

an interesting story, that was profiled in National Geographic book "Warriors in Uniform."

I was working as an Arabic translator/intelligence operator in An-Najaf Iraq, around 2003-2004. A Combat Camera team showed up at our location, getting ready to participate in a high level mission - documenting the action, basically. So, I was helping the crew get settled in, briefing them on the situation on the ground, etc. At some point, the team lead - SFC Chuck Boers - asked about using the internet. I set him up on my computer, and then I noticed the first thing he typed in was 'powwows.com.' I asked him if he was Native. He confirmed that he was. Ironically, I had a picture of my kids in powwow regalia right there at my desk, and I pointed it out. I said, "I'm enrolled with Choctaw Nation!"

They were at our location for a number of days, so Chuck and I had some long chats. We really hit it off. Anyway, before the mission, we decided to take a commemorative photo. We found some chalk-like stones and drew on a stucco wall. We included our tribal affiliations, location and year of the picture, and a ledger-style Native warrior on horseback. At the top of this we wrote "Native Warriors."

The picture was taken by one of Chuck's teammates. It got shared and garnered a lot of attention. Eventually, it got picked up by Indian Country today newspaper. Around that time we were contacted by Dr. Herman J. Viola, who was writing a book on Native Americans serving in the military, called Warriors in Uniform. So, our interviews are included in that book, as is the photo. I also made sure to mention that the Choctaws were the first Code Talkers, in WWI!

Chuck and I are still good friends to this day, and meet up every so often. Although, we are older and grayer now. We both had some very close calls downrange. So, I'm just happy we made it through in one piece. Life sure does go by fast!