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I would like to speak to you quite frankly on a subject that has occupied fully one half of my life and about which I feel strongly.

That subject is a professional career in our Armed Forces for an Indian citizen.

For many generations the future prospects of an Indian in our Army were not rosy. If he was accepted at all, he drew the least attractive assignments, and his chances for steady promotion were slim. Of course, there were-exceptions to this rule, and I will mention them later; but, on balance, the Armed Services were not exactly the happy hunting ground for a young Indian seeking a career.

That's all changed now, and things have been different for a good many years. Perhaps my own experience will make this clear to you.

Two years ago I retired from the Navy with the rank of

Commander after 26 years' service. I began as an aviation cadet at Pensacola in 1942 --the first American Indian to complete the Naval Aviation Cadet Flight Program --and became a fighter pilot on aircraft carriers in World War II and in Korea. I also served in the Gulf of Tonkin off Vietnam.

My years in the service have been the most valuable of my life. Every door was opened to me, and I received an education that could not be duplicated anywhere in the world. I was trained in aeronautics, navigation, electronics, and seamanship -- and later on, in journalism and public affairs. I have three young sons, and believe me, if they should become interested in a military career, I will encourage them and tell them of its advantages.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all of for joining me today to discuss the many opportunities avail-able in the armed forces for our Indian young people. I fully appreciate the influence each of you have on our youth and the important leadership responsibilities you share in this area.

Yours, as community leaders, is a noble interest of dedicated service -- and one I applaud. We certainly have much in common in objectives of wanting better communications with our young people.

Native Americans have played prominent roles in the military history of this country since its very beginnings, some 200 years ago in 1778, George Washington wrote from Valley Forge to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs: that he was bringing 4001 Indians into his forces to serve as scouts and light troops.

Dr. Waldo, a surgeon at Valley Forge, wrote: "I was called to relieve a soldier thought to be dying. He expired before I reached the hut. He was an Indian, an excellent soldier, and has fought for the very people who disinherited his forefathers." These are some of the earliest recorded instances of Indian participation in this country's military service.

Since then, Indian men and women have served in our armed forces with honor and distinction. During

the Civil War, Indian regiments fought in both the Union and Confederate Armies. The U.S. Indian Scouts were established by order of the War Department on August 1, 1866. By 1867 there were 474 scouts serving in the Army.

One of the duties of the Indian Scouts was to supply the post with meat. Legend has it that a Scout, given the order to go out and bag 60 turkeys and two deer for the posts

Thanksgiving meal, sent back word after a day in the mountains, "Are you sure that's all you want?"

Continuing the traditions of their ancestors, many Indians served gallantly in the armed forces during World Wars I and II, the Korean War, and most recently, in Vietnam. Although not yet citizens of the United States American Indians responded with deep patriotism in World War I Nearly 25,000 Indians are known to have fought in that war

In fact, Indian contributions to the war effort in combat and at home were so outstanding that American citizenship was granted to thousands of honorably discharged Indian veterans.

The eventual passage in 1924 of an Act of Congress to extend citizenship to all Indian people was a direct result of this Indian support of our Nation at war.

Many of you, I'm sure, are familiar with one of the most brilliant tactics devised by the U. S. forces to confuse the enemy in World War II when the Navajo language was used as a "code" for sending radio messages in the Pacific Theatre of operations. The code was a highly sophisticated use of the language and dialects of the Navajo Tribe, practically an unknown tongue at that time. Ordinary codes used by the military were considered obsolete within 24 hours, but the Navajo "code" was so effective that it remained unbroken throughout the war and the story of its use was a hidden chapter in military history until V-J Day.

Ernie Pyle, the famous war correspondent, wrote about the project as one of those primarily responsible for the victory in Japan. Nothing the success of the code in confusing the enemy, Pyle said "practically nobody in the world understands a Navajo except a Navajo."

Three American Indians have been recipients of the guest military honor --the Congressional Medal of Honor for military heroism "above and beyond the call of duty. They are Jack C. Montgomery of a Cherokee, and Ernest Childers, a Creek both from Oklahoma who served in World War II, and Mitchell Red Cloud, Winnebago, from Wisconsin who served in Korea.

Mr. Childers who many of you know retired from the Army and is now serving with the Department of the Interior's. Job Corps Program.

The gene·rat1on of Indian men who fought in World War II are now the senior leaders in Indian affairs They have assisted their people in the transition from an isolated rural reservation life into an age of opportunity --opportunities for a higher standard of living while at the same time maintaining their "Indianness."

The most recent conflict --Vietnam ---was a controversial war and many young Americana rebelled against serving in it, some to the extent of leaving this country.. Yet. Indians continue to serve, as they have in other conflicts, and their people at home continue to honor them for their service.

Last September, the first Army Junior ROTC unit w s installed at an all-Indian high school, the Fort Sill Indian School in Lawton. We now have a second at Fort Wingate on

Navajo. By enrolling in the ROTC program students can prepare themselves for such Army officer-producing institutions as

West Point, Senior ROTC colleges and universities and officer candidate schools. Their training and experience make it possible for them to receive initial training toward becoming commissioned officers in the United States Army. We are happy to note that active army instructors for this program are American Indians.

ROTC came to Fort Sill because the Indian teachers, parents and students there wanted it. That policy is in line with resident Nixon's self-determination program for Native Americans. They are following the self-determination policy the President Stated in a special message to the Congress on July 8, 1970 when he called for a "new era in which the Indian future is determined by Indian acts and Indian decisions."

What does self-determination mean? According to Webster's, it means "free choice of one's own acts or stat without external compulsion." I would also like to add that it means having the opportunity to freely choose your own path of development and achievement. Today, more and more young Indian men and women are joining the ranks of the professionals. As lawyers, doctors, government officials and educators, they are working to make better lives for themselves and for their people. Indian involvement at the top decision making levels of all agencies in our society is essential for the self-determination goal to become a reality.

The career a commissioned office in the Armed Services is certainly an option which Indian youth should consider. The multiple opportunities and experiences further education and advancement offered to all young people as commissioned officers must not be overlooked when we are helping our young people their future.

As community leaders working with our most precious resource, our young people, it is up to insure that they are aware of all the options open to them. In the end, it will be their decision as to what they want to make of their lives. However, it is our obligation and responsibility to see that they have every possible opportunity to make a free choice. This is what self-determination really means.