

2023



THE CHICKASAW NATION

VETERANS

SERVICES

NEWSLETTER





# CHOKMA!

The Chickasaw Nation is committed to serving and supporting our Chickasaw veterans through a variety of uniquely suited programs and services aimed at addressing specific needs. We appreciate the immense sacrifices you have made in defense and support of the freedoms we hold dear.

In this newsletter, you will find information about resources available to our Chickasaw servicemen and women, as well as stories of the service and selflessness of your fellow Chickasaws.

Thank you for your service, bravery and inspiration.

Sincerely,

*Bill Anoatubby*

Bill Anoatubby, Governor  
The Chickasaw Nation

A dark blue banner with a white ribbon graphic on the left that says 'SAVE the DATE'. To the right, the text reads '7TH ANNUAL Chickasaw VETERANS CONFERENCE' in white and red, with 'JUNE 2024' below it in red.





# CHICKASAW VETERANS CONFERENCE

## VETERANS FROM ACROSS THE UNITED STATES GATHER IN OKLAHOMA FOR ANNUAL CONFERENCE



**Above: Chickasaw Honor Guard members presented the colors as James Monroe played the national anthem on the trumpet. From left, Veterans Services director Ray Orphan, James Monroe, Silas Welch and Rufus Eyachabbe, Jr. Not pictured are Chickasaw Honor Guard members Paul Wilson and David Cavener.**

There were 315 veterans in attendance at the sixth annual Chickasaw Veterans Conference on June 14 at the WinStar World Casino and Resort in Thackerville, Oklahoma.

Chickasaw veterans from California, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas and Virginia attended in person. The virtual event and live coverage brought in veterans from across the United States.

It was an opportunity for fellowship and a time to connect for veterans like Gerry Poe, who served in the U.S. Army from November 1993 to October 2019.

"It's nice to be able to attend these events and meet with other veterans who have served in the armed forces

and are Chickasaw," Poe said. "We have that common ground."

Keynote speaker, Chickasaw Nation Governor Bill Anoatubby, shared several important messages. At the heart of his speech, Anoatubby expressed what it means to be a Chickasaw warrior and why such warriors are important to him, the Chickasaw Nation and the broader society.

"You represent what it means to be a Chickasaw warrior, a defender of the people with a servant's heart," Governor Anoatubby told attendees. "As Chickasaws, we have a deep and abiding respect for our warriors. Our traditions, our history and our very way of life have always placed great value on the role of the warrior."

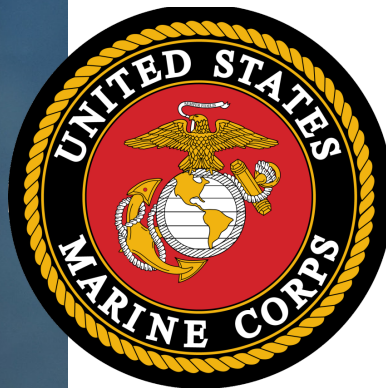
This sentiment also rings true for Poe who makes a strong connection between his time in service and his Chickasaw heritage.

"Chickasaws have always been warriors and we do our part to support and defend our country," Poe said. "I'm glad to be Chickasaw and to have served my country because, to me, it goes together."

The event was also an opportunity for veterans to become familiar with the programs and services available to them. Veterans visited information booths to discuss topics such as the Chickasaw Warrior Society, the veterans jacket program and the vehicle tag reimbursement program.

Thank you to the veterans that were able to attend or joined us virtually. We look forward to spending time with you next year.





## CASEY TEMPLETON

### MARINE GAINS NEW PERSPECTIVE OF THE WORLD THROUGH SERVICE

As a trumpet player with a dream to join “The President’s Own” United States Marine Band, Chickasaw citizen Casey Templeton joined the United States Marine Corps where he served from March 2000 to December 2004.

Templeton spent most of his childhood in Oklahoma before heading to California to complete his basic training. After enlisting, he was stationed in San Diego where he deemed himself a “Hollywood Marine.”

During his basic training, Templeton was surprised to find that his life experiences had prepared him for the circumstances he would face. Growing up in a military family, his Chickasaw mother Carolyn Herman, a U.S. Army National Guard veteran, valued survival

training and instincts. This led to many camping trips and teambuilding activities.

The trips and activities from his childhood proved to be especially useful when it came to completing the crucible, a test that occurs at the end of basic training. “I was staring at these obstacles

and going, ‘I’ve done all of this before,’” Templeton said. “My mom brought me through these courses for many years of my life before I joined the Marine Corps.”

Templeton spent the majority of his service, when not overseas, at Camp Pendleton in Oceanside, California. He served as a combat cook until he became a part of the 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion as a 50-caliber machine gun operator.

His plans to join the U.S. Marine Band were forced to change after a terrorist attack on Sept. 11, 2001, pushed the United States into war with Iraq. A month before the war began in March 2003, Templeton, who was a lance

corporal at the time, auditioned for and made it into the U.S. Marine Band against his first sergeant’s wishes. A few weeks later, his first sergeant pulled him aside to give him the good and bad news about his audition.

“I want you to know that you have made it into the Marine Corps Band. I figured you would, that was never my doubt,” Templeton recalled him saying. “But I’m not letting you go because we’re about to go to war and that’s why I told you not to do it.”

“I guess they needed a 50-cal operator more than they needed a trumpet player,” Templeton said.

The global war on terrorism led him overseas to Iraq as a part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, where he spent nine months of his service on his first tour.

By chance, he did get the opportunity to play again during this tour when the U.S. Marine Band visited his base overseas. The trumpet player had dropped his instrument and Templeton was able to help him temporarily

**Top Left: Casey Templeton in his official U.S. Marine Corps portrait after completing basic training.**

## RESOURCES FOR OVERALL MENTAL WELLNESS

Mental wellness is an important step in achieving overall health. To focus on the mental health of our veterans, the Chickasaw Nation works to provide an array of resources. Through our programs and services, we aim to address

stress, trauma and other mental health concerns.

The Chikasha Anokfilli “thinking Chickasaw” initiative was created in May 2022, in an effort to address core issues with mental health and encourage prioritizing overall wellness. Chikasha Anokfilli

ensures mental health services are accessible and establishes a foundation of prevention and intervention for mental health disorders. It explores what it means to be strong and resilient while working to remove the stigma surrounding mental health.

MORE INFORMATION AND  
ACCESS TO RESOURCES CAN  
BE FOUND AT

**CHICKASAW.NET/  
MENTALHEALTH**



fix it to a working condition. With the other player's permission, he used his own mouthpiece, which he always carried with him, to play for his unit.

"My guys hadn't even heard me play," Templeton said. "They were like, 'This is amazing!'"

After his first tour overseas, Templeton returned home for a few months before taking another nine-month tour. In the time between tours, he reflected a lot on his experiences and the mental toll they had on him.

"Depression is a real thing," Templeton said. "I came back from my first tour kind of broke and messed up. It's definitely a culture shock going from a hostile environment to the regular world."

His time overseas also gave him a new perspective on the world. "How you see things, how you see people is different than normal. The luxuries you have – like running water – you have no idea how important that is," Templeton said.

During his second tour in 2004, he experienced his most shocking moment of his service after a vehicle hit an improvised explosive device (IED). His first-aid training came into use in this moment, and he was able to help save the life of a fellow Marine.

This experience did not deter him from wanting to continue his career as a Marine. He initially chose to extend his service until one conversation with his then 5-year-old son led him to make the decision to return home.

"He looked at me and said, 'Daddy, I want you to come home' and that was it," Templeton said.

As a corporal in the Marine Corps, his service officially ended on Christmas Day in 2004. He now lives in Oklahoma with his children and helps run his family's outdoor laser tag business, Mobile Laser Forces.

He is an active member of the American Legion and the Chickasaw Warrior Society. He is proud to wear his Chickasaw Warrior Society vest and celebrate his heritage. Templeton wants to continue working with veterans to promote camaraderie, including helping fellow First American veterans with access to resources.



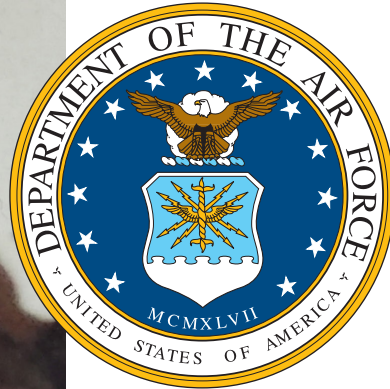
Above: Templeton (bottom right) poses with fellow Marines while visiting Babylon in Babil, Iraq, at the end of his first tour during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The National Suicide Hotline Designation Act was signed into law in 2020 and authorized the Veterans Crisis Line number.

Veterans experiencing a mental health crisis are encouraged to dial **988** then press **1**. Trained responders are available 24/7 to provide you or your loved ones with crisis support.

The Veterans Crisis Line can also be reached by text at **838255** or online at **VeteransCrisisLine.net**.





## CARLA JOHN

### **CHICKASAW VETERAN CONTINUES LIFE OF SERVICE IN HONOR OF LOST LOVED ONES**

One unexpected phone call launched 10 years of military service for Carla John who served in the United States Air Force from 1985-1995.

While attending college at the University of Oklahoma, John answered the phone for her roommate. On the other end was a military recruiter, and their unplanned conversation redirected John's path in life.

"I thank the military for things it taught me," she said. "It made me a stronger person."

Growing up in Fillmore, Oklahoma, with her parents, John recalls her Chickasaw father's big heart and his tendency to give away food from their garden. "They may need it," she remembers him saying, even when people took more than necessary.

Her father, Alvin John, inspired her to help others, a lesson that would continue through her military career and the years after.

During her service, she spent time at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, and Sheppard Air Force Base near Wichita Falls, Texas, for basic training. John started in the reserves out of Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma City. Within a year, she went active duty working cargo, loading hazardous material, balancing flight loads, transporting materials and more. Much of her work involved air cargo, working the

flight line around craft such as the C-130 Hercules, C-141 Starlifter, C-5 Galaxy and the McDonnell Douglas DC-10, among others. Her career also brought her to bases in Washington, California, Japan and Hawaii.

During her service, she spent time sharing her Chickasaw heritage. She helped her comrades understand what it means to be Chickasaw. "It took me going out in the world to realize how important we are," she said.

"I hold on to the fact that I know who I am. I am Chickasaw," John said. "I hope I represented it well."

After her service in the military ended in 1995, she decided to return home to Oklahoma but her years of serving others were far from being over.

On Christmas Day in 1996, John tragically lost her father in Oklahoma City. This unexpected loss came after he experienced many hardships. "He was going through tough times and I didn't understand until I came home," she said.

John worked to transform this moment of darkness into an ongoing source of light by once again drawing inspiration from her father's servant heart. Through this experience, she found her way back to God and dedicated her time to helping others.

"I think that's why I ended up back in Oklahoma City," she said. She started visiting Oklahoma City regularly with her husband, Charles, to help people experiencing homelessness, including First Americans and veterans.

This continued until John unexpectedly lost her husband five years ago. John once again turned to God to help her through this challenging time. "God got me through so much in the darkest of times," John said. This pushes her to continue helping others and inspires her to have compassion and spread kindness to the people who need it most.

"I just thank God that he gave me my dad and a wonderful husband," John said. "In turn, I try to reach out to others."

Today, if she is not beading at home in Sulphur, Oklahoma, she is either at Midway Hill Baptist Church or on the streets of Oklahoma City, accompanied by her sons, Alvin and Johnny, offering food, clothing, camaraderie and prayer to those without homes.

She continues to help others in honor of her late father and husband and aspires to lead her sons Erik, Aaron, Alvin and Johnny by example.

"We do it because we're Chickasaw," John said.



# VETERANS SERVICES AVAILABLE

## VETERANS SERVICES

Veterans services employees will help you navigate information on veterans' benefits and more from U.S. Veterans Affairs and other organizations through our veterans services.

### VETERANS SERVICES NAVIGATES BENEFITS FOR:



**Health Care**



**Education**



**Disability**



**Military Records**

For more information on veterans programs and services, call the Chickasaw Nation Veterans Services office at **(580) 272-2550**, email **Veterans.Services@Chickasaw.net** or visit **Chickasaw.net/Veterans**.

**SCAN TO VISIT  
Chickasaw.net/Veterans**



## VETERANS LODGE

We invite you to visit the Veterans Lodge which was created in honor of our veterans

and in appreciation of your service. You can relax, gather and attend annual events hosted by the Chickasaw Nation.

**Open Monday-Friday 8 a.m.-5 p.m.,  
excluding Chickasaw Nation holidays.  
1909 Warrior Way - Ada, OK 74820**

## CHICKASAW WARRIOR SOCIETY

The Chickasaw Warrior Society was established to honor you who have served – and are serving – in the military by encouraging community and establishing and supporting camaraderie.

Like U.S. Navy veteran, Melissa Stewart, you can find opportunities for fellowship and access to resources through the Chickasaw Warrior Society.

"I joined because I felt like it could be an additional resource for when I need help with anything, including filling out VA paperwork," Stewart said. "I get important information through mail and emails."

## CHICKASAW WARRIOR SOCIETY PARKING

Enjoy special parking at tribal service facilities and select tribal businesses throughout the Chickasaw Nation by becoming a Chickasaw Warrior Society member.

A Warrior Society decal must be visible in your vehicle while parked in the designated locations. Applications are available online at **Chickasaw.net/WarriorSociety**.

## CHICKASAW HONOR GUARD

As an honor guard member, you can be an ambassador for the Chickasaw Nation by speaking to students in the classroom and participating in community events

throughout the Chickasaw Nation and across the country. The Chickasaw Nation Honor Guard also conducts military honors at funerals and memorial services.

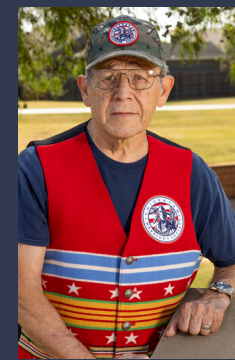
Apply at **Chickasaw.net/HonorGuard**. For more information, contact the Honor Guard at **(580) 310-7930** or **Veterans.Services@Chickasaw.net**.

## CHICKASAW VETERANS JACKET

Receive an exclusive jacket through our Chickasaw Veterans Jacket program. You must be a veteran – non-active duty – and have a discharge status other than dishonorable. To apply, contact Veterans Services at **(580) 272-2550** or **Veterans.Services@Chickasaw.net**.

## VETERANS TAG REIMBURSEMENT

Through the veterans tag reimbursement program, you are eligible to receive a reimbursement of up to \$50 for your U.S. car tag. This includes regular and specialty vehicle tags. A copy of your citizenship card, verification of military service and a receipt for the car tag is needed to apply. Applications are available online at **Chickasaw.net/VeteransCarTag**.



"I've benefitted a lot from the tag reimbursement program," U.S. Coast Guard veteran Harlan Clark said. "The Chickasaw Nation programs are a blessing all the way around."

# HIRING PREFERENCE FOR VETERANS

Veterans currently employed or seeking employment with the Chickasaw Nation are given higher consideration in the hiring process. To learn more, contact human resources.

**(580) 436-7259**



# CHICKASAW VETERANS

## ATTEND DEDICATION FOR NATIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS MEMORIAL



**Above: Chickasaw warriors visit the newly dedicated National Native American Veterans Memorial, located next to the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. From left: Ronald Garside, Dusty Rider, Ronald Harris, Billie Martin, James Anderson, Stephen Paul, H.D. Gardner, Geronia Coyle, John Lucas, Kenneth Moore and Chris Steward.**

During the Chickasaw Elder Veterans Trip, Chickasaw veterans converged on the nation's capital to meet other veterans who have served, visit monuments and memorials, and in 2022, this special trip included the dedication ceremony of the National Native American Veterans Memorial.

The National Native American Veterans Memorial dedication ceremony took place on the National Mall next to the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. According to the Smithsonian, the memorial is the first national landmark in Washington, D.C., to focus on the contributions of First Americans, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians who have served in the military.

Chickasaw astronaut and veteran John Herrington attended the event and spoke about its importance.

"As a fellow veteran, I know I speak on behalf of us all when I say we're proud to be with you today, to recognize together that this memorial stands as a powerful reminder of the service and sacrifices of those remembered."

Mr. Herrington is the first enrolled citizen of a First American tribe to fly to space. During his 13-day journey in space, he carried the Chickasaw Nation flag that was presented to him by Governor Bill Anoatubby before his first flight.

Also, in attendance was Lt. Governor Emeritus Jefferson Keel. Mr. Keel served as co-chairman of the advisory committee to the National Native American Veterans Memorial and helped secure funding for the memorial. He is a member of the Chickasaw Hall of Fame, the Chickasaw Warrior Society and has been inducted into the Military Museum

Hall of Honor in Ardmore, Oklahoma, for his exemplary military and civilian achievements.

"Today, I'm so honored and proud to be a part of this ceremony," Lt. Governor Emeritus Jefferson Keel said. "I want to thank each one of you veterans from the bottom of my heart."

As tradition on the trip, Chickasaw Nation warriors laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery in honor of Veterans Day.

"It was a great honor and privilege to be able to participate in the wreath laying ceremony," Mr. Harris said.

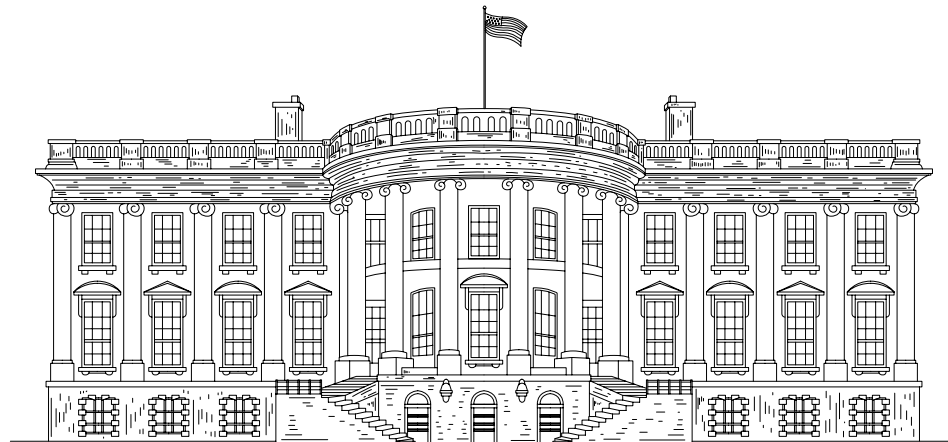
Chickasaw veteran and Ardmore, Oklahoma resident Harrell Dene "H.D." Gardner was filled with gratitude and emotion when he visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Mr. Gardner, who served in both the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Army, located the name of his friend and comrade on the memorial wall.



**Above: Four Chickasaw Vietnam veterans lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery on Nov. 10, 2022. The veterans are, back, from left, Ronald Harris and Ronald Garside. Front, from left, Stephen Paul and Dusty Rider.**



# TRAVEL WITH US TO WASHINGTON, D.C.



Apply today for your chance to travel with us on the next Chickasaw Elders Veterans Trip. Eligible veterans must complete a form to be entered into a random drawing.

For more information or to apply, contact the aging administration office.

**(580) 795-9790**

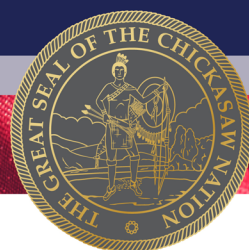
## CHICKASAW VETERANS WALL



The virtual Chickasaw Veterans Wall honors the lives of Chickasaw veterans and pays tribute to their military service. Chickasaw veterans and their families are invited to submit information to be included in the virtual wall. The virtual wall features a veteran's photo, military branch and dates of service for both past and living veterans.

For more information or to complete a form online, visit

**[CHICKASAW.NET/VETERANSWALL](http://CHICKASAW.NET/VETERANSWALL)**







# MILITARY WORD SEARCH

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1. **Akashumpa** (Auxiliary)
2. **Tushka Chepota** (Soldier)
3. **Soba ombinili tushka chepota** (Cavalry)
4. **Holita kullo** (Barricade)
5. **Tushka chepota apila** (Military)
6. **Isht itibi** (Weapon)
7. **Isht im utta** (Serve)
8. **Ilapichi** (Recruit)
9. **Apisachi** (Protect)
10. **Yukmishchi** (Command)
11. **Itibi** (Battle)
12. **Tushka chepota sipokni** (Veteran)
13. **Apelachi** (Defense)
14. **Holitopichi** (Honor)
15. **Ibafoka** (Enlist)
16. **Tushka Chepota Aiitimaiya** (Rank)
17. **Nafoka** (Attire)
18. **Ulhpisa ahosa** (Target)
19. **Isht bahfa** (Spear)
20. **Bushpoihalopa** (Blade)
21. **Oski nuki** (Arrow)
22. **Tanumpalhi** (Bow)
23. **Tushka** (Warrior)
24. **Moma Imaiya** (Hero)

# FEATURED ON THE 2023 COVER



CARLA JOHN



CASEY TEMPLETON



GERRY POE



MELISSA STEWART



HARLAN CLARK





*the*  
**Chickasaw**  
**Nation**

P.O. BOX 1548 • ADA, OK 74821

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