollar National Native American Veterans Memorial to be completed by Veterans Day 2020. The memorial location will be near the NMAI, located on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. As the NMAI identified:

Native Americans have served in our nation's military since colonial times. In recent decades, they have served at a higher rate in proportion to their population than any other ethnic group. Why? For many veterans, military service is an extension of their warrior traditions. Others serve to

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<sup>433</sup> Ron Martz, "Indian Veterans of Vietnam War Finally Receive a U.S. Memorial," *Sun Sentinel*, November 9, 1986 (<https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-1986-11-09-8603090384-story.html>).

<sup>434</sup> Enos Poorbear in "Indian Veterans of Vietnam War Finally Receive a U.S. Memorial," *Sun Sentinel*, November 9, 1986 (<https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-1986-11-09-8603090384-story.html>).

<sup>435</sup> Poorbear, "Indian Veterans of Vietnam."

<sup>436</sup> Ed Catches in "Indian Veterans of Vietnam War Finally Receive a U.S. Memorial," *Sun Sentinel*, November 9, 1986 (<https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-1986-11-09-8603090384-story.html>).

reaffirm treaty alliances with the United States. Still, others serve for the sheer love of home and country.<sup>437</sup>

A variety of Native tribes, including the Oglala Lakota tribe in Pine Ridge, South Dakota and the Oneida Nation in Wisconsin, have created their memorials to honor their veterans. However, other than the small Grandfather Plaque, there has been no national efforts to recognize any Native military service. As the NMAI reiterated, “Throughout Native America, servicemen and women are some of the most honored members of their communities. Yet they remain unrecognized by any landmark in our nation’s capital. That will soon change.”<sup>438</sup> Amazingly, the National Native American Veterans Memorial committee consisted of 28 Native American veterans, a majority of whom served in either the Korean or Vietnam Wars. The strong participation of Vietnam veterans, while due to the timing of the memorial and the death of many World War II veterans, indicated that Vietnam veterans were ready and willing to take the lead on a national memorial. Native Vietnam veterans, who remain the most slighted veterans, could probably have argued for an improved Vietnam memorial or something bigger than the Grandfather Plaque. Nonetheless, their dedication towards fighting for a National Native American Veterans Memorial that honored all tribes and all wars is in line with reasons that Native Vietnam veterans served in the first place: to honor the legacy of their ancestors, their relatives, and their People.

After almost a century of being ignored, the memorial promises to provide Native veterans with the recognition they deserved. As the NMAI clearly stated, “This memorial carries the heavy responsibility of respectfully acknowledging American Indian, Alaska

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<sup>437</sup> Patriot Nations exhibit website.

<sup>438</sup> Patriot Nations exhibit website.

Native, and Native Hawaiian veterans; raising awareness of their service across generations; and reminding all Americans of our national obligation to honor this inspired legacy.”<sup>439</sup> While important in its acknowledgment, no memorial could ever fully acknowledge the military service of the 574 federally recognized tribes and their members. However, the National Native American Veterans Memorial would be a start in the right direction.

The traveling poster exhibit, which is also featured on the NMAI website, promoted the soon-to-be memorial and served as a way for the NMAI to fundraise. The posters importantly highlighted not only military service, but also service on the home front, and in some cases, First Nation military service in the Canadian Armed Forces. Presumably, because of the connections that the 28 memorial committee members have, the National Native American Memorial undertook the opportunity to add underexamined narratives to the history of Native American military service. Native women who served, whose stories have long remained overshadowed, are prominently featured on the posters as well. Charlotte Edith Anderson, Six Nations of the Grand River tribe, volunteered for the U.S. Medical Corps and served at a hospital in France during World War I. She, according to the poster, was one of more than a dozen First Nation women to serve in World War I. Donna Loring, Penobscot, served from 1967 to 1968 in Vietnam processing casualty reports for the United States army. She currently serves as an advisor on women's veterans' affairs.<sup>440</sup> Other panels featured the Thunderbirds World War II unit and Chilocco Indian School. The Thunderbirds liberated more than 30,000 prisoners at a concentration camp in Germany and included several Native American soldiers while the Chilocco

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<sup>439</sup> Patriot Nations exhibit website.

<sup>440</sup> Patriot Nations exhibit website; Korea & Vietnam.

Indian School responded to the war effort by turning its students, who were more than willing, into future soldiers during World War II. The memorial's traveling exhibit and website demonstrate the importance of distinguishing the many accomplishments of Native American soldiers, both women and men. These stories have frequently been left out of the historical narrative about Native veterans, but the NMAI memorial has promised to more accurately fulfill those narratives.

The NMAI traveling poster exhibit and website's use of "new" materials, histories, and stories, in many ways, is one of the things that this dissertation has sought to change. The national memorial demonstrates what happens when Native veterans come home from war and use their voices to make a change. Instead of fighting on a battlefield, these Native veterans shifted their fight to the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., and more broadly, the American public, for recognition of their military service, sovereignty, and rights. That legacy of fighting began, not with Native Vietnam veterans, but rather with their fathers, uncles, aunties, and grandfathers, who have given their lives, limbs, and in some cases, their mental health. For their ancestors, military service was not in the name of the United States flag, the settler colonial project, or the U.S. military but for the protection of their land, people, culture, and future.

While the Native American Veteran's Memorial honors Native veterans from all engagements, the large push from Vietnam veterans seems to indicate that many are willing to begin telling their stories. The national memorial project collaborated with the Veteran's History Project at the Library of Congress to continue gathering these stories and

oral histories for future generations.<sup>441</sup> The Veterans History Project contains dozens, if not hundreds, of interviews with Native veterans from World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Importantly, many of the digitized interviews contain photographs, background information, and in some cases, video footage of each veteran. The surge of organizations and people interested in interviewing Vietnam veterans, like Ken Burn's PBS features in 2018, has revealed that the general public has largely forgiven or may be forgotten, the controversy of the Vietnam War. Nevertheless, as the oral interviews indicated in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Native veterans, unlike other soldiers returning home, were openly welcomed home by their communities. As the Patriot Nations exhibit noted, "When the veterans returned, many found solace and healing in their communities' ceremonies and honors."<sup>442</sup> There is no doubt that a thorough investigation of the oral history project would likely bring similar conclusions to light about other Vietnam veterans.

Native veterans have also started to write their stories as well. Most of the autobiographies in this dissertation were written over the last ten years, a trend that is continuing among all Vietnam veterans. A quick search of Vietnam autobiographies presents titles like *363 Days in Vietnam: A Memoir of Howitzers, Hook-ups & Screw-ups from My Tour of Duty 1968 to 1969* by Michael Stuart Baskin or *THERE IT IS...IT DON'T MEAN NOTHING: A Vietnam war Memoir* by Charles Hensler. Both Hensler and Baskin's autobiographies, who are both white, were published in 2018 and 2019 and benefitted from independent publishers who understand the demand for Vietnam veteran's stories. It can be

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<sup>441</sup> Smithsonian: National Museum of the American Indian, American Heroes: Native Service Members Defend the United States, accessed September 16, 2019. <https://americanindian.si.edu/nnavm/american-heroes/>.

<sup>442</sup> Patriot Nations exhibit website; Korea & Vietnam.

assumed that more Native veterans will soon be among those same veterans who are empowered to publish their stories.

A wide range of mediums has also started to produce material on Native Vietnam veterans. Over the last two years, several films on Native military service, especially service in Vietnam, have been developed and circulated. Dakota filmmaker Leya Hale directed and produced a feature-length film titled *The People's Protectors*. PBS stations have also created local and national content including *The Warrior Tradition*, which traces the history of Native military service into the present. *Defending the Fire* featured several Native Vietnam veterans including Wes Studi, a well-known Cherokee actor, who served in Vietnam. The film projected military service as an on-going legacy developed from earlier traditions. In popular culture, Rambo has returned to the theaters in the Fall of 2019, this time; however, in *Rambo: Last Blood*, he fights for his previously unknown family near his childhood home. Rambo, who will again be played by Sylvester Stallone, demonstrates that the stereotypes (savage, fierce, killer) of the Native veteran continues into the present.

Native Literature also featured in Chapter 4, continues to reference Vietnam, although in more nuanced ways. Tommy Orange's Pulitzer Prize-nominated book, *There There*, powerfully exposes the experiences of urban Native Americans. Orange's novel included a variety of characters that articulated the complexities of being Native in the twenty-first century. One of the constant features in *There There* is the inclusion of the powwow, the drum, and Native music. Similar to chapter 5's discussion of Gerald Vizenor's survivance and powwow music as a continuation of Native culture, characters in Orange's novel continue to overcome a variety of odds. Like many returning Native

veterans, these characters turn to culture for their survivance. Thomas Frank, a character struggling with alcohol addiction, turns to the drum, unknowingly finding himself, stated:

High-voiced wailing and howled harmonies that screamed through the boom of that big drum. Old songs that sang to the old sadness you always kept as close as skin without meaning to. The word *triumph* blipped in your head then. What was it doing there? You never used that word. This was what it sounded like to make it through these hundreds of American years, to sing through them. This was the sound of pain forgetting itself in song.<sup>443</sup>

The feeling Frank described was something that many Native veterans felt and encountered when they returned home to their communities. Veteran's songs were no doubt prevalent and a part of those drum group meetings at urban Indian Centers, reservations, powwows, and recording studios throughout the United States. Veteran's songs and Native music, in other words, helped Native veterans, even if briefly, forget their pain and connect with their ancestors who fought for centuries before them.

Importantly, Orange drives home the importance of military service to land and finding home:

Plenty of us came by choice, to start over, to make money, or for a new experience. Some of us came to cities to escape the reservation. We stayed after fighting in the Second World War. After Vietnam too. We stayed because the city sounds like a war, and you can't leave a war once you've been, you can only keep it at bay—which is easier when you can see and hear it near you, that fast metal, that constant firing around you, cars up and down the streets and freeways like bullets. The quiet of the reservation, the side-of-the-highway towns, rural communities, that kind of silence just makes the sound of your brain on fire that much more pronounced.<sup>444</sup>

Native people, Orange asserts, came and stayed in urban areas and cities for a variety of reasons. Nevertheless, Native people, whether or not through military service, fought and

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<sup>443</sup> Orange, *There There*, 212.

<sup>444</sup> Tommy Orange, *There There* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018), 9.

continue to fight for their multifaceted reasons including, in many cases, their unceded homelands.

**“Our People have served.”**

In a 2014 interview, Dennis W. Rucker, a Vietnam and Gulf War veteran, stated, “Our People have served.” He continued, “I just want to remind people that our Yankton Sioux have been involved in every war. Without the help of Code Talkers, we might say *Guten morgen*.”<sup>445</sup> Earlier in the interview, Rucker discussed his role as a veteran among his People. One of those roles included serving as a resource for Native veterans returning home from war. Rucker specified a story with a Native woman who would be leaving for Afghanistan. As a veteran and cultural advisor, Rucker guided the young woman through an inipi or sweat lodge, providing her with a traditional medicine bag and a Yankton Sioux Flag to protect her during her service in Afghanistan. Rucker reminded the young woman about her grandfather and father were both veterans. She would probably see, he emphasized, horrific things during the war. When she returned home, she would receive an eagle feather to indicate her service towards the land and her People. As he acknowledged, “That eagle feather that you’re going to wear is to tell people that you are a warrior. If you go to different tribes or a different place and you see that person with the eagle feather on, you ask him [or her] for help. Because that’s what he [or she] does, he [or she] will help people.” As Rucker reiterated, “that’s what they used to do a long time ago. That you go to that man and he will help you. And he [or she] won’t expect anything of it. That’s what it signifies, to help people.”<sup>446</sup> After the story about the young woman, Rucker repeated,

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<sup>445</sup> Dennis W. Rucker, interviewed by Dr. Samuel Herley and John Little, 2 Feb 2014, American Indian Research Project. *Guten morgen* means “Good morning” in German.

<sup>446</sup> Rucker interview.

“We’re a forgiving people and this is the only country that we know . . . and that’s the reason that I joined the service.”<sup>447</sup> In the heart of his words, Rucker established Native military service as a continuation of the protection of the land and the People, the only land and place that he or she or any Native veteran will know.

This dissertation has prioritized the voices of Lakota and Dakota veterans, who were among the more than 42,000 Native Americans that service in Vietnam. That number constituted a mere 1.6 percent of all United States troops sent to Vietnam at a time when Native people made up less than one percent of the population. At least 232 Native American soldiers' names are on the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C., most of which were listed as killed in action or missing in action. Native Americans from approximately 30 American states and one from Canada were included on the Vietnam Wall. South Dakota had a total of 24 Native Americans killed during Vietnam. Based on the last names as well as hometowns listed for the deceased, it is likely that all of the South Dakota Native Americans were Lakota, Dakota, or both. Because the armed voices did not specify or ask tribal affiliation, it becomes difficult to determine. North Dakota, Minnesota, and Nebraska totaled nine deceased Native soldiers, a number even more difficult to break down because those states contained multiple non-Lakota and Dakota tribes. Several states with Native populations suffered higher death rates of Native soldiers during including Oklahoma (37 deaths), New Mexico (35 deaths), and Arizona (33 deaths).<sup>448</sup> Again, the lack of specifics from the military and federal government makes it difficult to decipher tribal affiliations.

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<sup>447</sup> Rucker interview.

<sup>448</sup> Mark St. Pierre, *Of Uncommon Birth: Dakota Sons in Vietnam* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 287-304.

Native veterans continue to emulate the traditions created by their grandfathers, fathers, mothers, uncles, aunties, brothers, and cousins but the reasons, as articulated in this dissertation, are immense and complex. This can be seen in a variety of forms, from Native American literature to the veteran's autobiography. It can also be heard in the singing of veterans and honor songs before rodeo's in Mission, South Dakota or at the Denver March Powwow in Denver, Colorado. As articulated in the oral interviews, many veterans struggled with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, survivor's guilt, and a host of other ailments, including cancer from Agent Orange, from the Vietnam War. Some as Jim Northrup indicated never really returned home mentally from the frontlines, living out the rest of their lives in trauma from the war.

Despite these death totals, and at times the obvious impacts of PTSD among Native Vietnam veterans, Native Americans continue to serve in high numbers. In a 2015, Huffington Post article, Kevin Gover, Director of the National Museum of the American Indian, urged Americans to support the creation of the National Native American Veterans Memorial.<sup>449</sup> As of 2012, according to Gover, there were more than 22,000 Native Americans and Alaskan Natives on active duty. Gover cited the 2010 Census, which classified at least 150,000 Native veterans that would have included World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, as well as other twentieth and twenty-first century engagements.<sup>450</sup> The large numbers of Native American veterans and the massive number of active duty Native soldiers no doubt encouraged the general public to support the creation of the national memorial. As documented throughout this dissertation, it was the

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<sup>449</sup> Kevin Gover, "American Indians Serve in the U.S. Military in Great Numbers Than Any Ethnic Group and Have Since the Revolution," *Huffington Post*, May 22, 2015 ([https://www.huffpost.com/entry/american-indians-serve-in-the-us-military\\_b\\_7417854](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/american-indians-serve-in-the-us-military_b_7417854)), 2

<sup>450</sup> Gover, "American Indians Serve," 2.

Native veterans themselves who ultimately forced the United States to finally recognize their service.

At the 2019 opening ceremony of the South Dakota Indian Education Summit in Pierre, South Dakota, Whitney Rencountre, the emcee of the event and a member of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, asked participants to remove any headwear and stand for the opening honor song. The opening song, sung by the Wakinyan Maza Singers, was a veteran's honor song likely dating back to World War I. As the sound of the drum reverberated across the main hall in the Ramkota Conference Center, more than two hundred Native and non-Native educators rose to their feet. Halfway through the song, Rencountre quietly asserted over the drumming and singing, "My friends, this song is sung to remember veterans of the past, present, and future."<sup>451</sup> The theme for the 2019 summit in Lakota was *Thókátakiya ówanžila unyáŋpi*, translated as "moving forward together." By recognizing the Native veterans now serving as educators in the room, Rencountre actively participated in the summit theme of moving forward together.

After morning panels that consisted of topics ranging from Oceti Sakowin principles to Lakota video game design, and culturally responsive practices, summit participants returned to the main hall for lunch. Rencountre again greeted the educators and passed the microphone to Duane Hollow Horn Bear for a prayer. Hollow Horn Bear, a Rosebud Sioux Vietnam veteran, requested guests to stand and remove headgear before praying out loud in Lakota. After the prayer, Hollow Horn Bear, in English, acknowledged the dedication and service of the educators in attendance, who like Native veterans, serve Native American youth in South Dakota. Without them, Hollow Horn Bear, reiterated, it

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<sup>451</sup> Opening Ceremony at the South Dakota Indian Education Summit, Pierre, South Dakota, September 23, 2019. The author attended this event and witnessed this interaction in person.

would not be possible for Native youth to take the next steps in bettering their own lives and that of their communities and reservations. Rencountre took back the microphone and announced that elders and veterans would be the first to get in line for the buffet-style meal, jokingly defining the term elder as 65 years and up.

Hollow Horn Bear epitomized the importance of Native veterans in the present. His words extended to the service of the teachers in the audience, some of whom were Native veterans, but many were not. Native military service as demonstrated by Hollow Horn Bear comes in many forms. For a majority of the twentieth century, that only included military service in the United States Army; however, service has always been for the protection of their people, community, culture, and survival. These educators, although not serving on the battlefield, serve Native youth ensuring that future generations continue traditions, culture, and history. As the present looks to the past, this dissertation has promoted Native military service not only as warfare but rather something that connects them to earlier and future generations. The Vietnam generation has replaced their heroes and leaders, many of which were World War I, World War II, and Korean War veterans that have passed on, to serve as a model for future military service. Like World War I, the commitment to serve in the military continued and rapidly changed throughout Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The concept of *akíçhita* will continue to be redeployed for later generations to include new notions of military service but also as water protectors, cultural bearers, and leaders in language revitalization. It is important to never forget where those origins began but also to see them as part of the present.

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