



Left: Portrait of Chief Pushmataha, *History of the Indian Tribes of North America* (published 1836-44).
 Center: "In Memory Of" marker for David Moniac, Florida National Cemetery.
 Right: 1st Lt. Jack C. Montgomery, Medal of Honor recipient, in uniform. Montgomery served in Oklahoma's 180th regiment, 45th Infantry Division during World War II.

Scout, POW, Enlistee, Diplomat, Code Talker: *American Indians in Military Service*

During U.S. westward expansion in the nineteenth century, most wars pitted American Indian tribes against one another and the Army. However, tribesmen also served alongside white and black enlisted men and officers--an estimated 20,000 during the Civil War. From the first American Indian to graduate from West Point in 1822 to the specialist Navajo Code Talkers in World War II, American Indians also had to overcome racial discrimination in order to serve our nation.

Many American Indians are buried among other veterans in NCA's cemeteries, although they were not identified as U.S. citizens until 1924. In August 1866, Congress first authorized Indian Scouts as enlisted personnel in the U.S. Army, and they existed until 1947 when the Armed Services officially ended racial segregation.

Like many chapters of American history involving non-white populations, that of American Indians is complicated. General George Crook recruited for scouts among the Apache to help fight warring members of their tribe, first led by Cochise and later Geronimo. The army captured and imprisoned Geronimo in 1886. His second wife, Ga-ah, was held as a prisoner of war and died in captivity; she was buried at [Barrancas National Cemetery](#) in 1887.



Left: Council between General Crook and Geronimo in 1886. Photograph by C.S. Fly, Library of Congress.
 Right: Headstone on the grave of Ga-ah, Geronimo's wife

Later, twentieth-century education activists sought to replace the native language used by American Indian children with English. Fortunately oral traditions persisted and during World War II the Navajo language was employed as an unbreakable code that led to U.S. victory. American Indians have proudly served the United States, but recognition of their contributions has been slow. In 2001, the Navajo Code Talkers were belatedly presented with the Congressional Gold Medal. Several American Indian soldiers received the military's highest award, the Medal of Honor, for actions in combat. Four are buried in NCA national cemeteries.

Memorials recognizing American Indian service have been placed in NCA national cemeteries recently. The Comanche Indian Veterans Association donated the first one to [Fort Sill](#) (OK) in 2006. It was followed by a Navajo Code Talkers monument in [Santa Fe](#) (NM), 2013; and two identical Native American Alliance of Ohio monuments at [Dayton](#) (OH) in 2014, and [West Virginia](#) in 2016.