

Wheelus is Veteran of the Month

Thomas Wheelus is Choctaw Nation's Veteran of the Month. Wheelus was born, raised, and currently resides in Hugo, District 8.

He graduated from Hugo High School in 1966 and enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1969. Upon graduation from boot camp, Wheelus went to Norman, Oklahoma, where he worked as an auditor for the University of Oklahoma until he received active orders in Sept. 1970 and was home ported on the USS Oklahoma City Yokosuka, Japan.

Wheelus arrived in Vietnam in Oct. 1970, where he served 33 months in the Combat Zone aboard USS Oklahoma City which provided troop support and ground fire from the Mekong Delta up the coast to Hanoi, participating in Operation Linebacker. USS Oklahoma was the first ship to use a guided missile from ship to shore. SK Striker Wheelus was promoted to Storekeeper 2nd class (SK2) E-5.

Upon release from the U.S. Navy, Wheelus resumed his job at the University of Oklahoma and attended classes, majoring in music until 1977. He left college to be District Manager for Oklahoma Publishing Company until 1979, went on to work in a foreign car salvage yard until 1980, then ultimately worked as a music therapist until 1983. Wheelus returned to school at Northwestern in Weatherford, Okla. and graduated in 1985 with two bachelor degrees. He worked at the J.D. McCarty Handicap Children Center in Norman, Okla. until 1990, during which time he earned his Master of Music. He worked until retirement in 2010 at Griffin Memorial Hospital and attended Doctoral level classes in music at the University of Oklahoma.

He is the great-great nephew of Chief Justice Joel Everidge, born in 1828, who came across the Trail of Tears at age four. He was carried most of the way by his older sister Harriet Everidge, who married Thomas Oaks.

Wheelus comes from a military family. His father served the U.S. Navy in the Pacific, two uncles served in Europe, and an uncle served in Korea.