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GENERAL SURVEY OF NATIVE AMERICAN PARTICIPATION IN THE VIETNAM WAR

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
Department of History

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Abstract

Native American participation during the Vietnam War is a subject woefully understudied, as whole, with a majority of the historiography consisting of one man's work. This general survey of Native American/Indian/Indigenous American participation in the Vietnam War seeks to expand the current understanding of the experiences of Native Americans servicemen and women during the Vietnam era, with special focus paid to Native Servicemen stationed in West Germany and the views of non-Native servicemen towards their Native counterparts. This research shows that some of the more ubiquitous features in prior scholarship on the topic, such as ceremonies meant to send off and welcome back returning warriors, may be less common than previously thought. It also shows that discrimination faced by soldiers varied based on where they were stationed, opening up a new area of study for future research.

Keywords: Vietnam War, 1960s, Native American, West Germany

Chapter One: Historiography and Methodology

From 1955 to 1975, the United States of America was involved in the Second Indochina War, better known to Americans as the Vietnam War. The first American ground forces arrived on March 8th, 1965, and the war was one part of the United States' policy of containment. A total of 2.5 million American men and women worked to stop the spread of communism in a country on the other side of the world from the United States, and 58,000 did not return home.[1] Among the soldiers serving, estimates indicate roughly 42,000 Native Americans served during the Vietnam War period.[2] These men and women served their country at a rate disproportionate to their population numbers and, in doing so, suffered a large number of injuries that followed them for the rest of their lives;[3] injuries received from enemy forces, of course, but also due to the roles they were assigned in the military or due to their exposure to chemicals such as Agent Orange. It is also possible that the numbers of indigenous soldiers are higher than the official records show, as the category of "Native American" is surprisingly flexible;[4] the list of federally recognized tribes does not include all the Indigenous tribes within the United States.

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[1] Department of Defense. "Vietnam War U.S. Military Fatal Casualty Statistics." National Archives and Records Administration, National Archives and Records Administration, 29 Apr. 2008, www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics.

[2] Christian G. Appy, Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 18.
National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, Maribel Aponte, Tom Garin, Dorothy Glasgow, Tamara Lee, Earl Newsome III, Eddie Thomas, and Barbara Ward, Minority Veterans Report § (2017). https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Minority_Veterans_Report.pdf. 14.

[3] Holm, Tom. Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War. University of Texas Press, 1996, 18-19.

[4] I say it is possible, as I am unable to verify how the official sources came about this number. In Tom Holm's 2017 article, "*Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls* Revisited" published in *Wicazo Sa Review* Vol. 32, No. 1, Dr. Holm says that the 42,000 number that I and all other sources use originate from the Bureau of Indian Affairs and was reported on a tribe-by-tribe basis, but does not provide a citation; I am inclined to trust him regardless, as he has done significant work with Veteran Affairs in regards to Vietnam Veterans. If this is the source of the number, this would mean that the number is missing all non-federally recognized tribes, as non-federally recognized tribes are less likely to work with the BIA. Of course, there is no way to gather an exact number of participants; the closest one could get is a mixture of self-identification and official records of soldiers which, even if possible to achieve, has a chance of being artificially inflated and thus bogged down by false claims to either race or service.

Research into Native American participation in the Vietnam War is relatively small when compared to both the research done for other minority groups during the time period and to that done for Native Americans serving in World War II.[5] This paper seeks to expand the research regarding Indigenous participation in the Vietnam War, both within Vietnam and in East Germany. This is achieved through oral histories, either pre-existing and author conducted, and involving both Native and Non-Native soldiers. Along with this, I offer a few trails both for other researchers to follow and how I located interviews relating to Indigenous soldiers in archives that otherwise do not have obvious trails to follow.

Indigenous Americans who volunteered largely did so in an effort to follow in the footsteps of family members who previously served or out of a patriotic duty to the United States, a choice that can be difficult to understand when looking at the historical treatment of Native Americans by the American Government. Despite the drive to follow tradition and to fulfill patriotic duties, Native American men and women were subjected to racism in a variety of forms, regardless of what branch of the military they represented. Some of the most common were cases of Native soldiers being given the role of walking point or being at the front of their unit and thereby more exposed, under a misplaced belief that they were better suited for the job by virtue of their race, likely the cause of their disproportionate injuries, along with nicknames such as "Chief" being given to them. The outlier in these cases, however, come with an

[5] For African Americans participation in Vietnam, see *Brotherhood in Combat* by Jeremy P. Maxwell, *War! What Is it Good For?* By Kimberley L. Phillips, *Black Sailor, White Navy* by John Darrell Sherwood and *The African American Experience in Vietnam* by James E. Westheider. For Latino Americans, please see *They Answered the Call* by Gil Dominguez and *"I'm Not Gonna Die in This Place": Manliness, Identity and Survival of Mexican American Vietnam Prisoners of War* by Juan David Coronado. Asian Americans in the Vietnam War are similarly understudied based on my research. For Native Americans in World War II, most research focuses on the Navajo Code Talkers. Please see *World War II and the American Indian* by Kenneth William Townsend, *The First Code Talkers* by William C. Meadows, along with *Serving Their Country* by Paul C. Rosier.

examination of those stationed in East Germany, who experienced a different form of discrimination from their compatriots who were stationed in Vietnam.

For the purposes of this paper, Native American refers to anyone who self-identifies as such, a similar approach as what Tom Holm took in his 2000 book *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls* on the same topic. This approach was chosen as it avoids excluding people who are part of non-federally recognized tribes. It is possible that non-Native soldiers have been included in this category. Still, the risk was necessary, and I could not verify the enrollment of every Native soldier whose experience I found recorded. Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islander people groups were not included in this paper, as this is exclusively an examination of North American Indigenous people groups. Along with this, Native American, Indian, and Indigenous soldiers will all be used interchangeably throughout the paper, as all three are commonly accepted terms by Native Americans. All soldiers who do not identify as Native American are referred to as non-Native soldiers, as in most cases, there is no record of their race. However, when it is possible, the information is included.

The historiography is surprisingly small, particularly when compared to the literature on other racial groups that fought during the war, such as African Americans.[6] This is not to say that texts on the subject are non-existent as some, such as the Tom Holm book, do exist and focus exclusively on Vietnam. Others, such as Paul C. Rosier's *Serving Their Country,* take a broader approach where multiple wars are examined to provide an overarching view of Indigenous participation in U.S. conflicts. There also are cases of books such as Daniel M. Cobb's *Native Activism in Cold War America* that chose to ignore the role the Vietnam War played in

[6] For African Americans participation in Vietnam, see *Brotherhood in Combat* by Jeremy P. Maxwell, *War! What Is it Good For?* By Kimberley L. Phillips, *Black Sailor, White Navy* by John Darrell Sherwood and *The African American Experience in Vietnam* by James E. Westheider.

motivating Indigenous activism at home, in favor of looking at the historical treatment of Native Americans as motivation alone for the actions taken by the American Indian Movement. And while I will not focus heavily on the work or the category as a whole in this paper, I would like to spend a limited amount of time discussing some of the shortcomings of the approach. Finally, a not-insignificant number of texts on the topic are memoirs or texts published by and/or written for non-academics showing that there is, at the very least, a market demand for books on the topic.

I will initially focus on the only monograph published that focuses exclusively on Native American participation in the Vietnam War, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War,* written by Tom Holm, was originally published in 1996. Holm is himself an Indigenous Vietnam veteran and has worked extensively with the topic. The work, written using the oral histories collected by Holm and his assistants along with various government documents, focuses on the experiences of Indigenous veterans before, during, and after the war, with special focus being given to the ways young soldiers were prepared to go off to war and reintegrated into society once they returned as part of a culture of Indigenous warfare. While he does spend an amount of time looking at prior American wars that Indigenous soldiers fought in, it is just necessary background information that he quickly moves past.

The book opens the claim that American society was, and is, unprepared to help with the emotional trauma of returning soldiers but that Indigenous groups more readily absorbed their veterans through the use of traditional ceremonies designed to send off and welcome back tribal members.[7] This focus on the ubiquity of the going away and homecoming ceremony involving

[7] Holm, Tom. *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War*. University of Texas Press, 1996, 19,187-194.

medicine men is not one that I encountered. I only found one case of a ceremony involving a medicine man and in a separate case the soldier I interviewed felt completely unsupported by his tribe immediately before and after his return.[8] Holm also discusses the necessity of such traditions given that the resources available for soldiers, such as Veteran Affairs, were often unavailable to Indigenous soldiers through no fault of their own. While Holm focuses on wars that preceded Vietnam, and in the ways Native American warfare practices have changed due to interactions with Euro-American warfare, his primary concern with examining the topics is to illustrate some of the driving forces behind *why* Native Americans would choose to enlist in the military forces of the United States.

Through an examination of the experiences of Indigenous soldiers, he also finds records of non-Native soldiers giving their Indigenous counterparts the nickname "Chief" and the practice of having Native Americans lead the way for their unit, or walk point, a job which put Indigenous soldiers in a position where they would be more likely to be shot; my research has found this to be true and may be more insidious than what Holm's research suggests.

There are some likely reasons for the differences in what Holm and I found, primarily among them being the methods that we utilized in identifying the service members used in our writing. Holm gathered his subjects primarily through events such as the National Vietnam Veteran Pow-Wow[9] while my subjects were primarily gathered through personal connections with the Cherokee tribe of Oklahoma and through general Vietnam Veteran oral history archives. This could indicate that the sources Holm utilized were more active in their tribes and Indigenous culture as a whole and those who were physically able to make it to events. If people

[8] James Nealson, In-Person Interview to Author, Nealson's Residence, October 5th, 2022.
[9] Holm, Tom. Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War. University of Texas Press, 1996, pg 12.

had moved away from their tribe and culture, physically or metaphorically, Holm's survey would not have included them as they were not there to participate. Along with this, Holm stresses that the emphasis placed on the idea of the warrior varied from tribe to tribe, meaning cultural practices related to returning warriors/soldiers varied as well.[10]

Concurrent with the examination of the reintegration of returning soldiers, Holm pays particular attention to the experiences of Indigenous participation in the Second World War and how those experiences affected the next generation's desire to either enlist or accept their fate over attempting to dodge their draft, a topic which I sadly was unable to explore over the course of this research. Holm also draws attention to the ways in which tribal languages were lost, with the children of World War Two veterans being raised more often in Indian or public schools, a trend that occurred due to efforts by the U.S. government to integrate Native Americans into the larger American culture. In his research, Holm found that Indian Vietnam veterans were dissatisfied with the education they received in these schools and felt a disassociation with the larger prosperity of America in the 1950s and 1960s.[11] However, despite what he found, Indigenous veterans "remained strongly tribal, or at least "Indian," in outlook."[12]

Holm has published two additional articles, one in 1995 and one in 2017, which cover much of the same ground as previous work, though both have some unique key points. In his 1995 article, "PTSD in Native American Vietnam Veterans: A Reassessment," Holm draws an explicit connection between the low educational and high unemployment levels of Indigenous soldiers, which made them ideal recruits for the U.S. military.[13] Other than this revelation, the

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[10] Ibid, 36-7.
[11] Ibid, 112.
[12] Ibid, 117.
[13] Holm, Tom. "PTSD in Native American Vietnam Veterans: A Reassessment." Wicazo Sa Review 11, no. 2 (1995): 83–86. https://doi.org/10.2307/1409105. 83.

article is largely a more condensed version of his later book. His 2017 article, however, "*Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls* Revisited: The Research, the Findings, and Some Observations of Recent Native Veteran Readjustment," does address the issue I have with Holm's survey. In it, he writes:

> At first, we decided that we really could not conduct a random survey of Native American Vietnam Veterans simply because we had no way of determining what would have been a proper sample. … The RCS Native American group developed a questionnaire that was, unfortunately, no more and no less than a sample of convenience. There was no grand total of Native Vietnam veterans from which a random sampling could be derived. We really did not know how many Indian Vietnam veterans there actually were.[14]

The previously stated issues with the survey number are also compounded by the discovery of non-Native Vietnam veterans being included with the samples, which prompted Holm to shift his methodology from a random sampling of people claiming to be in the category to a new methodology, one where his team interviewed only attendees at powwows and similar Native gatherings. Holm also utilized his own personal contacts to complete his final work.[15] Holm again defends his decision to terminate data collection at 170 veterans due to the responses becoming overly repetitive. Holm believed that this repetition signaled the collection was representative of the larger, Indigenous Vietnam veterans' group.[16]

Finally, Holm discusses some of the conclusions of his research through the course of this topic, particularly that Indigenous soldiers primarily came from extended, rural, tight-knit

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[14] 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): 118–28. https://doi.org/10.5749/wicazosareview.32.1.0118. 120.

[15] Ibid.

[16] I personally did not find his sample size to be an issue. While it does represent only .4% of the 42,000 number, it could easily be representative of the 42,000 that were active in their communities after the war, and as I found some similar trends in my significantly smaller group of only eight, primarily rural, seems probable that a not insignificant amount of the non-urban Indigenous population would have at least part of their experiences represented within Holm's work.

families that valued tribal traditions and, therefore, had additional ways of dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These alternative methods possibly had a more positive outcome than the strategies used by the dominant society to help, while urban Indians lacked these connections to aid in their reintegration into society. Alongside these conclusions, the research did prompt two specific events that Holm mentions in his 2017 article. The first outcome was the establishment of Camp Chaparral, a four-day retreat on the Yakama Reservation for both veterans and VA caregivers, which is still running at the time of writing. This event serves two purposes. First, as a therapeutic space for veterans and also a place where VA caregivers can learn about Indigenous methods of healing. The second outcome was legislation introduced in 1990 to extend the National Vietnam Veteran Readjustment Study to include both Native Americans and Native Hawai'ians, introduced by Senator Spark Matsunaga (D-Hawaii). Holm feels that his work has been largely ignored by Veteran Affairs, despite the numerous changes it has brought about, because his work has not been noted as a key prompt for the changes.[17]

Regardless its shortcomings Holm's original work is fundamental to both my research and to any other scholar working with Indigenous participation in Vietnam. I find it surprising that Holm is the only scholar to have written a book that focuses exclusively on the topic of the Native American experience in the Vietnam War in the twenty years since his work was published. Additionally, it is interesting to note that no monograph has come along to build upon the work. This indicates that there is still a need to investigate this avenue of research more fully.

[17] 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): 118–28. https://doi.org/10.5749/wicazosareview.32.1.0118, 122.

Due to the age of the subjects, there is a need to conduct this research in an expedient manner to ensure valuable history is not lost in their passing.

However, several articles have been released on the topic, such as John A. Little's article, "Between Cultures: Sioux Warriors and the Vietnam War" (2015), which focuses exclusively on Native Americans in Vietnam. The article covers similar ground to Holm's work but chooses to focus specifically on the firsthand accounts of Lakota people over the non-tribe specific approach that Holm utilized. Little argues that Lakota served in Vietnam to "emulate traditional expectations established by previous generations of Sioux warriors and veterans" that he believes "developed not only from earlier generations' pre- and postcontact [sic] defensive survival measures but also from latter generations that served in American wars such as World War I, World War II, and the Korean War."[18] Additionally, his work provides a rather brief historiography of Indigenous participation in all wars predating the war in Vietnam. Little believes that the reason for the lack of comprehensive study on Native American participation in Vietnam beyond Holm's work is due, in part to "the historical emphasis on Native Americans as conquered enemies of the expanding Republic."[19]

Little also found that soldiers served for many of the same reasons both Holm and I found. Many soldiers stated that they joined to follow the warrior tradition of their tribe. Other reasons included the often reported need to find a way to support their family.[20] A common occurrence documented by the writer was the common practice of Native soldiers being expected to take point. Additionally, research documents the subjects mentioning non-Native soldiers who regularly excused their drunken behavior as acceptable because they claimed to have a

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[18] Little, John A. " "Between Cultures: Sioux Warriors and the Vietnam War." Great Plains Quarterly 35, no. 4 (2015): 357–75. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44685112. 357.
[19] Ibid, 358.
[20] Ibid, 372.

"Cherokee" grandmother.[21] This work does not dig deeper into these claims, but I would have appreciated to see some examination of the occurrences. While the claims of a Cherokee grandmother or the Indian princess ancestor are documented, even a small exploration of the topic would have been appreciated. Little's article closes with a discussion related to the use of ceremonies in welcoming home returning soldiers. It appears that much of his work is retreading Holm's theories about how these ceremonies helped soldiers dealing with PTSD reintegrate into society.[22]

Little mentions something that I also found while reading first-hand accounts of Indigenous soldiers who had attended the Indian boarding schools, particularly the similarities the soldiers found between their time spent in the military with their time spent at the schools.[23] In Little's interview with Basil Heath, a Yankton Sioux, the soldier mentions how the schools prepared him for serving, which made the transition between military and civilian life easier than his compatriots who had not attended such schools.[24] Along with the preparation that Indigenous Boarding schools may have given these men is the ever-present idea of the Native American super soldier who was better suited to the job of walking point because of their race. This is a concept that both Holm and I found in our research and that I will be discussed further later in this paper.

Paul C. Rosier's 2009 work, *Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century,* however, chooses to ignore the processes of reintegration that Holm and Little discuss in favor of looking exclusively at *why* Native Americans would choose to serve in the United States Military. Rosier, a historian of Indigenous history, falls in

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[21] Ibid, 268.
[22] Ibid, 363, 370-371.
[23] Ibid 364
[24] Ibid.

line with most other historians in the study of Indigenous participation in American wars by choosing to cover most of the major wars. His work covers a majority of the wars the United States was involved in during the twentieth century, instead of focusing exclusively on the Vietnam War. He further deviates from the approach scholars have used in relation to the topic of Indigenous participation in Vietnam with his choice to forego primary reliance on oral history interviews.

Rosier's book works to examine the position Indigenous Americans hold in the United States' history of imperialism, which he hopes helps correct what he labels a central fallacy of American history: that the United States is, in fact, an imperial power.[25] Rosier also sets out a simple premise that "the United States practiced imperialism since its founding, that America as a particular geography was constructed by force rather than conceived by ideological notions such as manifest destiny, and that its imperial expansion in what became the American West shaped U.S. soldiers' and officials' subsequent engagement with new peoples on new global frontiers -- "Indian country" migrating westward to the Philippines and beyond."[26] As you will see, I have found this insight especially valuable.

Rosier's work starts with the early 1900s, by examining the ways in which the United States government worked to create and maintain the lines between what was considered "civilized" and "savage." His book has a particular focus on the ways in which these "lines" affected the ways that Indigenous Americans interacted with the Bureau of Indian Affairs; a theme he develops throughout the book. He also examined how communism affected the United States government's interaction with Native Americans and the ways in which the reservation

[25] Rosier, Paul C. Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century. Harvard University Press, 2012, Pages 2-3.
[26] Ibid, 3.

system was fought for throughout the 20th century. Rosier then moves to the topics of war with his primary focus being World War II and Vietnam, while moving back to examine the home front problems Native Americans were experiencing. His work takes a broad view, jumping from debates related to a Four Points Program for Native Americans, then to an examination of the experiences of soldiers overseas, to worries of things such as the health effects of uranium mining on Navajo miners. Rosier discovers repeated efforts to conflate Indians with foreign enemies that he believes are fueled by domestic struggles with Native American rights, along with efforts by Native soldiers to prove themselves willing to follow the treaties signed by their ancestors even if the U.S. Government is not willing to do so themselves as a motivating factor for their enlistment.[27]

Rosier's book is why I have issues with books such as Daniel M. Cobb's *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (2009), which chooses to focus exclusively on the activists on the home front during the Cold War. Cobb, a professor of American history, uses a variety of first-hand accounts from activists and official documentation to examine the ways in which the American Indian Activism movement was formed and worked towards their goal of Indigenous sovereignty. However, he ignores some of the motivating factors that led some young Indigenous people to be willing to take more extreme actions, such as occupying the Bureau of Indian Affairs Building. In particular, a number of Indigenous soldiers were motivated to start protesting their treatment at home following their time in Vietnam because of the similarities they saw between the treatment of their enemies abroad and their own lives at home.[28] While historical motivation is important, it is necessary to look at why the Cold War

[27] LITTLE, JOHN A. "Between Cultures: Sioux Warriors and the Vietnam War." Great Plains Quarterly 35, no. 4 (2015): 357–75. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44685112. 278, 282

[28] For texts that focus more on this idea, please see Woody Kipp's *Viet Cong at Wounded Knee* (2008), Paul C. Rosier's chapter on the Cold War in *Serving Their Country* (2009), and Troy Johnson's article in

proved to be the boiling point for Indigenous activists' choice to react as they did at Alcatraz and Wounded Knee.

The fact of not enough texts examining the motivations of Native American Vietnam Veterans is not from lack of sources or lack of interest. There are several non-academic sources that either come from veterans themselves writing their stories and publishing them or from non-academics that sought to tackle the question of Indigenous participation in the Vietnam War. These texts are fairly easy to locate through a basic search of online booksellers such as Amazon. The works range from self-published books to non-academic works distributed by large publishing houses. To illustrate this point, I have picked three texts: *Viet Cong at Wounded Knee* (2008) by Woody Kipp, a memoir published by the University of Nebraska Press; *From Warriors to Soldiers* (2010) by Gary Robins and Phil Lucas, published by Tribal Eye Productions; and *Why We Serve* (2020) by Alexandra N. Harris and Mark Hirsch, published by Smithsonian Books.

First, despite being published through a university press, *Viet Cong at Wounded Knee: The Trail of a Blackfeet Activist* illustrates the simple fact that the lack of research into Indigenous participation in Vietnam is not due to the lack of sources existing or an unwillingness of Indigenous Veterans to talk about their experiences. The book is, as mentioned before, a memoir largely of Blackfoot veteran Woody Kipp's activism after the war. As such, it will not be given significant focus as a source in this paper. I want to bring attention to the similarities Indigenous Americans felt between themselves and the Vietnamese once again. This concept was felt so strongly by Kipp that he chose to title his book after his realization. He is the "Viet

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Wicazo Sa Review, "The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Roots of American Indian Activism" (1994), along with Tom LaBlanc's interview that is part of the University of Nebraska-Omaha's American Indian Oral History Project, which available online.

Cong" at Wounded Knee. And beyond Kipp's published work, there are other veterans willing to discuss their time serving, as seen in this paper. It is simply necessary that researchers speak to the community that is waiting to speak to them.

The audience for work related to this topic exists beyond academics, as shown by both *From Warriors to Soldiers: A History of American Indian Service in the U.S. Military* and *Why We Serve: Native Americans in the United States Armed Forces.* Both books focus on several wars in which Native Americans served. These books also relied heavily on Tom Holm's work for their sections on Vietnam, which is easy to understand based on the ubiquity of the work. These books tend to present the same discussion as Holm, as they focus on the duty Native Americans felt and the reasons for serving in the United States military.

The only real difference between these two texts is that Alexandra Harris and Mark Hirsch authored a significantly more professional book with *Why We Serve.* And it makes sense why that would be the case. Both Harris and Hirsch are themselves historians, and this book was created for the Smithsonian, with all the resources that would entail. Harris and Hirsch's work relies more on oral histories than *From Warriors to Soldiers* as well- though that could be by virtue of the history of the latter. While *Why We Serve* was always meant to be a book, *From Warriors to Soldiers* was, according to Gary Robinson, originally meant to be a documentary series for television. The series was not produced, in part due to the death of co-author Phil Lucas.[29] The lack of oral histories in this work may be due to the untimely death of Lucas and a desire to release the work in some form, even if not as originally envisioned.

The topic of tours of duty in West Germany during the Vietnam era has been entirely ignored in the historiography as well. However, if we want to understand the military service of

[29] Robinson, Gary, and Phil Lucas. From Warriors to Soldiers: A History of American Indian Service in the United States Military. New York, NY: iUniverse, Inc., 2010, xiii.

Native Americans in a comprehensive way, service in West Germany should be examined. The lack of acknowledgment is even evident in Holm's comprehensive history of Indigenous participation in the Vietnam War. While the topic of active combat zones and the veterans stationed within their borders is certainly a more interesting topic, West Germany is, for reasons I will discuss in chapter two, an area in dire need of study. Drafted and enlisted Indigenous soldiers alike were stationed here during their service, and by focusing on only the active combat zone, scholars are painting an incomplete picture of Indigenous experiences. The soldiers stationed in West Germany, according to my research, were not subjected to some of the more ubiquitous forms of discrimination that those in Vietnam faced; they were not sent out on point searching for the communist threats in the forests of West Germany nor did they experience the nickname of Chief from their fellow soldiers.

Additionally, current scholarship does not separate Native Americans based on the federal status of their tribal affiliation. Federal recognition of tribes opens the door for Native Americans to receive services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), along with a guarantee of tribal sovereignty. Of the roughly 900 Native American tribes that exist within the U.S. borders, only 567 are recognized.[30] The process of recognition is a multi-year long and expensive effort that requires tribes to conform to seven pieces of criteria. However, this process became standardized only relatively recently in 1978; during the Vietnam Era, the process was informal and based largely on congressional action or administrative decisions. It was entirely possible for a tribe to become *un*recognized on the recommendation of a local BIA branch-something which did happen to the Samish Indian Nation after their name was removed from the

[30] Valerie Lambert. "The Big Black Box of Indian Country: The Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Federal-Indian Relationship." American Indian Quarterly 40, no. 4 (2016): 333–63. https://doi.org/10.5250/amerindiquar.40.4.0333. 336.

1969 list of Northwest tribes with which the agency worked.[31] It seems probable that there would be a marked difference in the way those from recognized and unrecognized would feel about their service during the Vietnam War.

Problems with Sources

In my research, sources used in this paper were found in both academic archives and through conducting oral history interviews. The need to conduct the interviews was necessary for several reasons, chief among them being that most oral history archives I located did not collect any racial background information for their participants. This lack of information does make sense based on the creation dates of the collections utilized in my research. Until 2020, oral history interviews were required to follow federal Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines related to research involving human subjects,[32] and in order to be compliant with said guidelines, researchers are required to avoid taking any unnecessary demographic data for their subjects if it was unrelated to their project.[33] Both the Library of Congress collection on Indigenous veterans and the collections run by tribal groups had demographic data included as they were part of what their project was focusing on. However, a number of the archives I accessed were primarily general collections. As such, the racial demographic information is non-existent in the meta-data-

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[31] Sweeney, Rosemary. "Federal Acknowledgement of Indian Tribes: Current Bia Interpretations of the Federal Criteria for Acknowledgment with Respect to Several Northwest Tribes." American Indian Law Review 26, no. 2 (2001): 203–31. https://doi.org/10.2307/20070681. 210.
The Samish Indian Nation eventually regained their recognized status in 1996. For more information on the process of tribal recognition, I would recommend Valerie Lambert's 2016 article "The Big Black Box of Indian Country" and Frank W. Porter III's "In Search of Recognition."

[32] Oral History Association. "Information about IRBs," July 2020. Accessed March 31, 2023. https://oralhistory.org/information-about-irbs/. It is important to note that despite being considered exempt from IRB regulation under 45 CFR 46.102, section I1, this project has been submitted for IRB review and is compliant with any applicable guidelines.

[33] For all information related to the guidelines prior oral history projects would have been expected to follow, please see 45 CFR 46.102 which can be found at https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-45/subtitle-A/subchapter-A/part-46/subpart-A/section-46.102

though there are some references to subjects' race within their interviews. It likely was decided that recording such data would lead them to run afoul of IRB guidelines and was left out, even if the information was freely offered by the subjects. The downside of this decision is that for any researcher to find information on any specific racial group's participation in Vietnam, it becomes necessary to comb through entire archives for subjects.

There are some tools that archives can apply to collections of this nature so that researchers can more efficiently utilize them. One of the easiest options is to add a tagging system that includes relevant terms to the online archive, at the very least. Providing this type of tool would increase the usability for all levels of researchers, and the accessibility of historical data is something that we should all strive for. Projects such as digital tagging and cataloging a collection would require time, effort, and money. A creative collection director can harness the power of the public in completing the task. Volunteer-based tagging systems can work, as demonstrated by museums such as the Gilcrease in Tulsa, Oklahoma. This museum utilizes a combination of paid and volunteer-based work to provide tags for their online collections, which allows more people to find items in their collections that otherwise only have been found if the searcher knew they existed.

In my search to identify the Indigenous soldiers among general collections, it became necessary to develop a system that seemed most likely to return the most accurate results. This effort required a rather time-consuming process of opening the transcripts of every interview that exists and searching for key terms within them. The key terms utilized were "Indian," "Native," "Indigenous," and "tribes." The first three terms were selected as they cover the most common identifiers for Native Americans used by Americans from the 1960s into the modern day,[34] and

[34] This, of course, excludes the term First Nations as the term, despite being the preferred term for Canadian Indigenous people, has only recently seen significant use by people from the United States,

the final term, "tribe(s)," was chosen in the hope of identifying any passing references that otherwise would have been missed by the first three. Several tribal names were included once these terms were identified as efficient terms for archive searches (Cherokee, Navajo, Choctaw, and Comanche). I made the decision to refrain from using these terms in the initial search as the collections covered wide geographic areas. As such, the search would require the use of approximately 900 tribal names,[35] both federally recognized and non-federally recognized. Utilization of these additional phrases would have potentially bloated the time of this project to a degree that would be untenable for its scope. Omissions, such as these additional search phrases, could potentially negatively impact collection data returns. Still, I believe the primary search terms provide a broad enough terminology that this is unlikely based on the scope of this research project.

Upon the completion of this search, it was then necessary to separate the interviews of possible Indigenous soldiers from cases of non-Native soldiers speaking about someone else, cases related to the subject of "Indian Country," and stories related to playing "cowboys and Indians." As previously mentioned, any mention of the interviewee's Indigenous heritage led me to place them within the Indigenous soldier's category. I selected to focus on the accounts of Indigenous soldiers, as they can best speak to their experiences and motivations, but a minor number of non-Indigenous accounts have been included in this study as well. These accounts were chosen to be representative of larger trends related to non-Native soldiers' views on both

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and is still relatively uncommon. As most of my archival sources were produced no later than the 2010s, it seemed *extremely* unlikely that this term would have helped me identify any other cases of Indigenous participation in Vietnam, and as such was left out.

[35] This number also does not include smaller tribal groups that someone may have been identified with such as a case discussed later in this paper where Rodney Elmer Marrufo, Jr., is referred to as both Kashia and Pomo, with the former being a specific group within the latter, which when included would easily raise the number to over 1,000 unique terms to be searched along with possible misspellings in the transcriptions- Kashia vs Cashia, for example.

fellow soldiers and their enemies, as some also saw the similarities between Native Americans and the Vietnamese. It is important to note here that in cases that produced results related to Native soldiers in Non-Native accounts, the Indigenous soldiers largely are nameless men, even when other fellow soldiers' names are remembered and documented.

Interview subjects were identified exclusively through personal connections with Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma tribal members. As such, Cherokees are more represented than any other tribe, with three of the nine Native veterans I discuss here belonging to this tribe. The other remaining cases are members of different tribes from various parts of the United States. All subjects are members of federally recognized tribes, with many soldiers identifying as members of multiple tribes. The state of Oklahoma is disproportionately represented due to the relation of numerous indigenous tribes to the state during the days of western expansion. Finally, in regard to military branches, the US Army is similarly over-represented in this study, with six of the subjects being part of the Army, two being Marines, and one case of an Indigenous man serving in the Navy.

Despite the differences in tribes, branches, and homes, there are some similarities that all Native American Vietnam veterans share. Most respondents stated they were motivated to join for patriotic reasons or to follow in the family's footsteps in serving in the US military, though their feelings after the war do vary. While the experiences of it were not identical for all soldiers, they all experienced some form of mistreatment at the hands of their non-Native compatriots. These compatriots regularly relied on stereotypes of Native Americans as better suited for scouting by virtue of their race and drew on their ideas of their role in the US imperialistic project by casting themselves as the cowboys in the cowboys and Indians story they felt themselves in. There also is a difference in the form this discrimination took for the soldiers that

varied based on where they were stationed- with West Germany having some of the most overt cases of what I would largely label as ‘polite’ discrimination.

Conclusion

Indigenous participation in the Vietnam War is a topic that is woefully understudied. As of 2023, there is only one comprehensive text, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls* by Tom Holm, which is over twenty years old at the time of writing. While there are books that cover a broader focus of Indigenous participation in multiple wars, such as Paul Rosier’s *Serving Their Country*, the Vietnam War is just one small piece of a larger commentary. These works are not proper substitutes for scholarship that looks deeper and more exclusively at Vietnam. While some articles have been published to tackle the topic, which is particularly difficult due to the racial group at the center of the topic, there are still blind spots within the scholarship. Particularly, as John A. Little suggests in his article, “Between Cultures”, there is a marked need for histories that take an even smaller scope of a single tribe’s participation. In addition, the experiences of Native soldiers who were stationed in West Germany are entirely missing from the scholarship currently available, and with this absence, our understanding of Indigenous participation is far from complete.

Finally, there does seem to be a desire from Native veterans to tell their stories, as seen in the interviews conducted in this research project and with autobiographies and small, self-published works. When paired with non-academic press, popular histories such as *Why We Serve* show that this is a topic that interests both historians and the public alike. It is just up to the scholars of Indigenous Americans and the Vietnam War stepping in to fill the gap.

This paper seeks to add a bit more to the picture that already exists regarding Indigenous participation in the Vietnam War, along with the feeling of non-Native soldiers toward Indigeneity and their Native compatriots. This contribution is accomplished through a combination of pre-existing and author conducted interviews with both Native and Non-Native soldiers. In the process, features that are treated as common in other sources, such as the traditional ceremonies for warriors, were revealed to possibly be less common than previously thought. The processes revealed that West Germany is still an understudied subject, while also examining the ways in which Native Americans existed in accounts told by others.

Chapter Two: Indigenous Soldiers

This chapter moves from the background information and onto the first-hand accounts of those fighting in Vietnam and is split into three sections. The first section presents various non-Indigenous accounts. This section takes a broad-strokes approach to establish an overarching view of Indigeneity in accounts by non-Natives. These accounts presented here focus largely on members of the U.S. Army, primarily men, but there are a handful of accounts that break this mold. In these account, Native Americans are often an idea over living people serving alongside them.

Beyond section one, we move to the accounts of Native soldiers. This portion of the chapter is split into two subcategories. The first subcategory contains general stories of Indigenous soldiers, serving in Vietnam and typically as members of the Army. Other branches of the military are represented in this section, but at a greatly reduced status. These soldiers have what could best be described as the "standard" story of Indigenous participation in the war, one where they are common servicemen fighting on the front lines. The second subset, and final portion of chapter two focuses specifically on four soldiers with at least a portion of their service time in West Germany. This division is necessary due to the differences in the form of discrimination and the reason for the behavior of those responsible for the discrimination, with the discrimination in West Germany being at time more similar to the dynamics on the home front.

Indigeneity in Non-Native Accounts

To understand the environment that Native American soldiers were facing, it is necessary to examine how they were treated in interviews provided by non-Native interviewees.

These interviews are the most common references to Native Americans from a purely statistical standpoint. In this category, Indigenous people are overwhelmingly nameless entities when they are acknowledged as existing. Largely, Native Americans are presented as an idea over a living human. Numerous mentions of the similarities between the Indian Wars and Vietnam are repeated ad nauseam. Additionally, a similar number of statements mention the similarities between the Vietnamese people and Native Americans.

The comparison between the Indian Wars and the Vietnam War is not an unreasonable comparison. Both Indigenous forces in the various Indian Wars and the Vietnamese Communist forces made extensive use of guerrilla warfare tactics. Interestingly, this comparison was not exclusive to those who were part of the US forces in Vietnam. Nguyen Khan, Chief of Staff for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), said much the same of his enemy's forces and declared that "the best Indian is a dead Indian," a phrase repeated by some American soldiers.[36] Though unlike the Native Americans fighting against the United States, the Vietnamese Communists were quickly able to replace one lost man with ten new ones. This was accomplished either with people already loyal to the cause or by recruiting family members.[37]

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[36] Interview with General Nguyen Khanh, OH0065. 27 September 2000, General Khanh Nguyen Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=OH0065, Accessed 31 Mar 2023. Transcript page 15.
Interview with Harry Pearce, OH0327. 09 December 2003, Mr. Harry A Pearce Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=OH0327, Accessed 31 Mar 2023. Transcript 1 page 46.

[37] Interview with General Nguyen Khanh, OH0065. 27 September 2000, General Khanh Nguyen Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=OH0065, Accessed 31 Mar 2023. Transcript page 15.

Along with this comparison, I found cases of non-Native soldiers casting themselves and their ARVN allies as the heroic cowboys in the war.[38] However, in all the documented cases, there was only one soldier who made the connection between Native Americans, the Vietnamese, and the cost of imperialist aggression: Calixto Cabrera. In Cabrera's interview, he shares a story of a documentary he saw, in which a Native American mother is killed while holding her baby in her arms, and after the mother was dead, the child tried to nurse from her. He then states:

> That is exactly what I saw, what JC did. It's such a heartbreak. … Yeah, it's such a heartbreak that a baby is trying to nurse off his dead mother and that, in both cases, it's the American Army killing an unarmed woman. An unarmed anybody just bothers me, but an unarmed woman with a baby in her hands? That one stayed with me.[39]

Many soldiers made the connection between the fighting styles of the two enemies the United States faced, but Cabrera is the only one who drew a connection to the human cost of the expansion Rosier documented.[40] The reasoning for his realization of the connection could be due to the isolation he felt as a Puerto Rican soldier who moved to New York as a child compared to someone who spent their whole life in one of the fifty United States or the District of Columbia. Cabrera also chose to join the Vietnam Veterans Against the War after his service, another feature that sets him apart from his fellow service members making the comparison.[41]

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[38] Interview with Bert Kurland, OH0174. 1 January 2001, Bert Kurland Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=OH0174, Accessed 03 Nov 2023.Transcript page 76.

[39] Interview with Calixto Cabrera, OH0424. 03 May 2005, Calixto Cabrera, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=OH0424, Accessed 31 Mar 2023. Transcript page 82

[40] Rosier, Paul C. Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century. Harvard University Press, 2012, 3-5.

[41] Interview with Calixto Cabrera, OH0424. 03 May 2005, Calixto Cabrera, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University,

In addition to the comparison between the Vietnamese Communists and Indigenous Americans, some soldiers, such as Neil Couch of the 173rd Airborne Division, believed that the only way to fight their enemies and win was to bring in more Native soldiers to act as scouts. In fact, Couch believed this idea to such a degree that he claims that the losses the U.S. suffered early in the war could have been prevented if the "Indian Trackers" had been brought in. [42] A member of the Red Cross, Jennifer Young, indicated that she believed that the United States Marine Corps chose to institute a policy of Native Americans walking point, or leading their unit into potential combat, whenever possible.[43] I was unable to verify this practice as official policy. However, this claim is common enough to be believable based on statements encountered in my research, such as the account by Tom LaBlanc, an Indigenous Marine.[44] If this process was common practice, it demonstrates a willful disregard for Indigenous life, and if it is just a false claim, it shows that it was a common enough occurrence that there was a need to explain why they were seeing it. A more in-depth analysis of this claim will be presented later in this chapter.

As I discussed earlier, when Native American soldiers are discovered in the general archives, a pattern becomes increasingly clear. The Indigenous soldiers these men served alongside were largely nameless entities given epithets that drew explicit attention to their race, such as their tribe's name or even just "the Indian Guy;" These racial epithets are common

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https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=OH0424, Accessed 31 Mar 2023. Transcript pages 2, 199.

[42] Ibid. Transcript page 33

[43] Jennifer Young Collection (1645) Finding Aid, Jennifer Young Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=16450000000, Accessed 31 Mar 2023. Transcript part 3, page 21.

[44] American Indian Oral History: Interview with Tom LaBlanc, Interview Date: 1976 January 12, Date Digitized: 1/23/2017, MSS0018_au047. American Indian Oral History and Omaha Folklore Project Oral History Collection, MSS-0018. University of Nebraska at Omaha Archives & Special Collections. This also can be found in Tom Holm's book, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls*, pages 137-38, though his research does not seem to detect it being standard practice for Marines, likely due to his research's focus on Infantry.

enough both Holm and Little found similar cases in their own research.[45] However, the most common of these racially charged nicknames is Chief. In fact, the nickname was so common that I found at least one case where there were two Indian soldiers from different units working in proximity while both being named Chief by their fellow soldiers. Dewitt Roberts, a non-Native soldier, tells the story of an argument between two Native American soldiers related to a third non-native soldier. The account is particularly difficult to follow due to Roberts recalling the names of only the non-Native soldiers. For clarity's sake, I have elected to include the numbers One and Two after Chief, with Chief One being the Indigenous soldier who served in the same unit as Roberts.

The argument between the two Indigenous men was over Robert's "Indian Buddy," Chief One, hitting Sergeant Billy Joe Parish, a non-Native soldier. This prompted the second soldier, also known as Chief, a senior soldier, to take Chief One outside to talk about how ashamed Chief Two was to be the same race as him. It was a relatively minor incident in the grand scheme of things, and likely would have been forgotten by all involved if not for Sgt. Parrish and the second Chief's death the following day. The death hit Robert's "Indian Buddy" particularly hard, and he mentioned his regret that he would never be able to apologize for the fight– a fact that Roberts seemingly repeated to a number of people to try and halt any conflicts before they went too far.[46]

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[45] Holm, Tom. *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War*. University of Texas Press, 1996, pg 90.
Little, John A. " "Between Cultures: Sioux Warriors and the Vietnam War." Great Plains Quarterly 35, no. 4 (2015): 357–75. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44685112. 364, 367.

[46] Interview with Dewitt Roberts, OH0128. 19 June 2000, Dewitt Roberts Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=OH0128, Accessed 31 Mar 2023. Transcript page 54.
There is something here about Native Americans being used as examples for proper behavior, and I am sure there is a term for it that I, personally, do not know. The two Chiefs feel much the same as Pochahontas and Iron Eyes Cody's old environmentalism commercials, even if the Chiefs were real

There is a hint of cruel irony here about the fact that Roberts repeated the story so many times that records of the story exist, but there is no proper way of identifying two of the three soldiers involved in the altercation. It is possible that I did locate the name of the "Chief" who died in Roberts' story through my research. There is a record of a Rodney Elmer Marrufo, Jr. of the 66th Infantry Platoon, whose death is linked with a Sergeant Billy Joe Parrish on the Virtual Wall Memorial.[47] On the same online page, Marrufo is listed as a member of the Cashia Tribe, or more accurately, the Kashia Band of Pomo Indians from California. There are minor issues with this method of identification. First, the sergeant in Roberts' story has his name spelled as Parish over Parrish, which could be due to transcription error or the transcriber being unable to verify the correct spelling. Additionally, Billy Joe Parish does not appear on the memorial, while Billy Joe Parrish is present.[48] If the former is a separate man who passed during the skirmish, it would be extremely unlikely that his name would not be included. The other issue is that in Roberts' telling of the story, it is implied that both "Chief" and Parish's body were found quickly.[49] The Memorial, on the other hand, mentions that Parrish's body was not found till the following day.[50] This difference is easy enough to explain away, as the interview was conducted in 2000. As this

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people. They do not exist as real, named and fleshed out individuals in Roberts' story- instead they are just two Indian guys who fought with each other and the survivor regretted it, so should *you* fight with your fellow soldier when one of you could die tomorrow?

[47] "SP4 Rodney Elmer Marrufo, Jr, Stewarts Point, CA." The Virtual Wall® Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, 3 Oct. 2016,http://www.virtualwall.org/dm/MarrufoRE01a.htm.
"SFC Billy Joe Parrish, Tacoma, WA." The Virtual Wall® Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, 3 Oct. 2016, www.virtualwall.org/dp/ParrishBJ01a.htm.

[48] "SFC Billy Joe Parrish, Tacoma, WA." The Virtual Wall® Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, 3 Oct. 2016, www.virtualwall.org/dp/ParrishBJ01a.htm.

[49] Interview with Dewitt Roberts, OH0128. 19 June 2000, Dewitt Roberts Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=OH0128, Accessed 31 Mar 2023. Transcript page 53

[50] "SFC Billy Joe Parrish, Tacoma, WA." The Virtual Wall® Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall, 3 Oct. 2016, www.virtualwall.org/dp/ParrishBJ01a.htm.

roughly thirty years after the death would have occurred, it is possible Roberts misremembered the timeline of events, or they assumed Parrish's death before the body was found.

It is also noteworthy that, in Roberts' story, the surviving Native soldier refers to the deceased Native American soldier as "Chief,"-[51] showing that there was an acceptance of the racialized nickname among Indigenous soldiers. The use of racially charged nicknames and the Native soldier's feelings towards them will be touched upon again later in the paper.

Finally, there is also a similar comparison that appears regarding Native Americans and the indigenous people of Vietnam, known under the umbrella term of Montagnard. These comparisons, however, are rather brief mentions of soldiers encountering the Montagnard people and finding the group is treated by the Vietnamese government(s) in much the same way as Native Americans were treated by the United States.[52] The most surprising of these comparisons comes from Green Beret John Buessler, who mentioned that when the Montagnards joined the war efforts, they always chose to fight for the United States and never Vietnam. He explained that this was because they did not see themselves as Vietnamese, and as such, why would they fight for that military?[53] It is curious to see this comparison, particularly while considering Indigenous Americans' participation in the Vietnam War. Both are people groups that, to

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[51] Interview with Dewitt Roberts, OH0128. 19 June 2000, Dewitt Roberts Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=OH0128, Accessed 31 Mar 2023. Transcript page 53-54

[52] Interview with Franklin Jones, OH0130. 17 April 2002, Franklin Jones Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=OH0130, Accessed 31 Mar 2023. Transcript page 29.
Interview with Michael Horton, OH0039. 26 February 1990, Michael Horton Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=OH0039, Accessed 03 Nov 2023. Transcript page 31

[53] Interview with John Buesseler, OH0016. 26 January 2001, John Buesseler Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=OH0016, Accessed 31 Mar 2023. Transcript page 7.

outsiders, seem so similar to each other in the situation, while in reality, they would feel so different about serving in the armies of their respective imperial power – a difference that Buessler himself does not seem to notice, or if he does, he chooses to refrain from commenting on the revelation.

The reason for the difference is likely due to more recent treatment of Native Americans and Montagnards by their respective governments. While Native Americans of the 1950s and 60s were far from being treated well by the United States government, the South Vietnam government were actively pursuing policies that the Montagnard people groups believed sought to either fully absorb them into mainstream culture without regards for their own practices or kill them off entirely. This was in sharp contrast to both their treatment under the French colonial regime or the North Vietnam government, who both allowed the groups to exist separate from larger Vietnamese culture.[54]

Overall, Native Americans in Non-Native accounts come in two distinct depictions. First, as an old, but defeated, enemy of the United States that at one point stood in the way of the country's westward expansion. The 'ghost' of this old enemy still existed in a new enemy's strategy, and this reality required American soldiers to play the role of cowboy once again.[55] Second, when Native American soldiers do exist within these interviews, they are either only mentioned as necessary for Non-Native forces to fight and win against the Vietnamese forces as their race made them better able to track, but not so important that their non-Native compatriots

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[54] Fall, Bernard B. "The Second Indochina War." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 41, no. 1 (1965): 59–73. https://doi.org/10.2307/2611949. 69.

[55] While not an idea I expand on here, Paul Rosier discusses in his book, *Serving Their Country*, that the reservation system within the United States was seen as a hotbed for communism. It seems particularly interesting that the comparison between Native Americans and the Vietnamese Communists popped up, with one being perceived as communist and the other being an actual communist group. Of course all the comparisons are related, at least explicitly, to the fighting styles both groups employed and not to any politics of them.

actually attempted to remember their names over simply providing them a nickname that drew explicit attention to their race.

Indigenous Soldier's Participation

Moving from Natives presented in Non-Native accounts to Native soldier's accounts, the reasons these men, and one woman, chose to serve varied in much the same way as their non-native counterparts. Those who willingly enlisted did so to follow in the footsteps of other family members who served in prior wars, or to follow their patriotic spirit. Those who were drafted typically reported disillusionment with their service after the war. Despite their reasons for joining, the soldiers largely ended up playing particularly dangerous roles as one another, such as walking point. These soldiers best fit within the narrative of the standard Native American experiences that originates with Tom Holm's research, though there are a few key differences what I found, particularly regarding the ceremonies related to warriors leaving and returning.

While this paper is an examination of Native American participation during the Vietnam War, it is *not* an examination of only those soldiers who spent their service solely within the borders of the country of Vietnam. While a large number of the subjects in this paper served primarily in Vietnam, a particular focus is dedicated to four subjects who spent a portion of their time in West Germany. The experiences encountered by these four subjects while stationed in West Germany provide an interesting variation on the topic of Native American discrimination. Within this subject group, two members were exposed to instances of overt racism, and two experienced instances of sexism and homophobia.[56]

[56] I'd like to mention my pet theory on the topic of racism within the Library of Congress's collection of Native Americans in the US Armed Forces. In all the oral histories I used from this collection, the ones that they showcased on a page for Indigenous veterans of various American wars seem to downplay racism within the military, with Underwood's having the worst case of race based discrimination. While

Charles Chupco, a Creek man born in Wewoka, Oklahoma, joined the Navy in May 1960. He chose to join to follow in the footsteps of two of his uncles, one in the Navy and the other in the 82nd Airborne Division. His choice of military branch followed that of his Navy uncle, but additionally because he thought their uniforms looked better. His enlistment also provided the opportunity to avoid having to do basic training in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, where he was told his training would take place if he waited to be drafted. Instead, Chupco was sent to San Diego, California, for his basic training, which he found particularly easy to adjust to.[57]

Chupco and three other soldiers that will be discussed later (Charley Johnson, Harvey Philip Pratt, and Tecumseh Underwood), all attended government-run Indian Boarding Schools for at least a portion of their K-12 lives. Between the four men there were two schools named and a third unnamed, with Chupco and Johnson attending Chilocco Indian School in Newkirk, Oklahoma, Pratt attending Saint Patrick Indian Mission in Anadarko, Oklahoma, and Underwood not identifying the school he attended. In Chupco's opinion, basic training was no more difficult than his time at Chilocco.[58] The comparison between the two is sobering, because children should not experience an education that has any relation to military boot camp. It is commonly understood by all with a passing knowledge of military service that basic training is a grueling

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Charley Johnson Jr. does run into a racist soldier, he proceeds to move in with two roommates of different races and live in harmony. It is possible to get to other interviews, but they require visiting the general Veterans History Project Collection search and narrowing based on race, which I discovered purely by accident. I am a tiny bit suspicious that this collection was curated in a way that paints the U.S. Military in the best possible light, as it seems unlikely that only one of the soldiers experienced Indigenous racism. The subjects also seem to be model American soldiers, with Toni Rae King's family being multi-generational military and George England's (a veteran of the Korean War's) service being tied to a particularly important moment of the US Civil Rights movement in being part of the Unit who protected the Little Rock Nine.

[57] Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, Edmon Low Library, Oklahoma State University, Charles Sequoyah Lee Chupco, and Sarah Milligan. Charles Sequoyah Lee Chupco Collection. 1960. Personal Narrative. https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.111842/

[58] Ibid.

and soul-destroying endeavor to create a properly trained military force,[59] and while the average teenager may call high school soul-crushing, they likely would struggle to adjust to the fiercely regulated ways of the military, and especially with the rigors of boot camp.

Chupco's tour was quite similar to his non-Native counterparts in the Navy. His tour was largely spent in the Gulf of Vietnam, where he was responsible for conducting resupplies, along with a short assignment to a gunboat in 1971. Chupco's final assignment was in Saigon, where he helped with the control of the flow of traffic along the coast. While on the water, he was charged with keeping the ship's guns ready and manned while underway. Unlike some of his Army and Marine compatriots, he was not singled out for more dangerous jobs by virtue of his race. Along with this, he did run into several other Native soldiers serving in the Navy as well, but none were in the same unit. With the war in Saigon over, Chupco was sent home. He did not leave the military upon returning home. Chupco's decision to continue to serve for another twenty years demonstrates that his time serving was not wholly unpleasant.[60]

Harvey Phillip Pratt (enrolled member of Cheyenne & Arapaho tribes, also identifies as part Lakota), from El Reno, Oklahoma, however, is more similar to Chupco than Chupco's own fellow Alumni (who will be explored in the section on West Germany), as he similarly compares his time at Saint Patrick Indian Missions to his basic training to become a Marine. Pratt attended the school from ninth grade until his graduation. After he graduated, Pratt volunteered to serve, much to the chagrin of his family. His mother reacted to the news of her son's enlistment with what he labeled "the silent scream," with her mouth falling open and tears immediately coming

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[59] For information on the experiences of soldiers during basic training and the mental effects of it, please see DiRosa, Gia A., and Gerald F. Goodwin. "Moving Away from Hazing: The Example of Military Initial Entry Training." *AMA Journal of Ethics*, March 1, 2014.

[60] Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, Edmon Low Library, Oklahoma State University, Charles Sequoyah Lee Chupco, and Sarah Milligan. Charles Sequoyah Lee Chupco Collection. 1960. Personal Narrative. https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.111842/

to her eyes at the news.[61] He did not find out until later that the reaction was due to her younger brother's service in the U.S. Marines during the Second World War. Her brother had been declared Missing in Action (MIA) twice and wounded several times. Pratt's siblings similarly were not keen on his enlistment, but Pratt was unbothered by their worries. His family had always treated veterans with respect, and he believed that enlisting was the right thing to do as an American citizen.

Pratt traveled to San Diego for his basic training, where his mother's worries were quickly realized when his left arm was temporarily paralyzed due to a drill instructor's overzealous tightening of his rifle's strap.[62] He was sent back to headquarters for reassignment and to recover:

> They put me in the back of a dog catcher's pickup, with the wire cage in the back. They put me in there, and it was raining. And I'm sitting there, in the rain, with a paralyzed arm, and I'm thinking this is the worst thing that could ever happen. My left- I'm left-handed, my left arm is paralyzed, I'm in the rain. And they gave me my orders, … and I opened it up, to see what was in there, and it says Private Pratt is gonna be a good Marine. And that's what really kinda made me suck it up and say y'know I'm gonna be fine. They think I'm going to be a good Marine and that's what I want to be.[63]

Pratt recovered from this setback a month later and, on his return, had to restart his training on the rifle range, in part due to his new unit being one of the first issued of the new M14. He finished boot camp and made private first class despite troubles with his drill instructor at the time. He cites two things as key to his perseverance. First was his time spent at St. Patrick's, which had prepared him for a very regimented life before even setting foot in San Diego, and second, some childhood advice from his grandfather. Specifically, he mentions being taught to

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[61] Pratt, Harvey Phillip, Martin Earring, and National Museum Of The American Indian. Harvey Phillip Pratt Collection. 1963. Personal Narrative. https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.112851/.
[62] Ibid
[63] Ibid

always carry dry meat and a smooth rock with him- dry meat for food and a smooth rock to suck on to keep one's mouth from drying out. Pratt does not mention which side of the family this advice came from, as his mother and father were from separate tribes, but this advice might have originated as a survival mechanism when his family was relocated to Oklahoma. If the relocation experience were the driver of the advice, it likely would have been from his great-grandparents or great-great-grandparents passing it down based on dates Pratt gives for other members of his family and when the Cheyenne and Arapaho people were forcibly relocated.[64] It is possible it came from the Lakota part of his family, but it seems as if Pratt was not particularly close to them, as he specifically mentions growing up with a mix of Arapaho and Cheyenne language, and outside mentioning that he was part Lakota, he does not make any other references to that tribe.

During his time serving, Pratt did not serve alongside any other Native soldiers. He also did not mention an expectation that he would walk point as an Indigenous Marine, which would seemingly contradict what Young had claimed to be the standard practice. Instead, Pratt's assignment was primarily acting as a guard for the airship and base he was stationed at in Vietnam. However, there are a few key points that could temper Pratt's interview in determining the veracity of the "walking point" practice. For one, Pratt himself mentions that he was perceived as racially ambiguous by his fellow soldiers and was asked to clarify to his fellow Marines if he was Native American, Latino, or part black. Additionally, he left Vietnam in 1964[65]- four years prior to Young being in the country as part of the Red Cross. His time

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[64]Pratt, Harvey Phillip, Martin Earring, and National Museum Of The American Indian. *Harvey Phillip Pratt Collection.* 1963. Personal Narrative. https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.112851/.
Oklahoma Historical Society | OHS. "Timeline of Removal | Oklahoma Historical Society," n.d. https://www.okhistory.org/research/airemoval.

[65] Pratt, Harvey Phillip, Martin Earring, and National Museum Of The American Indian. *Harvey Phillip Pratt Collection.* 1963. Personal Narrative. https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.112851/.

stationed in Vietnam is also particularly early in the US involvement in relation to the number of troops in-country, as most of the US forces were not deployed until 1965, and, because of that fact, similarly predates the peak of US Marines involvement in the war. It seems exceedingly likely that the standard practices of the branch prior to the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August of 1964 are going to vary greatly from what they look like just four years later.[66]

To further illustrate this topic is the case of Tom LaBlanc (Lakota),[67] from Sisseton, South Dakota, another Indigenous Marine stationed in Vietnam during the war. While most of his interview with the American Indian Oral History Project focuses on his work as an activist and as the Assistant Director of the Minneapolis chapter of the American Indian Movement (AIM), there is a brief section where he speaks on his time serving. He does not say if he willingly enlisted or was drafted, but it seems likely he was drafted as he served for a very short amount of time and rather late in the war, with his service ending in 1970. LaBlanc is particularly critical of his time in the U.S. military, but during the interview, he says:

> Well, they said everybody was green. I knew to them I wasn't green. I see discrimination everywhere. I went to Vietnam, and I looked around at my company. There was about five or six Indians and we were all points. We were all the scouts because we had … I guess we could see and we could hear a little bit better. Discrimination, I don't know. I mean... the military was just totally a bureaucratic system, and tries to cheat everybody as a basis.[68]

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[66] For more information on U.S. Marines' participation in Vietnam, please see Marine Corps University. "Marines in Vietnam: 1954-1975," n.d. https://www.usmcu.edu/Research/Marine-Corps-History-Division/Brief-Histories/Marines-in-Vietnam-1954-1975/; Shulimson, Jack, United States. Marine Corps. History and Museums. U.S. Marines in Vietnam: The Landing and the Build-up, 1965, 1977. And Shulimson, Jack. U.S. Marines In Vietnam: The Defining Year, 1968. Pickle Partners Publishing, 2015. See also: Holm, Tom. *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War*. University of Texas Press, 1996, pg 137-138.

[67] The term Lakota has been used in place of Sioux, as it is the preferred term of many members of this tribe.

[68] American Indian Oral History: Interview with Tom LaBlanc, Interview Date: 1976 January 12, Date Digitized: 1/23/2017, MSS0018_au047. American Indian Oral History and Omaha Folklore Project Oral History Collection, MSS-0018. University of Nebraska at Omaha Archives & Special Collections.

LaBlanc's service aligns neatly with Jennifer Young's years with the Red Cross (November 1968-1969).[69] Young's claim of standard practice and LaBlanc's own experiences as an Indigenous Marine, it does seem possible that, at least for a few years in the late 1960s, the U.S. Marines were willing to purposely put the lives of Indigenous soldiers into higher risk situations based on superstitious beliefs. Considering the alternative explanation that Young was assuming based on what she saw around her, it is easy to see why someone would assume when Indigenous Marines were themselves keenly aware of what roles they were being given based on their race. Regardless of what LaBlanc was told about how he was going to be treated, as just another member of the Marines, he knew that he was still seen as a racial other.

LaBlanc was extremely critical of the U.S. Military, making explicit his beliefs that they would never admit to the massacres they committed during the Indian Wars, while also calling out the imperialism he saw in the world. LaBlanc called direct attention to the cyclical nature of what he saw, which drove him and other members of AIM to occupy the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) building in Washington, D.C. He and the other protesters did not want to be violent and militant, however, the group believed that the powers that be forced them to take this path:

> When we defended, stood up, and said "Hey, we have been peaceful. We have lived according to the treaties that we signed. We haven't fought to the point that we are now in a reactionary point of starting to react, being fed up with the frustration. It's getting to the point now of days, that the world, as they look at the Indian, here in America, the problems that we have. … The same problems that they are having in Angola, in the Middle East, that they had in Vietnam. It's over the land. … Whatever terms that you want to call it, they, same ingredients fits the recipe here, and that Indians, if we wanted to, could become the equivalent of any terrorists

[69] Jennifer Young Collection (1645) Finding Aid, *Jennifer Young Collection*, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=16450000000, Accessed 31 Mar 2023. Transcript part 3, page 21.

> throughout the world, any type of thing like that. We are not that type of people. We are gradually being forced into that type of situation…[70]

While being less politically motivated after the war when compared to LaBlanc, James Nealson (Cherokee) is similarly critical of his time in the U.S. Army. He was drafted in November of 1965 while living in Kansas and, like many drafted Americans, was not excited about the prospect of going across the ocean to be injured or even killed in a war that he felt was motivated by political reasons he did not agree with. Even the idea of following in the footsteps of his uncle, who had served in World War II, did not make him feel better about his service. In fact, once he was done with his basic training, he threatened to desert if he was not given at least a few days' leave to say goodbye to his family before he was shipped off, which was granted. Once Nealson was back from his leave, he soon found himself on a plane out of the United States to fight in a country he knew nothing about as part of a war he could not care less about.[71]

His time during the war was far from glamorous. Nealson, known to his squad mates as Rebel or Half breed, spent most of his time in the country away from the base. He largely walked around, looking for the enemy forces, but his unit was occasionally tasked with performing clean-up duty for other units that had been wiped out in battle, finding anything they could to send back home to the United States. It was not just the Vietnamese forces that concerned Nealson during his time in the country. Nealson was also constantly on edge around the African American soldiers from New York and Massachusetts, who he believed were determined to attack him and a friend in the unit for reasons he did not share. It is not my place to speculate on what caused the tension, and Nealson himself believes that none of his fellow soldiers cared

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[70] American Indian Oral History: Interview with Tom LaBlanc, Interview Date: 1976 January 12, Date Digitized: 1/23/2017, MSS0018_au047. American Indian Oral History and Omaha Folklore Project Oral History Collection, MSS-0018. University of Nebraska at Omaha Archives & Special Collections.
[71] James Nealson, In Person Interview to Author, Nealson's Residence, October 5th, 2022.

about race. However, such a claim seems extremely unlikely when he admitted to having the nickname “Half breed " due to his mixed indigenous and white heritage.[72]

Nealson’s hatred of the war did not decrease as his service continued, and he stressed during our interview that it never made sense to him why he needed to be there. He hated the Army, he was bad at taking orders, and once his tour of duty was over, he came home and suffered from depression from his time in Vietnam. Years later, he discovered several health issues with his heart, kidney, and lungs, which he and other Vietnam-era soldiers managed to trace back to their exposure to chemical pesticides used during the war, specifically the infamous Agent Orange.[73]

Agent Orange was a chemical mixture that gained its name from the fifty-five-gallon, orange-striped drums that it was stored in. The mixture was made of equal parts 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D) and 2,4,5-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4,5-T).[74] 2,4-D is a common herbicide still used within the United States to this day, with some debate from scientists over whether the chemical can be considered a carcinogen.[75] No such debate exists for

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[72] Ibid.
It seems likely the reason for the tension is based on how Nelson and his friend treated their fellow soldiers. Nelson himself gives the appearance of a good old boy of the South and is light skinned, while he described his friend as a gangbanger, which could easily explain why they ran into trouble with the African American soldiers from the North while they found the black soldier from the South agreeable - it was a difference in what the men were willing to put up with, or felt a need to put up with. Nelson also claimed in the interview that the black soldiers attempted to kill him and his friend one night but missed their shots, which if the story is true paints a telling picture of how bad the racial tension in the unit really was.

[73] Ibid.
Pratt, Harvey Phillip, Martin Earring, and National Museum Of The American Indian. Harvey Phillip Pratt Collection. 1963. Personal Narrative. https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.112851/.

[74] Uzych, Leo. “Agent Orange, the Vietnam War, and Lasting Health Effects.” Environmental Health Perspectives 95 (1991): 211–211. https://doi.org/10.2307/3431126.

[75] Ibrahim, M. A., G. G. Bond, T. A. Burke, P. Cole, F. N. Dost, P. E. Enterline, M. Gough, et al. “Weight of the Evidence on the Human Carcinogenicity of 2,4-D.” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 96 (1991): 213–22. https://doi.org/10.2307/3431234. The World Health Organization (WHO) does consider the pesticide to be a carcinogen regardless of what the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says. Even beyond the question of if this is a carcinogen, the chemical very much is not good for humans to be around, as there are cases of the chemical affecting male reproductive health.

2,4,5-T, however, and the use of the herbicide by the United States was halted entirely in 1979 due to the chemical's carcinogenic side effects, among other adverse health effects- a decision that came much too late for the soldiers exposed to the Agent Orange mixture.[76]

Alongside the health hazards that existed with just 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D alone, there also were claims of 2,4,5-T and possibly 2,4-D as well, being contaminated with Dioxins.[77] Dioxins, in layman's terms, are chemical compounds, likely introduced during the production process, [78]which are very stable, allowing them to retain their toxicity while accumulating in the environment. Additionally, dioxins dissolve extremely well in lipids (fatty acids) and poorly in water, meaning they are hard to dilute and easily absorbed by the human body. In short, the toxic and carcinogenic mix was possibly contaminated with other, also toxic chemicals, that easily built up in the body, and said mix saw widespread use throughout Vietnam.

In Nealson's case, he, along with other members of his squad, regularly stood in the Agent Orange sprayed from trucks that went by while out marching around Vietnam. All the gear issued to the average soldier created a miserably hot experience in Vietnam's climate. The soldiers believed the spray was a good way to cool off in the heat while unaware of the potential impact of the chemicals in use.[79] He did not realize until much later in his life the cost of that short relief. The effects of Agent Orange are not unique to Indigenous soldiers, or even U.S. Forces, but it does show a willingness from the high-ranking to risk the possible long-term health of Americans for short-term gains.

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[76] National Academies Press (US). "History of the Controversy Over the Use of Herbicides." Veterans and Agent Orange - NCBI Bookshelf, 1994. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK236351/#:~:text=The%20Environmental%20Protection%20Agency%20(EPA,States%20on%20February%2028%2C%201979.

[77] Uzych, Leo. "Agent Orange, the Vietnam War, and Lasting Health Effects." Environmental Health Perspectives 95 (1991): 211–211. https://doi.org/10.2307/3431126.

[78] Special thank you to Agata Kwasnik for providing an explanation of Dioxins in simple terms- without them, I would not have been able to understand what made them so dangerous.

[79] James Nealson, In Person Interview to Author, Nealson's Residence, October 5th, 2022.

As a whole, Indigenous servicemen stationed in Vietnam found themselves in active combat zones where their lives were put in further danger due to not only exposure to chemicals but due to fellow soldiers' beliefs in Indian Warriors. These beliefs had Native soldiers leading the way for their unit, because they were better fighters, better scouts, and even if though they were based on racist stereotypes, they place the soldiers in active harm. It did not matter if the soldier was drafted, or willingly volunteered, they all found themselves in danger due to their race. This research also showed that the going away ceremony that was a major focus of Tom Holm's work is less common than his work would lead people to believe.

Indigenous Soldiers in West Germany

Finally, we have the four cases of Indigenous soldiers being stationed in West Germany during Vietnam that I identified in my research. These four cases are separated from their compatriots stationed elsewhere as they faced a form of discrimination that was different, and in only one of the four cases is race explicitly labeled as a factor in it. While the soldiers stationed in Vietnam were more likely to be put in physically dangerous situations where emotions can run high, three of the four cases in West Germany take on a more "polite," largely non-physically violent form. The case that did take a violent turn, that of Larry "Mike" Childers, the difference in the reaction does have an explanation. Between these four cases, we can see cases of indigenous soldiers experiencing sexism, racism, and homophobia in a location that was relatively safe from the dangers of combat.

Toni Rae King (No Tribe Listed) was stationed primarily in the United States and Vietnam but did have a short stint stationed in West Germany.[80] King is unique among the

[80] Sugar, Erica, Toni Rae King, and Baltimore Va Medical Center. Toni Rae King Collection. 1967. Personal Narrative. https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.10709/.

records I identified of Indigenous participation during the war, as she is the only female soldier I found in pre-existing interview archives, and I was unable to find another female to interview during my own data-gathering time. It is possible (albeit unlikely), that out of the 265,000 American women who served during Vietnam,[81] she is the only Indigenous woman who served. The more likely explanation for King's interview being the only one I found is the hesitation female soldiers felt about sharing their stories with loved ones. This is compounded by the fact that Indigenous soldiers made up less than 1% of American forces across all branches.[82] In addition to her gender and Native American heritage, King is further set apart from other women who served as she enlisted and was given the assignment of an Army Intelligence Officer and not the job of a nurse, which made up a significant part of the demographic.[83]

King chose to enlist in the military for reasons like a number of the other soldiers discussed. She joined to follow in the footsteps of other members of her family who had served in previous wars, which she could trace back to her grandfather's enlisting in the Army during World War I. In fact, in preparation for her military service, she took part in her college's Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). King believed the war in Vietnam was a necessary

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In Spite of the fact King does not identify which tribe she is part of, I have elected to include her in this paper as she is part of the Library of Congress' collection of Indigenous Veterans' Oral Histories. As she makes direct reference to her grandfather serving as a sovereign soldier in WWI, I am willing to believe the LOC did their due diligence on her inclusion.

[81] Fact Sheet - The Vietnam Women's Memorial Project, Inc. - Fact Sheet on Vietnam Women Veterans, No Date, Folder 15, Box 01, Penni Evans Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. Accessed 16 Mar. 2023.
https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=19620115003
I have not found any other primary sources to back up the 265,000 number- however it seems likely that this is correct as it is the number used by Veteran Affairs (VA) when discussing women's participation in Vietnam.

[82] Ibid.
Holm, Tom. *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War*. University of Texas Press, 1996, pg. 20.

[83] Fact Sheet - The Vietnam Women's Memorial Project, Inc. - Fact Sheet on Vietnam Women Veterans, No Date, Folder 15, Box 01, Penni Evans Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University.

conflict, and that by serving, she was helping the Vietnamese people gain the freedoms she had in America. This idea puts her in stark contrast to people such as LaBlanc and Nealson. Before she could join, there was a small issue that had to be corrected before she was allowed to enlist; the draft board had decided that someone with the first name "Toni" was male and drafted King. King had to work to have the draft notice rescinded so that she could enlist as planned. King was able to get her discharge, and she quickly re-enlisted as part of the army.

Throughout her interview, King clearly presents her patriotic spirit and how important she felt her participation was. This was a family tradition she could trace back to her grandfather serving in World War II, and across multiple branches of the U.S. Military. In fact, this tradition was so important to King that she instilled the desire to continue it in her daughter who, at the time of King's interview, was about to enlist herself.[84] It might be due to this patriotic spirit that King largely avoids being too critical of her time in the military, instead focusing her time telling humorous anecdotes.

Beyond stories of her time in Vietnam, King dedicates one particular story to then President Lyndon B. Johnson. King was serving as the commissioned officer (CO) of her helicopter unit. She, along with the rest of her unit, awakened at 2:30 in the morning to fly to the Johnson ranch. They thought Johnson had suffered from a stroke, and they needed everyone ready. King and her crew were making calls alongside everyone else, trying to prepare for the President's death. They knew that people needed to be aware of what was happening and that the Vice President needed to be ready. Three hours passed, and Johnson's doctor came out of the President's room shaking his head. The doctor declared that the President was going to be fine; he had not suffered from a stroke, a heart attack, or any other serious issue. The night before,

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[84] Sugar, Erica, Toni Rae King, and Baltimore Va Medical Center. Toni Rae King Collection. 1967. Personal Narrative. https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.10709/.

they had had a large party at the Johnson ranch, and despite his doctor's warnings to avoid barbecue, Johnson had eaten himself sick. Despite their early morning and lack of sleep, King and her crew still flew with Johnson back to Washington just a few hours later.[85]

Her time in West Germany is the only time she is particularly critical of the U.S. Army's treatment of her and other female soldiers. Particularly, she mentions how, despite being a CO, she was rarely treated as such. Her subordinates would regularly treat her more like a younger sister. This behavior extended into social settings, such as a fellow officers following her into an officer's club in West Germany and only allowing her to drink soft drinks. "At times, it was very disheartening to have five or six guys on a flight crew who suddenly decided you were baby sister."[86] In spite of this behavior, she still considered them good guys, whom she dubbed the "Snoopy Crew," after the Snoopy stamps they put on their helicopter after every mission.[87]

King's military service was cut short after a crash during a mission in Vietnam. The helicopter, which was covered with Snoopy stamps due to their many successful missions, was destroyed. King was sent home as she could no longer serve with her injuries, which confined her to a wheelchair. This disability prevented King from accomplishing her goal of a long military career. As part of becoming the CO of her flight crew, King was required to return the helicopter in the same condition she received it, without any of the Snoopy stamps. Before her discharge, she received a tiny, toy helicopter from the general's wife. The top came with a note stating, "Since you couldn't return ours to us, we'd give you a little one to remember it by."[88] This toy remained on King's desk for years. Despite her injuries, King did not regret her time in the military, and urged others to serve so places such as Iraq and Afghanistan could be free.

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[85] Ibid
[86] Ibid
[87] Ibid
[88] Ibid

While King's time in West Germany is a relatively brief part of her interview, the same cannot be said of Tecumseh Nathaniel Underwood's (Seminole) service. Underwood spent both years of his service working radio maintenance exclusively within the borders of West Germany, despite his desire to be elsewhere. Underwood is also part of the group of Native American veterans who attended a government boarding school prior to his service. Unlike the Chilocco and St. Patrick alumnae, he was particularly troublesome to his instructors by refusing to speak English over Seminole, which led him to be expelled from the school multiple times.[89] Underwood was very proud of his heritage, so he regularly listed English as the foreign language he could speak.

His heritage was also what prompted his enlistment in the U.S. Military, though his reasoning was different from other soldiers who willingly enlisted. Underwood was unable to find any work in his home state of Oklahoma, as he could not find an employer willing to hire a Native American. He wanted to be able to support his mother and siblings, so he went with his only choice: the military. Underwood, however, did not leave by himself, as his departure coincided with the departure of several other young men from his church, the Native American Church. These men chose to willingly enlist over waiting to be drafted.

Before Underwood left, however, he was given a going away ceremony by a friend's family. This family was more active with traditional beliefs than Underwood's own family. The medicine man involved prepared him to become a proper warrior, and once the ceremony was completed, he was deemed ready to leave on his journey.[90] Underwood does not offer details on what the ceremony entailed, but a going away experience is well documented among Indigenous

[89] Library Of Congress, Tecumseh Nathaniel Underwood, and Jeanine Nault. Tecumseh Nathaniel Underwood Collection. 1963. Personal Narrative. https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.107900/.
[90] Ibid

soldiers of Vietnam and other wars.[91] As mentioned in chapter one, these ceremonies were some of the more focused elements of Holm's 1996 book, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls*. Underwood was the only case of such a ceremony happening I discovered, but this occurrence is not surprising because of the more limited pool of data in my research. Additionally, tribal heritage differences and audience can impact the information gathered.

Returning to Underwood, he was far from happy about his assignment in Berlin, where radio maintenance-trained soldiers were in high demand. He believed he belonged on the front lines in Vietnam, where all the action was, and even went so far as to request a transfer so he could accompany his roommate. Unfortunately, while Underwood's transfer was denied, his roommate with a different work assignment was able to gain a transfer to Vietnam and was killed in action shortly after his arrival.[92]

Underwood chose to handle any attacks on his race personally over enlisting help from others, regardless of any punishment this method might bring. In at least one case, after Underwood turned off an engine with an oil leak, he ran afoul of a CO who did not understand what he was doing. The CO decided that the best solution to the problem at hand was to begin insulting Underwood's race. Underwood does not share exactly what happened, but does admit he was court-martialed for his response, which he felt was necessary to teach the man a lesson. Underwood encountered one other interaction with a CO that he believed was racial discrimination. The CO in question was a white man, who had studied history and, upon finding out Underwood was a Seminole Indian, made several "jokes" about how he could sign Underwood up as a prisoner of war (POW), as Seminoles never signed a peace treaty with the

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[91] Holm, Tom. *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War*. University of Texas Press, 1996, pg 12.

[92] Library Of Congress, Tecumseh Nathaniel Underwood, and Jeanine Nault. Tecumseh Nathaniel Underwood Collection. 1963. Personal Narrative. https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.107900/.

United States. Underwood was never quite sure if the CO was actually joking or if the man was trying to make a name for himself by being the man responsible for creating the last Seminole POW.[93] It does seem unlikely that the CO was serious about taking Underwood as a POW, but it is understandable that he would be worried as he had already experienced racism while serving in Berlin.

Underwood also served alongside at least one other Native soldier while stationed in West Germany, who he found some humor in being around. The man was a Chippewa [Ojibwa] Indian, who was in his third year of medical school when he was drafted. He was unable to get a deferment and decided he was going to take out his annoyance at the situation in a way that would not land him in any trouble: by having the U.S. Army put his translated Chippewa name on his fatigues. So, Little Boy Standing in the Water was put on all his fatigues- though Underwood noted that every time a commander spoke to this soldier, they shortened it to just "boy."

Charley Johnson, Jr. (Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw)[94] similarly experienced racism while in West Germany, though his experience was racism directed at Black Americans and not at himself. Johnson was another Chilocco alumni, who hailed from Talihina, Oklahoma. He was the second youngest out of eight siblings, and one of four that ended up serving during Vietnam. It was due to family stress that Johnson attended Chilocco. His parents needed to take his older

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[93] Ibid.

[94] Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, Edmon Low Library, Oklahoma State University, Charley Johnson Jr, Sarah Milligan, and Julie Thunder. Charley Johnson, Jr. Collection. 1965. Personal Narrative. https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.111818/.
Johnson is, from a purely blood standpoint, just Cherokee and Choctaw. However, his father was adopted into a Creek family and he grew up primarily around the Creek tribe, prompting him to identify as all three.

brother's newborn in, and as he was the oldest child still living with them, he was sent off to the school for his last two years of high school.[95]

Johnson found his time at the school enjoyable, unlike most of the other alumni of Indian Boarding schools. He wished he could have attended all four years of high school, rather than just his last two. The school taught him valuable skills, like ironing and how to clean up after himself, along with allowing him to meet Native Americans from across the United States. Johnson was expected to work while attending the school, but he did not mind it. He was a fairly average student, who was enrolled in their pre-college track, though that does not mean he was constantly in the administration's good graces. During the interview, he mentions two instances that landed him in trouble. The first instance occurred because he left campus without permission because his mother missed seeing him, and the second occurrence was because he snuck beer on campus.[96]

Once Johnson was out of high school, he was fortunate to be able to return to the job with a local oil company he had started the summer prior in Oklahoma City. However, like Underwood's decision to enlist to find employment, Johnson soon found himself looking for a different job, as his paycheck barely covered his bills and what he needed to eat. He managed to find a vocational school that would provide training in the field of welding and had just finished his education when he received the letter telling him to report for his physical. Johnson never particularly wanted to serve in the military. If the draft never happened, he would have happily stayed out; however, to avoid becoming infantry, he enlisted. After finishing basic training at

[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid

Fort Polk in Louisiana, he found himself in Vietnam as part of the 134th Quartermaster Company.[97]

Johnson's time serving in Vietnam lined up with his youngest brother, Tom's, own service and with a number of fellow Chilocco alumni that he counted as friends. He never connected with any of these individuals during his enlistment. His brother was never near the base, but his friends from school, who were all infantry, regularly passed through where he was stationed. Through a twist of fate, he and his friends were never able to connect. Johnson found his time in Vietnam difficult, but one of the few things that kept him going were letters from some of his female classmates from Chilocco, which he said kept him sane during his service.[98]

In the final eight months of his service, he was relocated to West Germany as part of a helicopter unit near Nuremberg. While there, he served alongside three other Native soldiers, an Apache who refused to talk with anyone else, and two other Native American soldiers that Johnson befriended named Leif and Moseh, who were Cherokee and Ojibwa, respectively.[99] His unit was required to be ready to man their assigned helicopter and fly out immediately. They regularly ran late-night drills to make sure they were ready, but this assignment was safer than his last station.[100]

However, while he witnessed some discrimination in Vietnam, Johnson always wondered about a particularly strange situation he encountered while in West Germany, which involved a man from South Carolina. The man was a young, very intelligent, and very religious white man who spent some time with Johnson when he first arrived in West Germany.[101] The other soldier

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[97] Ibid
[98] Ibid
[99] I am unsure if these are the correct spellings of these soldiers names, as Johnson does not provide a spelling in his interview.
[100] Ibid
[101] Ibid

was the friendly sort, but Johnson discovered that the man had purchased a rifle to bring home, something that was common for American soldiers to do. Soldiers were able to buy firearms cheaper than they were able to in the United States. The only downside to purchasing a rifle while serving overseas was that the necessary ammunition could not be purchased without proper registration. This issue was not a concern for the white soldier, however, and Johnson soon discovered how the other soldier passed his time. One night, while spending time in the other man's room, watching black soldiers pass below:

> He'd be standing at his window, and he'd point that rifle down at somebody, and … he'd click it and go POW! I shot that (n-word). … and that stayed with me. You'd see him Sunday morning, carrying his Bible going to church … I couldn't understand how he could have so much hate for other people.[102]

After this interaction, Johnson stopped spending time with the soldier. Soon after this decision, Johnson was approached by a pair of soldiers, a black one from Alabama and a white one from Michigan. They needed a new roommate, and Johnson, ever neat, was seen as the perfect choice. The difference between the situations is something Johnson always found particularly funny. Here was a pair of men from different races who were good friends, and he soon became friends with them, while the other man was so prejudiced that he pretended to shoot African Americans with an unloaded rifle.[103]

The rest of Johnson's service went by without any issues, but once he came home, it took an extended time before he felt back to normal, let alone feel comfortable wearing his uniform again. He returned home a very angry man, and he found that he could only begin processing his emotions through speaking with fellow veterans. Johnson felt the war should not have been

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[102] Ibid
[103] Ibid

fought at all, even if he believed serving in the army was the right thing to do. At the time of his interview, he mentioned how it still takes him considerable time to mentally prepare for any event specifically meant for veterans.[104]

The last person of this group stationed specifically in West Germany is Larry Michael 'Mike' Childers, a Cherokee Indian from Gans, Oklahoma. Childers was unable to participate in an interview, as he passed away in 2015.[105] However, in lieu of his participation, his niece, Barbara Tucker, agreed to share the stories that Childers told about his time serving. Additionally, she shared correspondence she received from Childers when he was stationed overseas. Tucker was just three years younger than her uncle, and the pair were extremely close with one another- to the point that they both regularly referred to and treated each other as siblings.

Childers was the youngest of five children. His family was not the most prosperous in their town, but they did instill a dedicated work ethic in their children. If Childers had not been drafted, it is believed that he would have joined the army solely for the economic benefits, regardless of his feelings that the war was not justified. After his draft letter was delivered in 1967, he soon found himself traveling to places that he would never have been able to visit through his means. After completing basic training in Little Rock, Arkansas, Childers was ordered directly to West Germany, where he would spend most of his service time. Childers' time in Germany is when he experienced conflict with other American soldiers.

Childers found himself temporarily hospitalized after other soldiers discovered that he was gay. These soldiers decided among themselves that they were fit to "punish" Childers for his

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[104] Ibid
[105] The Oklahoman. "Larry Childers Obituary," March 19, 2015. Accessed March 31, 2023. https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/oklahoman/name/larry-childers-obituary?id=20755603.

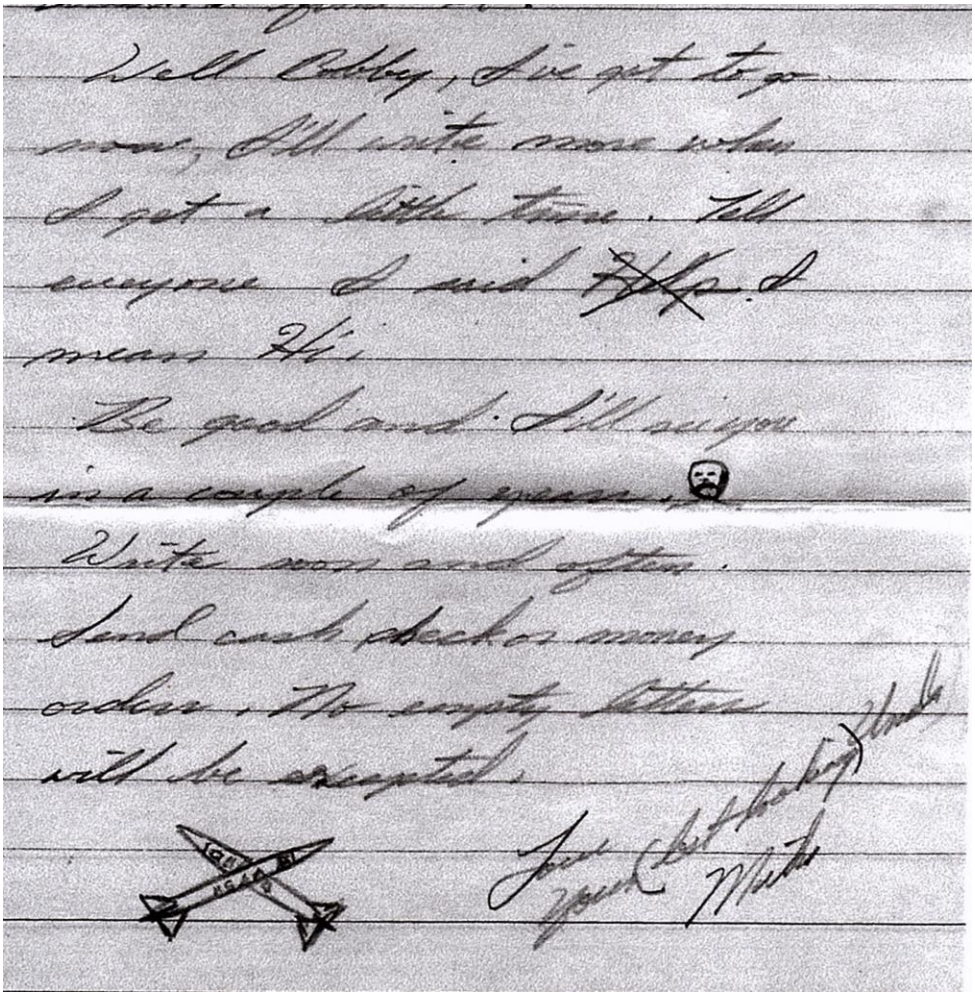
sexuality. They waited for Childers to step out of a building after dark and beat him until he passed out due to his injuries. He was luckily found by other servicemen and rushed to the infirmary, where he received a blood transfusion and treatment for his wounds. According to Tucker, Childers realized the risks of allowing the attackers to "win" against him, as he believed it would haunt him for the rest of his time serving. Despite the doctor's orders to stay and rest in the infirmary, he left the next morning and presented himself at the unit's roll call. Once roll call was completed, Childers made it back to his bunk, where he collapsed into sleep for the rest of the day.[106]

Tucker is unaware if the perpetrators ever received punishment. Additionally, Childers managed to avoid both a medical discharge and a less-than-honorable discharge due to the "suspicions" of his sexuality. This indicates to me that Childers may have avoided identifying the attackers when speaking with the military police, as the soldiers would likely have avoided any severe punishment for the attack. If the attackers were identified, it seems probable that they would have shared the motivating factor with the military police, which would, in turn, send Childers back home to Gans with a mark of shame.

While there is no excuse for the violence against Childers, the accusation and the era in which it occurred explain why the discrimination he faced took a violent turn when compared to other Native American soldiers stationed in West Germany. Discrimination against sexual preferences, in the military or on the home front, was not confined to West Germany. Violence against members of the LGBTQ+ community is well documented during the time frame, and the Gay Panic Defense is still used to this day. Additionally, the Stonewall Riots occurred while

[106] Barbara Tucker, Phone Interview to Author, March 30th, 2023.

Childer's was serving, showing that tension was already high between the queer community and those outside it.


Well Bobby, I've got to go now, I'll write more when I get a little time. Tell everyone I said ~~Help~~ I mean Hi.
Be good and I'll see you in a couple of years.
Write soon and often.
Send cash check or money order. No empty letters will be excepted.

Excerpt of letter from Larry Childers to niece, Barbara Tucker (referred to here as Bobby)[107]

Despite his trouble with other soldiers, Childers managed to keep his humor. In letters home to his niece, he filled the pages with jokes about what he was dealing with, along with small doodles (see above). Some letters poke fun at the lack of food he was used to while in

[107] Childers, Larry M. *Letter from Larry Childers to Barbara Tucker, Date May 25th, 1967*. Letter. From Barbara Tucker's personal collection. (accessed March 30th, 2023) The drawing at the bottom of the two 'missiles' might be of the MK-84 or MK-82, guided bombs used by the US Army during the time period.

West Germany. One letter asks Tucker to send him sardines, one of his favorite snacks, as "you can get [them] fairly cheap," only to quickly add that he was joking (but not really).[108] Nearly every letter back to Tucker, he signs off with some variation of the same phrase: "your favorite (and best looking), uncle."[109]

Childers, like other veterans presented in this paper, suffered from a number of health issues; his issues centered around his heart and lungs. Unlike the others, it seems likely that Childers was exposed to toxic substances not in the jungles of Vietnam like the others, but within the borders of the United States. Following a request for emergency leave due to his father's failing health, Childers was reassigned to Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas instead of returning to West Germany. He spent the final months of his service working in the arsenal.[110]

Pine Bluff Arsenal was one of a handful of chemical ammunition plants established during the Second World War, [111] which continued the production of both chemical and biological warfare (CBW) agents during the Vietnam War. National Security Study

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[108] Childers, Larry M. *Letter from Larry Childers to Barbara Tucker, Undated*. Letter. From Barbara Tucker's personal collection. (accessed March 30th, 2023).
I personally believe that this letter in question says for Tucker to send Childers a 'radio' over 'sardines,' as it fits more in line with his jokes about other things he asked Tucker to send- usually things like checks or other, more expensive items which would be unlikely for the family to be able to afford. However, others who are part of Childer's family have read it as Sardines and commented on how canned sardines were some of his favorite foods. As such, I have elected to use the more immediate family's reading of the letter over my own.

[109] Childers, Larry M. *Letter from Larry Childers to Barbara Tucker, Undated*. Letter. From Barbara Tucker's personal collection. (accessed March 30th, 2023)
Childers, Larry M. *Letter from Larry Childers to Barbara Tucker, Dated May 25th, 1967*. Letter. From Barbara Tucker's personal collection. (accessed March 30th, 2023)

[110] Barbara Tucker, Phone Interview to Author, March 30th, 2023.
Childers, Larry M. *Letter from Larry Childers to Barbara Tucker, Date July 1st,1967*. Letter. From Barbara Tucker's personal collection. (accessed March 30th, 2023)

[111] Mauroni, Al. "THE U.S. ARMY CHEMICAL CORPS: Past, Present and Future." On Point 9, no. 3 (2004): 11. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44610263.

Memorandum (NSSM) 59 and National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 35 under President Richard Nixon reduced the production of CBW agents from its peak.[112]

Childers regularly told his niece stories about the "specialized blankets" that the soldiers were required to sleep under while stationed at Pine Bluff in case of a chemical spill, but he was always careful about what he said. According to Tucker, Childers' caution in sharing information was potentially two-fold. First, he wanted to avoid dredging up unpleasant memories, and second, so that he did not violate his security clearance regulations for his work in West Germany and while stationed at Pine Bluff. Childers' high-level clearance produced issues later in life when medical issues appeared. It seems that much of Childers' deployment record was sealed and did not provide locations of service. This situation created difficulty in documenting what he had been exposed to, and in diagnosing. Through persistence and a bit of luck with finding the right person to complain to, Veteran Affairs doctors were able to obtain complete records related to his service. Tucker was told that the issue was because of the records being stored "at the Pentagon" and required specific requests to access.[113]

It is possible that the experiences of these soldiers in West Germany are not representative of all Native American experiences. West Germany was undoubtedly one of the better locations to be stationed during the Vietnam War as an Indigenous soldier, especially with regard to interactions with non-Native soldiers. This could just be a case of accidental sampling bias. In King and Childers' cases, there are factors that further separate them from the "standard" Native American veterans, and the sample size is small. However, as Johnson found, the

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[112] Tucker, Jonathan B., and Erin R. Mahan. President Nixon's Decision to Renounce the U.S. Offensive Biological Weapons Program, 2009. Pages 2-11. The production was not fully eliminated, however, as NSDM-35 allowed for the research into the offensive capabilities of biological agents for the purposes of defense, while simultaneously not providing precise federal guidelines on what qualified as defensive research and development.

[113] Barbara Tucker, Phone Interview to Author, March 30th, 2023.

behavior in West Germany was surprising compared to Vietnam; West Germany does seem to exhibit a difference in military culture that was unique to the area. While I am unsure of the exact cause of this difference, it seems probable that West Germany, being a location where soldiers were not in active combat, allowed for the expected social hierarchy of the United States to be recreated in a foreign country. Vietnam was an active combat zone, and it was best for everyone's survival to limit any open animosity between differing groups in the same unit- even if cases such as Nealson's show that open animosity was not fully eliminated. I would expect a similar pattern to appear with servicemen who were stationed within the United States during the war, but the records I had access to make the comparison impossible for the time being.

While I believe scholars researching Indigenous participation during the war should take care to try to include some information about West Germany, I do recognize that this is a particularly difficult topic to investigate from a purely numbers standpoint. We are studying a group that is a relatively small percentage of the total U.S. armed forces, which is further reduced to those stationed in one specific part of the world that was not part of active combat. If someone desired to examine this topic further, I would recommend extending the research to include non-Native, minority soldiers who were stationed in West Germany during the war. The reasoning for this is two-fold. First, and most practical, this change would provide a more extensive pool to sample, as around one million racial minorities served during the war.[114] By widening the pool, there would be a better chance of finding subjects that were stationed within the area.

[114] National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, Maribel Aponte, Tom Garin, Dorothy Glasgow, Tamara Lee, Earl Newsome III, Eddie Thomas, and Barbara Ward, Minority Veterans Report § (2017). https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Minority_Veterans_Report.pdf.

Second, as shown in Johnson's interview, the discrimination was not always aimed at the interviewee.[115] It seems probable that one could find cases of Indigenous soldiers in these accounts, much the way I have demonstrated earlier in this chapter, and paint a clearer picture of Indigenous service in this sector. Regardless of the additional identification of Indigenous soldiers, this additional research would, at the very least, provide a basic understanding of the larger culture of American soldiers stationed in West Germany during the Vietnam War.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined three key features of Native American participation in Vietnam. First, through the eyes of non-Native soldiers, which Native Americans are largely treated more as a template of previously defeated opponents to be applied to the new Vietnamese enemies. The Vietnamese, a guerrilla fighting force, were referenced in the same breath as the various tribes of the Indian War, and the soldiers felt they were the cowboys of the olden days. When Indigenous soldiers were present, serving alongside non-Natives, they were often remembered as nameless entities and given nicknames that explicitly referenced their race. Additionally, these soldiers justified their choices to put Indigenous soldiers in dangerous positions with claims that they were better suited for the roles by virtue of their race. This idea seemed to be so rooted among leaders that it appears that it might have been official policy for the U.S. Marines in the late 1960s and into the 1970s. This belief led Native soldiers to find

[115] Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, Edmon Low Library, Oklahoma State University, Charley Johnson Jr, Sarah Milligan, and Julie Thunder. Charley Johnson, Jr. Collection. 1965. Personal Narrative. https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.111818/.

themselves as scouts or walking point for the units, where they were more likely to be injured in the line of duty.

We see that these soldiers, who joined for reasons varying from economic to traditional to obligatory because of the draft, were much the same as their non-Native counterparts in Vietnam- albeit more likely to have a nickname such as “Half breed” or “Chief.” They also overwhelmingly did not have a going away ceremony or a ceremony meant to help them re-integrate with larger society after the war, features that were ubiquitous in previously published works. And, just like their non-native counterparts, they suffered from health effects from exposure to chemicals and mental health issues such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Finally, there is the case of soldiers stationed in West Germany over Vietnam for part of their service, an area entirely unstudied by scholars examining the Vietnam War experience. These soldiers were subjected to discrimination in various forms, but tended to mirror the types of discrimination that one would expect within America’s borders. This is possibly due to the assignment being less stressful when compared to the active combat zone of Vietnam, but further research is necessary to confirm if my findings are indicative of a more significant trend or just a case of coincidence in the sources.

As presented in chapter one, the subject of Indigenous participation in the Vietnam War is extremely understudied. Scholars would be wise to approach this topic sooner rather than later, especially if there is a desire to utilize oral histories. This population’s youngest members are in their late sixties, and, due to exposure to chemicals such as Agent Orange, are more likely to have a variety of health issues related to their service that could reduce their lifespan materially. A number of tribal groups have taken strides to record the histories of veterans from prior wars, but due to Vietnam’s unpopular nature, less focus has been paid to the topic as a whole- though

in recent years, the situation has started to be rectified. Beyond a twenty-year-old comprehensive text, there still is a need for histories that try to approach the question of urban Indigenous soldier's experiences, the experiences of Indigenous soldiers stationed in West Germany, and most important of all, histories focusing on specific tribes and the ways in which each tribe handled Vietnam veterans.

While my research has filled some of the holes in the scholarship, my research is a slight drop in the bucket of work to be done. Non-federally recognized tribes are entirely absent from my work. These groups are often forgotten in federal funding and assistance programs, and it would be best not to leave them out of the conversation entirely. Additionally, Native soldiers stationed in West Germany and the ways their experiences differed from their compatriots stationed in Vietnam are in dire need of more research. My research indicates that it is probable that both the experiences of those stationed in Vietnam and in West Germany differ from those who spent a significant amount of time stationed within the United States, though the latter may be more similar than the former.

My time spent constructing this work has been both rewarding and trying. This topic, while close to my heart, has become close to my mind as well. I strongly believe that further research on this topic can produce new and informative findings, both regarding experiences of Indigenous Soldiers' service during the Vietnam War and in the way military policy could be shaped through racist ideas that affect not just the enemy but American soldiers as well.

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