



THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON DC 20350-1000

October 31, 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR DISTRIBUTION

SUBJECT: Department of the Navy 2023 National Native American Heritage Month

This November, the Department of the Navy (DON) joins the Nation in celebrating National Native American Heritage Month. This month provides us an opportunity to pay tribute to the rich ancestry and heritage of Native Americans and Alaskan Natives and recognize their immeasurable contributions to our great Nation. Native Americans have a long record of service to the United States; one which started long before they were granted citizenship or the right to vote.

In 1970, in an effort to reduce racism and sexism in the Navy and Marine Corps, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Elmo Zumwalt issued Z-gram #66, a naval message requiring every base, station, and aircraft squadron commander, and ship Commanding Officer to appoint an officer as a special assistant for minority affairs. This change in climate and culture paved the way for many Native Americans to rise to excel in the DON and provided opportunities for all minorities and women to achieve their full potential.

Notable examples include Rear Admiral Michael L. Holmes and Commander John Bennet Herrington. Rear Admiral Holmes, a member of the Lumbee Tribe in North Carolina, served 32 years as a naval aviator. Most notably, he served as Commanding Officer, Patrol Squadron Thirty, the largest aviation squadron in the U.S. Navy, and as Commander, Patrol and Reconnaissance Group. Admiral Holmes was awarded two Navy Commendation Medals, three Meritorious Service Medals, and three Legion of Merit medals. Commander Herrington, an enrolled member of the Chickasaw Nation, was selected as an astronaut in 1996 and, 2 years later, as a member of National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Astronaut Support Personnel Team. In 2002, he logged 330 hours as the first Native American in space when he traveled as part of Space Shuttle Endeavour's STS-113 mission.

Today, over 12,000 Native American and Alaskan Native Sailors, Marines, and civilians serve in the DON. Let us celebrate the contributions and service of these great Americans and commit ourselves to building a stronger and more inclusive workforce. For more information on National Native American Heritage Month, I encourage you to visit <https://www.nativeamericanheritagemonth.gov/>.

Carlos Del Toro

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