Why We Serve honors the generations of Native Americans who have served in the Armed Forces of the United States—often in extraordinary numbers—since the American Revolution.

Visit the National Museum of the American Indian online exhibit.

“I found out I am not only fighting for the little bitty piece of land I talk about, [or] my immediate family. I found out I was fighting for all the Indian people, all the people of the United States.”

- Samuel Tso (Navajo), U.S. Marine Corps
November is National American Indian Heritage Month. It is a time to celebrate American Indians and Alaskan Natives, the first peoples of the United States.

Currently, there are 574 federally recognized American Indian and Alaskan Native tribes and more than 100 state-recognized tribes across the United States.

Each have their own unique history, beliefs, traditions, governance structure, and culture.

Sergeant First Class John Raymond Rice “Walking in Blue Sky” was a HoChunk (Winnebago) Indian and a U.S. Army soldier killed in action while leading his squad in the Korean War in 1950.

On August 28, 1951, during his funeral, a cemetery employee noticed there were American Indians at the service. After the military burial portion of the service, cemetery officials discovered that Rice himself was Native American. They stopped the burial, and made Rice’s wife Evelyn take his body away.

The event touched off a national episode. President Harry S. Truman ordered his body to be interred in Arlington National Cemetery.

Sergeant Rice was buried on September 5, 1951, nearly a year to the day after he died.
**Do You Know What Sovereignty Means?**

**Sovereignty** is the most fundamental concept that defines the relationship between the government of the United States and governments of American Indian/Alaskan Native tribes.

Tribal sovereignty refers to the right of American Indians and Alaska Natives to govern themselves. Sovereignty for tribes includes the right to establish their own form of government, determine membership requirements, enact legislation and establish law enforcement and court systems.

American Indians and Alaskan Natives are technically U.S. citizens first and have the additional option of becoming citizens of their tribe or village as enrolled tribal members.

The **Alaska Territorial Guard** (ATG) was a military reserve force component of the U.S. Army. The units were created in 1942 during WWII out of the United States’ concern over enemy invasion of the territory of Alaska.

**Laura Beltz Wright** was a member of the ATG. She delivered mail, sometimes using skis or a dog sled. She was known as the “best shot in the company.” She once hit a target 49 out of 50 times!

She and her fellow ATG members were not granted veteran status until 2000. Wright had passed away four years earlier. Her family accepted her discharge papers at a ceremony honoring ATG members.
Native Americans and buffalo have a long history together. The Buffalo, or American Bison, has played an essential role in the survival and culture of the American Indians who lived in the Plains region of what is now the United States, and parts of southern Canada.

Every part of the buffalo was used. In addition to providing food, the Indians used the skins for tipis and clothing, hides for robes, shields, and ropes. They used dried buffalo dung for fuel. Tools were made from bones and muscles were used to make bowstrings, moccasins, and bags. Even the hoofs were used to make glue.

**Make Your Own Native American Buffalo Hides**

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

STEP 1: Scrunch up your brown paper bag, open and smooth it flat. Repeat. Then, tear brown paper bag to resemble the shape of a buffalo hide.

STEP 2: With black sharpie make a border around your whole hide. It is a good idea to create a repeating pattern.

STEP 3: Draw in pencil your Native American inspired designs. Make sure your designs are big and fill your hide. Designs should not have a lot of detail.

STEP 4: Color or paint your designs.

STEP 5: Edge all designs with black sharpie to make them stand out.