

Sergeant First Class Debra Kay Mooney joined the Oklahoma Army National Guard in 1991 and was deployed overseas to Iraq two times – in 2004 and 2008. During the first overseas deployment to Iraq, Sergeant Mooney and some of her troops organized a Pow Wow – the first of its kind held in a combat zone. The Pow Wow, held at the end of September 2004 at the Al Taqaddum Air Base near Fallujah, was hosted by the 120<sup>th</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion. Sergeant Mooney and others organizing the Pow Wow hoped to bring a piece of home to the Natives serving in Iraq. She said they also wanted to share Native American culture and heritage so that others would have a better understanding.

Debra says she much of her focus in life has been learning, teaching and speaking about the Native American way of life.

Preparations for the Pow Wow in Iraq were intense. Debra shared that regalia and items that could not be sent from family and friends at home was put together from scavenged materials on base. A planned throwing contest required tomahawks – so tomahawks were made out of metal from truck doors. Sticks for the stickball game were actually mallet handles, with parachute cords creating the cups. A 55-gallon barrel was cut in half and canvas from a cot was stretched over it to create a drum. Debra said the challenges of the Pow Wow were met in a five-week window for planning and execution.

Afterwards, regalia from the Pow Wow was sent to the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington DC as a legacy to the event and tribal heritage.

Mooney served on the advisory committee of distinguished Native veterans which provided guidance on a national veterans memorial. The National Native American Veterans Memorial was constructed on the grounds of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in Washington, DC by Oklahoma artist Harvey Pratt, and dedicated in 2020. It is named "The Warriors Circle of Honor". Ceremonies for the memorial were also held in November of 2022.

She attended basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina and served in the 120<sup>th</sup> Combat Heavy Engineers, Oklahoma National Guard. Her second deployment to Iraq (in 2008) she served as a facility Engineer for Detainee Operations. In addition to deployment in Iraq, Mooney also spent time in Germany and Panama.

Mooney is the first woman in her family to serve in the military. She is a contributor to "Warrior Spirit, the Story of Native American Patriotism and Heroism" by Herman J. Viola, a book for which she wrote the Foreword.

#### Sources:

Interview info collected by Judy Allen 2022 and

"Warrior Spirit, the Story of Native American Patriotism and Heroism" by Herman J. Viola