

F-15 nose art honors Code Talkers

Staff Sergeant Robert C. Holster made it a mission to honor the Choctaw Code Talkers with special nose art on an F-15 fighter jet. While most USAF aircraft have standard paint jobs to fit their role, the nose art of fighter craft can be unique. Holster wanted to honor his Choctaw heritage for his aircraft. When Holster became crew chief, the aircraft was devoid of nose art, so he took the opportunity to create an emblem design telling the story of the original Choctaw Code Talkers of WWI. Collaborating with the Choctaw Nation and the Choctaw Code Talkers Association, his design was soon complete, integrating a design by artist Gwen Coleman-Lester, and the arrowhead shape of the 36th Division insignia, where WWI Code Talkers were assigned when they served in France.

The dedication ceremony for the plane's nose art included guests Chief Gary Batton, Assistant Chief Jack Austin and President of the Choctaw Code Talkers Association, Nuchi Nashoba.

Holster enlisted May 2011 in the United States Air Force, Oregon Air National Guard. "I chose the Oregon National Guard because it is close to home," he said.

After basic in San Antonio at Lackland AFB, Holster returned to Oregon, where he has continued his service at Kingsley Field. He received training through the Air Force for aircraft maintenance on F-15 fighter jets.

"For nine years, I was an Aircraft Mechanic doing major inspections and doing extensive repairs to fighter jets. For the last three years I have been a Dedicated Crew Chief, where I manage a F-15 and do inspections before flight, between flights, and after flights. I ensure the aircraft is ready for flight and that the pilots are receiving a safe jet.

The military is a great way to see the world and/or to have schooling paid for. It has great benefits, as well. The military has almost every job opportunity that you can think of. You can get trained in any career field and take that experience to the civilian world."

When he enlisted, Holster said he had to leave his two older children, Araya and Nakoah, behind. "That was one of the hardest things I ever had to do!" Holster also said, "The worst part of basic training was not getting to talk to my children every day. The greatest day of training was the day of graduation, because my parents brought my children to watch me graduate basic training."

Holster said he had vivid memories while in technical school at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas in 2011. "While marching in formation back to the dorms from the school house, something popped into my head saying my children had been in a car accident. No matter how many times I tried to not think those thoughts, it was actually true. When I arrived back to my dorm room, my cell phone was ringing off the hook. It was my parents informing me my kids had been in an accident. It took over an hour to find out Araya and Nakoah were fine, and both had been in their car seats. My daughter was four years of age at the time." He shared a back story of his life, "I had spent fifteen years on the Chiloquin Fire Department. The worst day while on the job was back in 2005 when a family of five passed away from going head on into a semi. By the time we got there, the father and four-year-old boy were still breathing. After gaining access to the four-year-old, I took over stabilizing his head as we laid him on the back board. That is when he took his last breath. Six years later, my daughter, now four, and being in a car accident made it to where I could not sleep for a week. Every time I tried to close my eyes it was my daughter's face I was laying down for the last time."

According to Holster, studying and learning military terms vs. civilian terms and learning hundreds of different acronyms was a difficult part of training. "The easiest part of the military lifestyle for me to adapt to was listening and following instruction. I came from a fire background, fighting fires both structure and wildland. It is imperative to listen and follow instruction to the "T".

Medals and citations include Commendation Medal, Air Force Achievement Medal and the Meritorious Service Medal with Silver Star.

Holster said he has created many friendships, two of them very special. "First is Technical Sergeant Ashley Vela. Ashley has become like a sister to me and the second is Technical Sergeant Chris Wilmott, who has been the biggest mentor I have had in my military career."

Major Richard Schuster is my current commander. He was the one who saw the importance of my nose art for my jet. Major Schuster directed me to coordinate a ceremony to dedicate my nose art that represents our first Code Talkers.

When asked how military service had affected his life, Holster answered, "Several different ways, good and bad. "Good": The military has brought structure and discipline back into my life and fine-tuned my attention to detail. Sacrifices of the "bad": I would take home the military ways the my kids were affected greatly. I wasn't allowing y kids to be kids, and allowing them to make mistakes and learn from their own mistakes. One day of early 2022, I noticed my children were not happy while at our house. Finally, after several attempts of asking what was the matter, my daughter, 15, opened up. Araya and I had spoken for over five hours on why her and her two brothers were so unhappy. I didn't realize how my military persona was affecting my children. My daughter had opened my eyes to how I was being as a father and from that day forward, I have left work at work, and we couldn't have a happier home now."

Holster said, "One important life lesson I have learned is to separate military life from home life. You may lose the ones you love the most without even knowing it. Military personnel are trained held at a higher level than the average person. It can be hard for individuals to understand fully what military members' thought processes are. In my mind, this can be what makes a difficult home life. I am extremely proud of my daughter for opening my eyes and making me realize what I was doing.

Holster had begun the traditions of attending pow wow and ceremonies with his children, so they can know their Choctaw heritage.

"I would describe myself as a person to put others before self. I am a person who cares and am willing to help as much as I can. I am a family man – a father who wants the best life for his children," he said.

Holster's parents are Charles and Susan Holster. He has one sister, Sheri and a brother, Chadric.

Holster said, "I wish people fully understood what a lot of veterans have gone through in their military career and know that they may have seen things that most people will never experience in their life. I wish people would understand that our military members have signed on the dotted line basically saying, 'I will risk my own life to protect your way of life.'"