DoD honors culture, contributions of Native Americans

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STAFF WRITER

For more than 200 years, Native Americans have contributed their fighting spirit and warrior ethos to help the American military forces conquer their enemies, from the War of 1812 to present day.

During World War II, Native Americans were instrumental to the success of U.S. battles by serving as code talkers, or "Windtalkers," and by sending and receiving messages using a code that was nearly impossible for enemies to decipher.

In light of these and countless other contributions made by Native Americans to the U.S. military, and in the tradition of recognizing diversity throughout the Marine Corps, the Department of Defense has designated November as American Indian/Alaskan Native Heritage Month.

To celebrate, the Tri-Command Committee has scheduled a luncheon at the Four Winds Club, from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. Nov. 19, which will feature singing and dancing performed by traditional and fancy dancers. The buffet-style luncheon will include Native American-style food. All are invited to attend the event.

Although only .1 percent of the Marine Corps is comprised of Native Americans, it is recognized historically that Native Americans have the highest record of service per capita when compared to other ethnic groups, according to the DoD.

"In every war the U.S. has had a part in, there have been Native Americans fighting alongside, whether fighting each other or the enemy."
- Sgt. Joseph Jordan, member of the Seminole tribe

With such small numbers, it is easy for people to have misconceptions about the culture, and even make jokes about people they know nothing about, said Sgt. Joseph Jordan, Starlite Range coach and a member of the Seminole tribe.

"A lot of people don't understand Native Americans, their culture or religious ways, so people might joke about it," said Jordan, who is also a descendent of the Lumbee, Cherokee, Creek and Catabwa tribes. "Sometimes I kind of feel lost because there are not many Native Americans in the Marine Corps."

Jordan said it is important to recognize this diverse group of people, whose significant contributions made an impact on most every war Americans have participated in.

"In every war the U.S. has had a part in, there have been Native Americans fighting alongside, whether fighting each other or the enemy," said Jordan, who explained that during the War of 1812, Indians fought for both sides as auxiliary troops in the Civil War.

In earlier years, many Native Americans lied about their heritage in order to get a job because many businesses would not hire Native Americans, said Jordan.

"In a lot of places, Native Americans would claim to be Spanish or Irish because of all the racism," he said.

However, his heritage never stopped Jordan from being proud of where he came from.

"When I was young, my mom always told me to be proud of my heritage," he said. "So, I began finding out about my culture, and that's what made me proud."

Special to The Boot

Navajo code talkers serve with a Marine Signal Unit, in the South Pacific, 1943. Five other tribes also used their languages to help the Allied effort throughout the war.

Native Americans have come a long way and have since become an integral part of the military and society as a whole.

"They are a lot more educated and have better jobs," he said. "A lot of Native Americans also play a part in NASA. The first Native American to go into space was from the Chikasaw tribe."

Historical milestones like this as well as an overview of some of the customs of Native Americans will be covered during the presentation,.

Jordan encourages everyone to attend the observance, which will give attendees knowledge of who Native Americans really are.

"Everyone should come out and learn about the culture and its rich heritage," he said. "It will be a learning experience – they'll have a better mindset about who Native Americans are."

For tickets, contact 228-2647.

Tri-Command wishes happy holidays with stress-free ideas

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The holiday season can be a time full of joy, cheer, parties and family gatherings, but, for many people, it is a time of self-evaluation, loneliness, reflection on past failures and anxiety about an uncertain future.

These feelings can breed stress and lead to many personally destructive actions such as increased consumption of alcohol and unwise financial decisions. Both of which can lead to suicidal thoughts, according to the National Mental Health Association.

"Stress is about how we think, how we feel and how we act," said Crystal Dilliard, certified health promotions director for Marine Corps Community Services – South Carolina. "The holidays are a very stressful time of year. People are busier, and there is an increased financial burden. Stress is also elevated when people find themselves separated from their loved ones."

Dilliard, who is a registered nurse, acknowledged that the high-level of stress that accompany the holidays do not mean that everyone is going to be depressed and have suicidal thoughts, but the Tri-Command offers many programs to help those who do.

Along with command sponsored Professional Military Education that address the physical, mental and spiritual health of Tri-Command personnel throughout the holiday season, Semper Fit Health Promotions offers guidance and a referral program to Marines and sailors who face mounting holiday related problems.

"A Marine is not going to come forward and say, 'I'm lonely,'" said Gayle Wierzbicki, drug demand reduction coordinator for the Tri-Command/ Eastern Recruiting Region. "The individual commands need to know who is going to need to be away for the holidays and who is not – and who is going to need support."

Wierzbicki said that she would like to see an "Adopt-a-Marine" program that provides Marines who cannot make it home a place to spend the holidays in a family atmosphere.

"There is a large number of people who suffer holiday depression caused by loneliness, financial strain and stress," said Wierzbicki. "The Tri-Command has many programs in place to help. Marines should know there are plenty of people in place to assist them."

If you find yourself growing overwhelmed with the pressures of the holiday season, a good first step toward relief can be a visit to the National Mental Health Association Web site. It offers many simple, yet helpful, solutions to coping with stress and depression during the holiday season:

- Keep expectations for the holiday season manageable. Try to set realistic goals for yourself. Pace yourself. Organize your time. Make a list and prioritize the important activities. Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Do not put entire focus on just one day (such as Thanksgiving Day) — remember it is a season of holiday sentiment, and activities can be spread out to lessen stress and increase enjoyment.
- Remember the holiday season does not banish reasons for feeling sad or lonely. There is room for these feelings, even if you choose not to express them.
- Leave "yesteryear" in the past and look toward the future. Life brings changes. Each season is different and can be enjoyed individually. Do not set yourself up in comparing today with the "good ol' days."
- Do something for someone else: Try volunteering some time to help others.
- Enjoy activities that are free: Such as driving around to look at holiday decorations; going window-shopping without buying; making a snowman with children.
- Be aware that excessive drinking will only increase your feelings of depression.
- Try something new: Celebrate the holidays in a new way.
- Spend time with supportive and caring people: Reach out and make new friends or contact someone you have not heard from for a while.
- Save time for yourself: Recharge your batteries. Let others share responsibility of activities.

For more information on dealing with holiday stress, visit the National Mental Health Association Web site at *www.nmha.org*. For local assistance with problems associated with holiday stress, call Semper Fit Health Promotions at 228-7010. Units interested in a brief on holiday stress and the dangers that can manifest from it, can call Wierzbicki at 228-2552.

Are You Stressed?

Take this test and find out.

Rate yourself on each question on a scale of 1 -5. (1 being always, and 5 being never)

1. I eat at least one hot, balanced meal a day.
2. I get seven to eight hours of sleep at least four nights a week.
3. I give and receive affection regularly.
4. I have at least one relative within 50 miles, on whom I can rely.
5. I exercise to the point of perspiration at least twice a week.
6. I limit myself to less than half a pack of cigarettes a day.
7. I take fewer than five alcoholic drinks a week.
8. I am the appropriate weight for me height.
9. I have an income adequate to meet basic expenses.
10. I get strength from my religious beliefs.
11. I regularly attend club or social activities.
12. I have a network of friends and acquaintances.
13. I have one or more friends to confide in about personal matters.
14. I am in good health (including eye-sight, hearing, teeth).
15. I am able to speak openly about my feelings when angry or worried.
16. I have regular conversations with the people I live with about domestic issues - for example, chores and money.
17. I do something fun at least once a week.
18. I am able to organize my time effectively.
19. I drink fewer than three cups of coffee (or other caffeine-rich drinks) a day.
20. I have some quiet time for myself during the day.

To get your score, add up the figures and subtract 20. A score below 10 indicates excellent resistance to stress. A score over 30 indicates some vulnerability to stress, and you are seriously vulnerable if your score is over 50.