

Choctaw warrior Shirley A. Mantaghi
Interviewed August 2022 by Judy Allen

Branch of Service US Army Reserves

Woman Warrior Shirley Mantaghi

Choctaw warrior Shirley A. Mantaghi served two tours of duty with the US Army Reserves, the first May 1974-May 1979, and the second December 1983-December 1988. She was honorably discharged as a Specialist E-4.

Shirley attended basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama. Shirley was a member of the WAC (Women Army Corp) from 1974-1978. The WAC was disbanded in 1978 and all-female units were integrated with male units.

Talking about basic training, Shirley said, "I never appreciated cars so much in all my life. March, march, march!" Shirley said she had issues recognizing her right from left. "I never knew my left." Shirley was given a rock to hold in her hand to help know which hand was the left hand. "It didn't help. Basic was rough. You were up at 4 am and didn't go to bed until 10 pm. Walking and marching all that time! I was in shape!"

Shirley's favorite place to be stationed was with the 481st at Rio Vista, California, off the Sacramento River. She was an Administrative Clerk for the 481st Transportation Unit/Heavy Boat which operates amphibious assault ships. Shirley said at the time of her service, there was only the one Army Reserve heavy boat companies operating the LCU 2000 Landing Craft – where she was stationed.

"While in the 481st, Humphrey the Humpback whale swam into the San Francisco Bay to Rio Vista (in 1985)," said Shirley. "Our unit had to lead him back to the ocean. I was on the phone for hours to the Governor of California, George Deukmejian, because he wanted to know every detail. After the event, there was a movie and even a restaurant named after Humphrey.

"The job I had my first time of service was being the Colonel's administrative clerk for the 351st Civil Affairs," said Shirley. This was in Mountain View, California.

"The military developed the self-esteem, the moral of a Choctaw Warrior in me," said Shirley.

"My moral value consists of being honest, showing respect and kindness and generosity to others. As a Choctaw warrior I value my life and the life of others. And as a warrior, I feel it is my obligation to be a protector and a defender of the life value. As a soldier, we constantly live the *Seven Core Values of the Army* – loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. The seven core values I learned in the military works for me daily as a civilian. That is basically what being in the military has taught me," said Shirley.

"Ethics and moral values have played how I have served as a Choctaw warrior. I value my life and the life of others. Therefore, serving in the military and serving my Choctaw people is an example of how I have served as a Choctaw Warrior," said Shirley.

"I was born in 1948, and was raised by my Grandma and Grandpa, Duke and Emealine Stallaby from the time I was five years old. We lived in a suburb of Red Oak, Oklahoma, known as Salonia," said Shirley.

"I had to learn the Choctaw language because that is all they spoke." By the time Shirley began first grade in the LeFlore school district, she had lost her English language, only speaking in Choctaw. "I didn't know English when I started school. The teacher was mean. The teacher would shake me to death when I couldn't speak English." She eventually became bilingual.

When asked what other adversity she faced growing up Choctaw, Shirley said, "I never had too much problem being a Choctaw. I get along with everybody. I didn't know what racism was while living in California. There were so many races in California. I just considered everyone as people, like me."

Shirley married Fred Manteghi after meeting him at Eastern Oklahoma State College where he was going to school. While they lived in California, she went to school at Cal State University in Hayward, where she received a degree in Native American (NA) studies. "At that time it was in the '70's. My teachers were Dean Chaver, Dennis Banks and those radicals. When they occupied Alcatraz, I wanted to go, but my husband said 'no way.' It was interesting to have the American Indian Movement (AIM) people come in and give lectures! I worked at the place Wilma Mankiller (former Cherokee Chief) worked at - Oakland Native American Center."

Shirley also received a Degree in Liberal Studies from the University of Oklahoma.

Shirley said she became an Indian Child Welfare (ICW) specialist. "The Indian Child Welfare Act was just coming out and no one wanted to abide by the ICW law. Every time I went into a courtroom it was a hassle. My statement would be, 'I am sorry, but the federal law supersedes the state law!' I probably represented over 100 tribes." She said she had cases in courtrooms in San Jose, Oakland, San Francisco and Bakersfield.

Shirley lived in California 38 years before returning to Oklahoma in 1998.

"I found out about racism when I came back to Oklahoma. I was told, 'People in Oklahoma did not like Indians.' I thought, 'What are you talking about?' I was told, 'You will find out.' That is when I consider I found what racism is all about," said Shirley.

"To me, it was shocking. I thought, 'I am a human being just like you. What makes me different? Why do you not like Indians? What is the problem?' Stereotyping was unbelievable in Oklahoma," said Shirley.

When young and growing up with her grandparents, Shirley loved going to the Choctaw churches in southeast Oklahoma. "We went to every singing, convention and association all over. We went to Thessalonica and Macedonia, Durwood Indian Church, all the churches in between those places and Kiamichi by Talihina. We had camp meetings and Bible schools," said Shirley. Shirley said a big part of the church culture was the traditional food, which she loved. Some of her favorites were hog meat, banana, tanchi labona and of course, wild onions.

"When I went to California, I never dreamed I would see those places again. When I joined the Choctaw Honor Guard I got to see those places again doing funerals! I could almost picture Grandma and Grandpa and us there!"

Shirley has been an active member of the Choctaw Honor Guard since 1998.

"The first funeral I served as an Honor Guard was in cow pasture. There were cows everywhere. One bull was staring at me. I told (John) Burlson if the bull comes toward me I will give you my rifle and you will never see me again. I am scared to death of cows. Two weeks later, I was sent to a parade in Tishomingo, and there was a Longhorn behind me. I am so afraid of cows, I could hardly stay in step."

Shirley said, "It has been the greatest honor bestowed upon me to honor deceased Choctaw vets."

In addition to honor assignments at funerals, duty assignments Shirley has had as an Honor Guard include: Leading the Trail of Tears walk; posting colors at the Bakersfield (Okla Chahta Gathering); Opening Procession of the National Museum of the Native American in Washington, D.C.; many Pow Wow Grand Entries; Memorial Day exercises and 21 Gun Salutes at Veterans Day Ceremonies at Tvshka Homma.

Shirley said she would like to be remembered as a grandma and great-grandma wearing her combat boots and firing her M-16.

Shirley Mantaghi is the model for the female Honor Guard at the Warrior exhibit at the Choctaw Cultural Center in Durant. Her likeness stands in full uniform beside other heroic figures at the exhibit – Tvshkalusa, Pushmataha, Joseph Oklahombi and Tony Burris. When asked about people in her life who had influenced her greatly, Shirley named her grandparents and Uncle Steve. "They instilled in me the belief I can do anything and be anything I want to be." She said the most important lesson she had learned in life is, "Be yourself, be humble, and you can accomplish anything. You can accomplish your goals."
