

**Warriors and Healers of the Eastern Band of Cherokee: Peoplehood, Survivance, and
Military Service in World War I (1917-1924)**

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Abstract

My research examines the contributions of the Eastern Band of Cherokee warriors during World War I, emphasizing Indigenous agency, cultural survival, and community within a settler-colonial framework. It explores how these warriors navigated military service as both an assertion of sovereignty and a means of survival, using their enlistment to resist colonial erasure while maintaining their cultural identity. Through the application of the Peoplehood model and the concept of survivance, this study analyzes the interconnected roles of land, language, sacred history, and ceremonial practices in sustaining Cherokee identity. Furthermore, this study incorporates an Indigenous feminist perspective to emphasize the role of Eastern Cherokee women in maintaining the resilience of Cherokee communities and supporting the healing of warriors. The women served during the war as nurses, officers and occupied a generally white and male centered environment. After the war, some former warriors and women participated in political actions to improve the lives of indigenous peoples. They also had to learn to reintegrate themselves in their community and society after such deep traumas; and for that they used their traditional healing practices and traditional stories. By combining archival research, oral histories, and an analysis of military service, my work contributes to ongoing discussions of Native sovereignty, military service, and the legacies of Indigenous resilience before, during, and after World War I. It underscores the enduring importance of Indigenous storytelling, archives, and collective memory

in documenting the survival and revitalization of Cherokee culture in the face of historical violence and cultural suppression.

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General Audience Abstract

This dissertation explores the experiences of the Eastern Band of Cherokee warriors during World War I, focusing on how they balanced military service with maintaining their cultural identity. It examines how they used enlistment not solely to serve their country but also to assert their sovereignty, preserve traditions, and resist cultural erasure. The study also highlights the vital role of Eastern Cherokee women, who served as nurses and officers, supporting the war effort and helping their communities recover after the conflict. Finally, the project looks into ways of healing upon the Eastern Cherokee veterans' return to their home after the war.

Using a combination of archival research, oral histories, and military records, the project shows how returning veterans reintegrated into their communities, drawing on traditional stories, ceremonies, and healing practices to cope with trauma and strengthen communal bonds. Some veterans and women also engaged in political efforts to improve the lives of Indigenous peoples, demonstrating ongoing leadership and resilience.

The research emphasizes the interconnection of land, language, sacred history, and ceremonial practices in sustaining Cherokee identity. By centering Indigenous perspectives and practices, this work highlights the importance of storytelling, archives, and collective memory in preserving culture and ensuring continuity despite the pressures of war and settler colonialism.

Ultimately, this study sheds light on the courage, creativity, and resilience of the Eastern Band of Cherokee, showing how military service, cultural survival, and community engagement were deeply intertwined. It contributes to broader discussions about Native sovereignty, Indigenous military service, and the legacies of cultural survival in the face of historical oppression.

Dedication

To my son, Milo. May he grow to know and respect his ancestors.

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Introduction

Military service and war efforts during World War I have often been glorified and romanticized or dramatized with the war regarded as one of the bloodiest in modern history, a true “butcher's bill” for those involved. The war introduced devastating new weaponry, trench warfare, and unprecedented battlefield conditions that shaped modern understandings of war trauma. Amid this brutality, it is striking that soldiers from marginalized communities—those whom the United States had historically sought to assimilate and dominate—chose to enlist and fight. In the trenches, the enemy was everywhere.

From this perspective, it is hard to consider that soldiers would volunteer to go. But it is even harder to imagine that soldiers from marginalized backgrounds, often regarded as the “savage” and the enemy to assimilate and dominate, would also volunteer to go. Among the various tribes which enlisted and were drafted, Native warriors from the Eastern Band of Cherokee, who were often criticized and dismissed by the broader American society, volunteered to serve. These warriors enlisted knowing full well the consequences and implications of their decision, enduring both the horrors of war and the systemic racism of their American counterparts. The idea of such warriors, facing such adversity willingly, all the while facing repression and attempted assimilation of their culture and identity serves as an illustration of their agency and resilience.

Unlike some narratives that reduce Indigenous military service to obligation or economic necessity, the Eastern Cherokee participation in WWI highlights their agency, resilience, and strategic engagement with the U.S. military. Their enlistment was not merely about serving the United States—it was a continuation of their warrior traditions, shaped by cultural values, gender roles, and the political realities of their time.

In addition, the fact that Eastern Cherokee warriors served and volunteered during World War I offers a unique perspective on Indigenous agency, challenging mainstream narratives that view Native warriors' enlistment as mere compliance or obligation. As Historian Thomas Grillot notes, “Among the some three hundred thousand self-identified Natives in the 1910 census, there was no real rebellion against the draft, not even of the unorganized, passive type; no attempt at sabotage, or espionage; no pro-German propaganda in the reservations to which, almost since the beginning of the U.S. republic, Native Americans had been relegated, one group after the other, one war or treaty at a time.”¹

By the late 19th century, U.S. Indian policy shifted from removal toward assimilation, aiming to erase Indigenous cultural practices and incorporate Native peoples into Euro-American society. Boarding schools, Christian missions, and allotment policies—most notably the Dawes Act of 1887—sought to “civilize” Native children by forbidding their languages, religions, and traditional practices.² These policies treated Indigenous identity as an obstacle to progress and

¹ Thomas Grillot, *First Americans: U.S. Patriotism in Indian Country after World War I* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 3.

² Vine Deloria and Clifford M. Lytle, *American Indians, American Justice* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 45–47; Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880–1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 89–91.

positioned Native people as wards of the state rather than sovereign communities. As Vine Deloria emphasizes, assimilation was framed as a benevolent project, but it was in fact a systematic attempt to dissolve tribal governance, redistribute communal lands, and undermine Indigenous social structures.³ The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (ECBI), like other communities, endured these pressures while striving to maintain language, ceremonial life, and gendered cultural roles—efforts that would shape how men and women navigated military service, civic engagement, and postwar reintegration in the early 20th century.

The evolution of federal and state authority in the Southeast were influential on the ECBI tribal autonomy and agency. Following the Treaty of Hopewell in 1785—the first formal agreement between the United States and the Cherokee Nation—the federal government claimed “the sole and exclusive right of regulating the trade with the Indians and managing all their affairs in such manner as they think proper.”⁴ This clause, as historian William McLoughlin notes, would later be interpreted by many whites as signifying that the Cherokee had lost their sovereign rights and become “tenants at will” of the new American state.⁵ The ambiguity of that phrasing established a structural precedent: federal protection coexisted uneasily with state jurisdiction, creating the legal contradictions that the ECBI would continue to navigate well into the twentieth century.

³ Deloria and Lytle, *American Indians, American Justice*, 45.

⁴ “Treaty with the Cherokee, 1785 (Hopewell),” *Kappler’s Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, Vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), Article IX.

⁵ William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renaissance in the New Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 15–21.

This context cannot be separated from broader structures of repression. Until 1978, Indigenous peoples in the United States were, in theory, legally barred from practicing many of their ceremonies and spiritual traditions. In 1883, Secretary of the Interior Henry M. Teller issued a circular to Indian agents prohibiting dances, medicine rituals, and other traditional ceremonies, which were deemed “heathenish” and incompatible with U.S. policies of assimilation⁶. This decree formalized a system of legal restrictions on Native religious life that persisted through the Courts of Indian Offenses and shaped the cultural landscape in which Eastern Cherokee ceremonies and storytelling continued under surveillance. The *American Indian Religious Freedom Act*⁷ marked the first federal acknowledgment that Native nations had the right to ceremony, sacred sites, and religious expression—though even then, enforcement was weak. For the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, this meant that cosmologies of blood, balance, and women’s authority—embodied in figures like Selu the Corn Mother—were not legitimized for generations under settler law. That erasure was not abstract: it reverberated through boarding schools, military service, and federal policies that attempted to overwrite Cherokee gender systems, language, and sovereignty.

This dissertation states Eastern Cherokee participation in World War I within this longer trajectory of colonial disruption. By examining both men and women—warriors, nurses, caregivers, and students—I argue that their actions must be understood not as assimilation into settler institutions, but as survivance: acts of resilience and cultural continuity under conditions

⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs, *Circular to Indian Agents on the Prohibition of Certain Ceremonies*, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the Year 1883 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 45–47.

⁷ American Indian Religious Freedom Act, 42 U.S.C. § 1996 (1978).

of domination. Through an analysis grounded in Indigenous feminist theory, the Peoplehood model, and frameworks of settler colonialism, I show how Eastern Cherokee men and women navigated institutions designed to discipline them, while carrying forward cultural practices that affirmed their sovereignty and relational responsibilities.

One critical aspect of this study is the impact of Indian boarding schools—particularly Carlisle—on Eastern Cherokee warriors’ decisions to enlist and their experiences in the military. These schools were central to the federal government’s assimilation policies, forcibly removing Native children from their communities and families in order to “kill the Indian, and save the man.”⁸ At Carlisle, students were forbidden to speak their languages, forced into Christian practices, and trained to abandon traditions at the core of their being. The institution was run with military discipline and explicitly linked to the American military establishment, underscoring the state’s belief that the proper “civilized” Native was one reshaped into a disciplined subject of empire. Yet many Eastern Cherokee warriors later used the very skills they were compelled to learn—English literacy, military drills, and even their Cherokee language, which had been suppressed in the United States—as tools of survival and resistance.

For Eastern Cherokee warriors, as John Loftin and Benjamin Frey explain, warfare was never only a matter of physical strength; it was an extension of cultural and spiritual beliefs. Their participation in World War I, particularly in the 81st Division, placed them in battlefields across Europe where they continued long traditions of resilience and adaptability. The paradox is clear: while they served in a U.S. military that discriminated against them, they simultaneously

⁸ Famous motto of the founder of Carlisle School. Military man Captain Richard Henry Pratt.

deployed their Cherokee language as a code—precisely the language settler institutions had tried to erase. This language use highlighted the complexity of their service: a cultural resource deemed obsolete or dangerous by the settler state became essential to military victory.

The Owl family provides an illuminating example. George Allen Owl (Company I, 321st Infantry) and Britten Owl (81st Division) exemplified Cherokee resilience and skill, while Samuel Owl, drafted as a Private Bugler in the 58th Field Artillery Battalion, embodied the Cherokee tradition of battlefield communication.⁹ Yet despite their service, these men faced systemic discrimination upon their return, including legal obstacles that denied them voting rights. Their struggles, as described by Thomas Grillot, show how service did not erase the colonial state's refusal to recognize Indigenous sovereignty.¹⁰ The Owls' experiences reveal the dual struggle of Eastern Cherokee people in the early 20th century: seeking recognition as U.S. citizens while simultaneously preserving their own sovereignty, identity, and cultural continuity.

While EBCI men fought abroad, their women also played essential roles in both military service and community resilience. Lula H. Owl's work at Camp Lewis, Washington, illustrates their often-overlooked presence in wartime infrastructure. Lulu K. Wolf Hassenplug, who served at Walter Reed Hospital, demonstrate the diversity of Eastern Cherokee women's contributions. Beyond their official service, women maintained kinship bonds and ensured that returning warriors were reintegrated into the community. Their labor included ceremonial healing,

⁹ Bandel, Jessica A. "Portraits of War: George Allen Owl," *Our State*, April 20, 2017, <https://www.dncr.nc.gov/blog/2018/11/16/george-owls-letter-chokeee-indians-camp-jackson>.

¹⁰ Thomas Grillot, *Native Americans and the First World War* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018),

reaffirmation of kinship ties, and cultural practices to honor warriors—acts that extended Cherokee traditions of care into wartime contexts.

To analyze the Eastern Cherokee narratives, this project draws on two intertwined central frameworks. The Peoplehood Model, developed by Robert K. Thomas¹¹ and later defined by Tom Holm, Ben Chavis and Diane Pearson, emphasizes the interconnections of place, sacred history, ceremonial cycle, and language in shaping Indigenous identity. These elements profoundly shaped Eastern Cherokee warriors' decisions and resilience, framing their participation as something more than compliance with U.S. demands. Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance provides another lens, highlighting that Eastern Cherokee service was not mere survival but an active assertion of identity, sovereignty, and cultural continuity under colonial domination.¹²

This project, therefore, is about more than World War I. It is about human beings—the warriors and their communities—and the cultural preservation that sustained them during and after their military service. It emphasizes how Eastern Cherokee beliefs and practices rooted in Peoplehood, survivance, and gendered cosmologies of blood were crucial not only to their survival on the battlefield, but also to their long-term survival as a people. To fully understand these experiences, one must consider the historical, social, economic, and political contexts that shaped Eastern Cherokee enlistment, military service, and community resilience.

¹¹ Robert K. Thomas and Tom Holm, *The Cherokee Nation: A Peoplehood Perspective* (Tahlequah: Cherokee Nation Press, 1994), 45–48.

¹² Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 1.

I argue that the Peoplehood Model provides a necessary corrective to both U.S. military history and dominant settler-colonial narratives, because it re-centers Indigenous epistemologies of identity, belonging, and survivance. Developed by scholar Robert K. Thomas (Cherokee) and further refined by historian Tom Holm (Cherokee/Creek) and Linda Pearson (Cherokee) and Ben Chavis (Lumbee) the model emphasizes that Indigenous nationhood is constituted through four interrelated elements: place, sacred history, ceremonial cycle, and language¹³. Place grounds Indigenous life in relation to land and water; sacred history connects present generations to ancestral memory; ceremonial cycle structures social and spiritual responsibilities; and language transmits worldview and kinship across generations. I use this model because it allows me to situate Eastern Cherokee participation in World War I not as isolated acts of assimilation, but as extensions of these enduring structures of nationhood. At the same time, I draw on Indigenous Feminist Theory—particularly the work of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) and Andrea Smith (Cherokee)—to foreground how settler colonialism has been enacted through patriarchal impositions on Indigenous women’s authority, kinship systems, and reproductive power.¹⁴ This feminist lens underscores that colonial disruption of Cherokee women’s sovereignty at institutions like Carlisle Boarding School and in military service was not incidental but central to the colonial project. Finally, by engaging military history, I highlight how Native service in the U.S. armed forces cannot be reduced to loyalty to the United States, but must be understood as strategic engagements shaped by Indigenous philosophies of warfare,

¹³ Tom Holm, J. Diane Pearson, and Ben Chavis, “Peoplehood: A Model for the Extension of Sovereignty in American Indian Studies,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 11.

¹⁴ Audra Simpson, *Theorizing Native Feminisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 45; Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005), 37.

kinship, and survival. Together, these frameworks allow me to examine Eastern Cherokee warriors and women as sovereign actors navigating the intersecting pressures of settler colonialism, militarism, and assimilation, while asserting survivance in both battlefield and community life.

First, relationship to place highlights the Eastern Cherokees' profound connection to their ancestral homeland, Kituwah. This connection is not primarily territorial but spiritual, emotional, and cultural, embodying a bond that spans generations. As historians John Loftin and Benjamin Frey, note, Kituwah is a sacred site central to creation stories and Cherokee identity.¹⁵ Maintaining this relationship constitutes for the Eastern Cherokee people, a form of resistance against settler colonial pressures to sever Indigenous ties to the land. Survivance, as articulated by White Earth Chippewa scholar Gerald Vizenor,¹⁶ complements this model by emphasizing the active presence of Indigenous identity: by continuing to steward Kituwah, the Eastern Cherokee people assert cultural endurance and counter narratives that render them invisible.¹⁷

Second, sacred history refers to the living traditions of oral storytelling and cultural memory. Stories are not merely historical accounts but are enacted and embodied by successive

¹⁵Loftin, John D., and Benjamin E. Frey. *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees*. 1st ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.12949145>, 83

¹⁶ Vizenor, Gerald. *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008,1

¹⁷ Isaacs, Sandra Muse. *Eastern Cherokee Stories: A Living Oral Tradition and Its Cultural Continuance*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019.

generations. Isaacs emphasizes storytelling as essential for preserving sacred histories and sustaining cultural identity.¹⁸

Public performances like the outdoor drama *Unto These Hills* exemplify how Cherokee history and identity are actively preserved. Retelling events such as the Trail of Tears or the life of the Cherokee warrior, Tsali integrates songs, dances, and narrative into community practice, ensuring that these histories remain vibrant. According to Gerald Vizenor, such acts of storytelling constitute survivance, allowing Indigenous narratives to function as active resistance, reclaiming narrative authority, and asserting continuity in the face of colonial erasure.¹⁹ Equally important, many ceremonies and performances retell sacred history, reenacting foundational stories of creation, migration, and cultural origin. In this way, public storytelling simultaneously preserves communal memory, reinforces cultural values, and asserts the enduring presence of Cherokee identity—a process that represents cultural translation and resilience rather than simple preservation.

The third element, ceremonial cycle, encompasses rituals tied to spiritual, social, and political life. Ceremonial practices—including warrior ceremonies, medicine rituals, and powwows—maintain relationships with the cosmos and reinforce communal bonds. Powwows, for example, honor veterans and integrate traditional practices adapted over time, reflecting

¹⁸ Isaacs, *Oral Histories and Sacred Knowledge in the Eastern Cherokee* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 52.

¹⁹ Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 1–5; John Kneebone and Donna Cobb, *Unto These Hills: A Historical and Cultural Overview* (Cherokee, NC: Cherokee Historical Association, 2010), 12–18.

resilience in the face of colonial prohibitions. Through these practices, Eastern Cherokee identity is continuously reaffirmed, demonstrating cultural resistance and survivance in everyday life.

Finally, language serves as a cornerstone of cultural continuity and worldview. Cherokee is inseparable from spirituality, kinship, and cyclical notions of time, offering a framework for understanding the cosmos and guiding communal life. Survivance manifests in the teaching, speaking, and preservation of the language, reflecting active defiance against colonial efforts to suppress it and asserting political and cultural agency.

Blood, too, was central to ECBI epistemologies. For them, women's blood—especially menstrual blood—was sacred and life-giving, contrasted with the blood spilled in hunting or warfare. This philosophy rooted women's authority in reproduction, agriculture, and governance, establishing balance between genders. Settler colonialism, however, disrupted this balance, reducing blood to a biological measurement in boarding school files and federal records, where ECBI girls were labeled “full-blood” or “mixed-blood.” These classifications sought to overwrite Cherokee women's status as kin-makers and knowledge-holders by reducing them to racial fractions. As Katherine Ellinghaus and Kim TallBear (Dakota) demonstrate, blood became a bureaucratic tool of assimilation, even as Cherokee cosmology insisted on its sacred and sovereign meaning. Recognizing this tension is crucial: one cannot discuss Cherokee women's historical importance without discussing blood, and one cannot discuss Native survivance

without reckoning with blood quantum policies that both constrained and, paradoxically, allowed tribes to protect their sovereignty from exploitation²⁰.

In this dissertation, I argue that Eastern Cherokee agency and knowledge are central, yet they cannot be fully understood without situating it within the ongoing impact of settler colonialism. I argue that settler colonialism must be analyzed not only through Indigenous experiences but also through the actions and structures imposed by settlers that shape those experiences. Understanding settler colonialism requires examining both sides of this colonial encounter: the strategies employed by settlers and the adaptive responses of Indigenous peoples.

As Australian historian Patrick Wolfe notes, “Settler colonialism destroys to replace.”²¹ With this statement, Wolfe highlights that settler colonialism is not merely physical displacement but also epistemological: settlers attempt to replace Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and relating to the world. The US federal government’s establishment of Indian boarding schools highlights this reality. Native children were removed from their families, forbidden from speaking their languages, and taught settler norms. Ironically, Eastern Cherokee Code Talkers during World War I subverted these efforts: the Cherokee language, targeted for eradication, became a tool of resistance, encrypting military communications and asserting Indigenous knowledge within colonial institutions. Lakota scholar Vine Deloria Jr. extends this argument, critiquing the settler-driven construction of history: “The white world of abstract symbols

²⁰ Katherine Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell: Native Americans and Assimilation Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017); Kim TallBear, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

²¹ Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388.

became a nightmare for Indian people.”²² Settler epistemologies fail to recognize Indigenous ways of knowing, and their imposition represents both intellectual and cultural domination.

Additionally, Indigenous Feminist theory provides an essential lens for examining Eastern Cherokee women’s roles during and after World War I. Mainstream narratives often focus on male warriors, yet women like Lulu K. Wolf, Sallie Graybeard or Lula H. Owl Gloyne, reveal the centrality of care giving, kinship, and ceremonial responsibility in wartime resilience. Their actions challenge settler-imposed gender binaries and demonstrate Indigenous agency within and against colonial institutions. Asshinabee theorist and scholar, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson emphasizes relationality as central to Indigenous survival.²³ The Eastern Cherokee women’s contributions exemplify this relational ethic: their care giving and leadership sustained not only their families but also broader community structures and cultural practices. Historians Rebecca Goetz and Carolyn Johnston show how colonial gender norms sought to suppress Indigenous women’s authority, and the wartime roles of Cherokee women directly resisted these expectations. By studying and working in institutions like Walter Reed Hospital and Carlisle, the eastern Cherokee women navigated settler systems strategically, asserting authority while preserving Indigenous knowledge and practices.²⁴

²²Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 9.

²³ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 12–15.

²⁴ Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); Carolyn Ross Johnston, *Cherokee Women in Crisis: Trail of Tears, Civil War, and Allotment, 1838–1907* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003).

Similarly, anthropologist Renya K. Ramirez (Ho-Chunk) demonstrates that the marginalization of Native women highlights how settler colonialism simultaneously undermines gendered authority and racial belonging. Eastern Cherokee women's care giving, leadership, and spiritual work during wartime were not incidental but crucial acts of cultural preservation and resistance.²⁵

Finally, the work of theorists Maile Arvin (Native Hawaiian), Eve Tuck (Unangax̂), and Angie Morrill (Klamath Tribes) on decolonial feminism re-frames participation in settler institutions not as submission but as reclamation of autonomy. Their framework insists that Indigenous women's actions—whether in educational, medical, or military spaces—must be understood as assertions of sovereignty and cultural survival, even within colonial structures.²⁶

Through this dual lens of settler colonialism and Indigenous feminist theory, I analyze Eastern Cherokee women as active agents in maintaining cultural continuity and resisting attempted erasure. Their roles in wartime efforts illustrate the intersection of Indigenous agency, gendered responsibilities, and survivance: affirming cultural identity while navigating and resisting colonial pressures.

Although I did not conduct fieldwork for this dissertation, I aspired to work with the ECBI community through respectful engagement with their scholars, cultural institutions, tribal archives, and existing narratives. I prioritized consulting with Eastern Cherokee historians,

²⁵ Renya K. Ramirez, *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 7.

²⁶ Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy," *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 8–34.

cultural experts, and tribal members when possible, seeking their guidance to ensure my analysis aligns with their perspectives and values. Additionally, I incorporated published oral histories, community narratives, and archival materials produced by the community. I engaged with tribal cultural institutions, such as the Museum of the Cherokee People in Cherokee, North Carolina, which preserves valuable archival records and cultural insights. My goal is to contribute meaningfully to decolonizing the representation of their historical narratives, which are often framed through a settler-colonial lens while promoting mutual understanding and respect. However, my research not only seeks to uncover Eastern Cherokee voices within these sources; it also examines the ways in which their history and narratives have been framed through settler-produced accounts and how those narratives, in turn, have shaped historical memory and policy.²⁷

Central to my methodology is reciprocity and respectful listening. Alyssa Mt. Pleasant (Tuscarora), Caroline Wigginton, and Kelly Wisecup argue that the study of American Indian history and culture must be part of an ongoing relationship between scholars and the communities they study, a principle I integrate by following tribal archival protocols.²⁸ Similarly, ethnohistorian Ludwig Braun and anthropologist Raymond DeMallie emphasize that story itself is a form of knowledge, one that requires attentiveness to culture, kinship, and language as part of the interpretive process.²⁹ I therefore treat Eastern Cherokee oral traditions and community

²⁷ Alyssa Mt. Pleasant, Caroline Wigginton, and Kelly Wisecup, *Materials and Methods in Native American and Indigenous Studies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 3–4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁹ Ludwig Braun and Raymond J. DeMallie, *History, Power, and Myth: Essays on the Historical Anthropology of North American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 19.

narratives not as supplementary to colonial archives but as primary sources that reveal cultural meaning.

Indigenous historians, Winona Wheeler (Creek/Métis), Charles Trimble (Dakota) and their colleagues remind us that Indigenous oral histories not only document the past but also shape community identity and future practice.³⁰ In my research, I experienced this vividly at the performance *Unto These Hills* in Cherokee, North Carolina (July 2024). When the story of Tsali's martyrdom was dramatized, the audience's reverence demonstrated how performance functions as both storytelling and ceremony, linking the present to ancestral memory. This moment underscored the importance of approaching such narratives as dynamic cultural practices, not as static historical artifacts.

I integrate author Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou) critiques of Western research traditions for defining and distorting Indigenous knowledge, arguing that decolonial methodologies require challenging the structures that have historically silenced Native perspectives.³¹ Indigenous theorist Shawn Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree) similarly insists on relationality, understanding knowledge as embedded in community and spirituality.³²

³⁰ Winona Wheeler, Sarah Carter, Freda Ahenakew, and Robert Alexander Innes, *Oral Histories and Indigenous Futures* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2024), 7.

³¹ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (London: Zed Books, 2012), 5.

³² Shawn Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree, Indigenous research methodologist), *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2008).

I follow these frameworks by centering Eastern Cherokee perspectives and interrogating how colonial archives—military documents, government reports, and anthropological accounts like those of ethnologist James Mooney—both preserved and distorted their cultural practices.³³

Finally, I acknowledge my positionality as a non-Indigenous scholar. Reflexivity, as Mt. Pleasant, Wigginton, and Wisecup caution, requires recognizing how one’s subjectivity shapes the questions posed, the sources prioritized, and the interpretations made.³⁴ By foregrounding Eastern Cherokee voices while critically analyzing settler-colonial archival frameworks, I aim to contribute a methodology that honors survivance and cultural continuity while exposing the ongoing impact of colonial structures.

My chosen methods of analysis engage and question the structures that shape Indigenous military history, particularly the production and interpretation of knowledge within settler-colonial frameworks. Archives are never neutral repositories of fact; rather, they shape and silence narratives in ways that reflect colonial power relations. As Rose Miron ,observes, “archives play a critical role in the construction of historical narratives, all of which contain some silences”.³⁵ This is especially true in the case of Eastern Cherokee women, whose lives are largely absent from archival records, not because they lacked influence, but because settler-produced archives failed to value or preserve their voices.

³³ James Mooney (settler anthropologist), *Myths of the Cherokee* (Bureau of American Ethnology, 1900).

³⁴ Mt. Pleasant, Wigginton, and Wisecup, *Materials and Methods*, 11.

³⁵ Rose Miron, *Beyond Silence: Archives, Memory, and American Indian Women’s History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2024), 17.

My approach draws on what scholar Rose Miron calls “Indigenous archival activism”, which she defines as actions by Indigenous nations to reclaim their histories through access, sovereignty, and the creation of new narratives that defend nationhood and community belonging³⁶. While Miron herself is not Indigenous, her collaborative work with the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Nation underscores how tribal archives differ from settler-colonial ones: they are not simply repositories of memory, but “arsenals of knowledge” and projects of nation-building³⁷. Following this framework, I do not treat existing records—military files, government reports, or anthropological writings—as transparent windows onto the past. Instead, I interrogate how these documents distort, obscure, or selectively remember Indigenous participation, and I place them in conversation with Eastern Cherokee narratives, oral histories, and tribal cultural institutions.

My research acknowledges archival silences. I focus on how silences were produced, whose interests they served, and how Eastern Cherokee communities have continually countered them through oral traditions, ceremony, performance, and tribal record-keeping, archival silences and the biases embedded in colonial documentation. In this way, my methodology highlights both the resilience of the Eastern Cherokee people and the necessity of reading archives critically, as contested sites where power, memory, and survivance intersect.

The lens through which non-Indigenous scholars view history, culture, and agency is often shaped by a settler-colonial framework, no matter how much effort is made to resist it.

³⁶ Rose Miron, *Beyond Silence: Archives, Memory, and American Indian Women’s History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2024), 3.

³⁷ Miron, *Beyond Silence*, 17–18.

There is always the risk of misrepresentation and inadvertently reinforcing the very colonial structures one seeks to challenge. As a researcher, I must remain aware of the danger of centering my own biases and assumptions rather than truly understanding and prioritizing the lived experiences of the Eastern Cherokee community. It is easy to mistake academic rigor for the depth of lived experience and to overlook the nuances of cultural and historical significance.

Moreover, as a white scholar engaging with Indigenous methodologies, I frequently find myself frustrated by the barriers put in place by systems designed to decolonize research. Indigenous communities are rightfully cautious about allowing non-Indigenous scholars to adopt these methodologies, given the legacy of exploitation and misrepresentation in academic research. This caution is a vital safeguard, but it can sometimes leave me feeling conflicted—torn between wanting to be part of the necessary work of decolonizing research and facing the realities of community hesitations. There are moments when it feels as if a path is offered, only for it to be refused, as though I am in a space of constant negotiation.

These are not easy realizations, nor should they be. The process of researching ECBI history and epistemologies as a non-Indigenous scholar should not be a comfortable one. It must be a journey that challenges me emotionally, intellectually, and ethically. There is no neutral position in this work. My research is not simply about gathering knowledge from the Eastern Cherokee people; it is about understanding the responsibility inherent in representing their histories and their cultures. It is about confronting the trauma of history and the very real consequences of misrepresentation. In the face of centuries of displacement, attempted erasure, and violence, I cannot ignore the weight of these histories in my work.

At times, I found myself searching for reassurance or validation—wondering if I was conducting this research in the 'right' way. But the truth is, there may never be a clear or simple answer. After everything that has happened, do non-Indigenous scholars even have the right to question the difficulty of this work? Indigenous communities have endured these histories, and the least we can do as white researchers is sit with that discomfort, acknowledge that it is part of the process, and accept that ethical engagement will never be a completed task but an ongoing practice of accountability.

Recognizing these challenges, my approach to research is shaped by a continuous and evolving reflection on these tensions. Rather than positioning myself as an expert with all the answers, I strive to center the perspectives, histories, and voices of the Eastern Cherokee people. My work is grounded in Indigenous methodologies that emphasize relational accountability, community engagement, and deep respect for Eastern Cherokee knowledge systems. It is not about me, as a scholar, extracting knowledge for academic benefit; it is about creating space for the community's stories, allowing them to guide my research, and maintaining a commitment to cultural preservation and ethical scholarship.

This approach does not absolve me of responsibility; it requires a constant process of self-examination and critical engagement. It is a practice of humility, where I acknowledge my positionality as a white scholar, and commit to working in ways that support, rather than exploit, the communities whose histories I am studying. Ultimately, it is about forging pathways to scholarship that are accountable to the Eastern Cherokee community, ensuring that their voices, their cultural expressions, and their agency are prioritized and respected throughout the research process.

Ultimately, my dissertation presents the ECBI as a community of both warriors and caregivers, whose resilience was shaped by their deep cultural ties and commitment to *survivance*. The stories of Eastern Cherokee warriors and women challenge the dominant narratives of settler colonialism and provide a framework for understanding how Indigenous peoples have sustained their cultural identities in the face of ongoing oppression. Their resilience in both military service and community care emphasizes the intertwined nature of gender, culture, and resistance in Indigenous survival.

I follow the vocabulary choice of historian John R. Finger, who clarifies, “On those occasions when I discuss the Cherokee Nation or other Cherokee groups in Oklahoma, I shall refer to them by their appropriate names. Readers should also remember that whenever I refer to the Eastern Cherokees, the Eastern Band, the Cherokees, or the Band, I mean the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in North Carolina.”³⁸ Thus, this dissertation uses EBCI consistently when discussing the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to avoid ambiguity. Broader terms such as “Cherokee” or “Eastern Cherokees” are reserved for contexts that involve the nation as a whole or multiple Cherokee groups which I cite a few times. Some terms, way of thinking and traditions are similar among the different Cherokee tribes. In addition, some of the historical events involve all Cherokees before the Trail of Tears and the split between the tribes. This approach ensures clarity regarding time, place, and jurisdiction while maintaining precision in the discussion of legal, political, and cultural dynamics.

³⁸ John R. Finger, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees, 1819–1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), xiii.

Additionally, I use the term “warrior” rather than “soldier” to describe Eastern Cherokee men who participated in World War I. This distinction is not merely semantic; it reflects both cultural and epistemological differences in how military service is understood. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) explicitly prefer the term “warrior” because it conveys relational, spiritual, and communal responsibilities that extend beyond the individual and the state. Unlike “soldier,” which is tied to U.S. military hierarchies, citizenship obligations, and the logic of settler colonial power, “warrior” resonates with frameworks of Peoplehood—the interrelated domains of sacred history, place, ceremonial cycle, and language that structure Cherokee identity.³⁹ Tom Holm further defines “warrior” in the context of Native veterans as someone who acts in service of community, sacred obligations, and spiritual balance, emphasizing moral and cosmological responsibilities alongside military engagement.² Warriorhood thus entails a responsibility not only to one’s military unit but also to one’s family, community, ancestors, and spiritual kin.

The Cherokee language itself reflects this broader conception of warriorhood. The term $\square\square\square\square$ (*unetlanv*) refers to a warrior not merely as a fighter, but as a person who upholds communal and spiritual responsibilities, embodying the interwoven obligations to family, ancestors, and sacred traditions.⁴⁰ While the lexicon is preserved in sources produced by the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians maintain their own practices and interpretations of warriorhood, highlighting the importance of situating these

³⁹ Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 25–27.

⁴⁰ Durbin Feeling, *Cherokee–English Dictionary* (Tahlequah, OK: Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, 1975), 256.

concepts within specific tribal frameworks. By privileging “warrior” over “soldier,” this study acknowledges Indigenous epistemologies and frames Eastern Cherokee military service as an expression of survivance rather than assimilation.

Loftin and Frey emphasize that Cherokee ceremonial life and sacred places are inseparable from identity and community continuity,⁴¹ which I argue suggests that military service for the EBCI cannot be understood outside of these sacred frameworks. Warriorhood, then, is not primarily about battlefield valor but about protecting balance, honoring sacred relationships, and ensuring cultural survival. In this sense, the act of going to war was both cosmological and sacred, extending older practices of protection and guardianship into a new context.

This dissertation asks: *How did the Eastern Band of Cherokee Nation’s preservation of cultural beliefs, gender roles, and community structures shape their warriors’ participation in World War I, and in what ways did their service reflect the principles of Peoplehood and Survivance?* By centering these questions, this study examines the interplay between Indigenous identity, community responsibility, and military service, situating Eastern Cherokee experiences within both the broader framework of settler colonialism and the specific practices that sustained Cherokee cultural continuity.

⁴¹ John D. Loftin and Benjamin E. Frey, *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2024), 27–50.

Chapter One-The Politics of Enlistment: Eastern Cherokee Warriorhood, Agency, and Resistance (1914-1918)

In 1914,⁴² a letter from Carlisle Indian School Superintendent Oscar Hiram Lipps expressed concern over growing student interest in participating in the war that had broken out in Europe. Although the United States had not yet entered the conflict, school officials worried that this enthusiasm could ignite what Lipps called a dangerous “war spirit” among Native students. Rather than support these martial inclinations, he proposed a seemingly benign alternative: providing football tickets to redirect their focus and uphold the school’s assimilationist agenda.⁴³ While this letter reflects certain federal authorities’ anxiety about Native students embracing warfare for their own reasons, it also reveals a deeper tension: the administration feared Native peoples’ capacity to reinterpret war outside the confines of settler colonialism. Was it that the Native warrior’s combat needs were too dangerous? Would he become unstable and “untrainable” outside of the classic restraints of western society? Interestingly enough, even as

⁴²Lipps, Oscar Hiram. Letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. October 24, 1914. Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center. https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/default/files/docs-documents/NARA_RG75_CCF_b017_f09_10541.pdf.

⁴³ U.S. Department of the Interior, Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1914 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914).

the school officials and military leaders trained the students in feelings of sacrifice and patriotism, they tried to manage or delay actual political participation.

In the example given, sport was deployed as a pacifying mechanism—which resonates with how boarding schools used football to represent discipline, order, and American identity. However, as this chapter demonstrates, by the time enlistment surged in 1917, ECBI warriors did not see military service as a mere path to assimilation or citizenship. Instead, many approached it as a continuation of their responsibilities as protectors of their communities. Within Cherokee cultural frameworks, war was not simply a political or national duty, but a sacred role tied to community survival, ceremonial practice, and ancestral obligation. Their enlistment must be read, therefore, not solely as patriotic compliance, but as an assertion of sovereignty, cultural endurance, and resistance to settler definitions of warriorhood.

The participation of American Indians in World War I has often been framed within a colonial and assimilationist lens, where military service is viewed primarily as a pathway toward U.S. citizenship, as noted by French historian Thomas Grillot⁴⁴ who wrote and conducted research about American Indians enlistment, drafting and participating in WWI. However, this interpretation oversimplifies the complex motivations behind Native enlistment, particularly among the Eastern Cherokee. Grillot highlights that, while historical narratives emphasized military service as a means of securing citizenship, Eastern Cherokee warriors often perceived their role in the war as a reaffirmation of their longstanding cultural responsibilities as protectors

⁴⁴ Thomas Grillot, *First Americans: U.S. Patriotism in Indian Country after World War I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 91.

of their people. Enlistment in World War I was therefore not merely an extension of colonial desires but a deliberate engagement with a colonial military structure that allowed them to assert their sovereignty, resist colonial misrepresentations, and maintain cultural distinctiveness. According to Grillot, approximately seventy members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (ECBI) were drafted or joined the armed forces during World War I, with the largest group serving in the 321st Infantry Regiment. This active participation reflects a strategic choice to engage with the military not as a tool of assimilation but as a platform for asserting identity and autonomy.

This chapter further examines the influence of the boarding schools, specifically, Carlisle Indian Industrial School, an institution designed to attempt assimilating Native students into Euro-American ways of life while stripping them away from their traditions and beliefs systems. For many Eastern Cherokee warriors, their experience at Carlisle was formative, providing them with a form of military training that not only prepared them for war but also forged bonds of kinship and resistance. These school-based experiences reveal the paradox of boarding schools—while their primary aim was to erase Native culture, they inadvertently became a site of resistance, creating networks of Native students who retained a sense of cultural identity and solidarity.

Through a careful examination of the motivations behind Eastern Cherokee participation in World War I, this chapter challenges the view that their enlistment was solely driven by the desire for citizenship. Instead, it frames their military service as an act of agency, survivance, settler colonialism, and a continuation of their roles as cultural guardians through the peoplehood model. By analyzing the intersection of colonialism, military service, and cultural identity, this

chapter uncovers the ways in which Eastern Cherokee warriors navigated a colonial structure while holding firm to their practices and ways of life.

The ECBI faced a series of various challenges posed by settlers; from the lack of recognition of their rights as a legitimate tribe, to not being considered American citizens, but merely wards of the state, to not having the right to vote. Throughout these challenges, the tribe remained united in their kinship ties, beliefs and traditions. They also demonstrated courage and a desire to persevere. Alliances with whites were also part of their history, and a strategy of survival. As Elizabeth Giddens points out, “According to legend, in 1811, they resisted the persuasion of Shawnee chief Tecumseh when he spoke at Soco Creek in an effort to raise a pan-Indian confederation against the United States. Although younger men were tempted to join Tecumseh, Gul’kalaski, a chief who later distinguished himself as an ally of the United States at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814, counseled friendship with whites.”⁴⁵

First of all, Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson’s reflection on the challenges of post-colonialism in the North American context, that the idea itself often fails to capture Indigenous experience because “they never left; the Native never disappeared,”⁴⁶ can help the analysis of the unfairness of the various treaties and laws which complicated Cherokee life. For Simpson, treaties are not just instruments of dispossession but central to Native political life. Though many were signed under extreme pressure, they remain legal instruments that affirm

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Giddens, *Oconaluftee: The History of a Smoky Mountain Valley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 48–49, accessed April 19, 2025, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁴⁶ Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 330.

rights to land, resources, and jurisdiction. Simpson asserts that treaties, regardless of the coercive conditions under which they were signed, constitute a form of covenant-making that binds both parties. Consent—even under duress—becomes a site of recognition, refusal, and truth-telling, where the refusal itself opens pathways to other political possibilities.

This is noticeable after the passage of the Indian Removal Act and the Trail of Tears, as the individuals who remained in North Carolina did so under constant threat of dispossession and legal erasure. As Giddens explains, “The Eastern Band did not escape the logic of removal so much as they postponed or reshaped it”⁴⁷. This meant that although they were not forcibly marched west, they were subjected to a subtler, ongoing pressure to assimilate or vanish. Giddens emphasizes that these Cherokee “were often not recognized as a legitimate political body” and had to navigate “the shifting legal and racial codes of the settler state”⁴⁸, which denied them clear status either as citizens or as a sovereign nation. Their land, often held in trust through intermediaries, was perpetually vulnerable to state interference and private encroachment. These overlapping colonial structures—legal ambiguity, land insecurity, and political marginalization—created a prolonged state of vulnerability. That is to say, that even when treaties are signed under unequal and unfair conditions, they are considered binding instruments that Indigenous nations have mobilized to assert their sovereignty. The ECBI, like many Native nations, navigated these constrained choices with both resistance and pragmatism, ensuring that the very documents meant to contain them could also become tools of resurgence.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Giddens, *Oconaluftee: The History of a Smoky Mountain Valley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 148.

⁴⁸ Giddens, *Oconaluftee*, 147.

These colonial structures—legal ambiguity, land insecurity, and political marginalization—created a prolonged precarious state for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Eric Cheyfitz, a leading scholar of Indigenous law and literature, shows that while treaties and policies often translated Indigenous social systems into Western legal frameworks that constrained sovereignty, Native nations could reinterpret these same frameworks to assert authority and sustain communal obligations. He argues, “What I now understand is that rights discourse is not necessarily or automatically relevant to Aboriginal cultures. A system of responsibility makes more sense to the Aboriginal being”⁴⁹.

One cannot discuss the topic of blood in Native studies without at least mentioning this historical phenomenon on the American continent: by imposing fractionalized definitions of Native identity, the U.S. sought to undermine communal belonging while disregarding Indigenous systems of kinship, responsibility, and spiritual connection. Historian Katherine Ellinghaus, who specializes in American Indian history and federal Indian policy, shows that assimilationist policies, such as blood quantum regulations and allotment, were designed to fragment Native nations and erode collective rights. She observes that “Blood quantum has long been an influential and contested issue, one that has divided and disenfranchised American Indians in a variety of ways”⁵⁰. Additionally, from a Native theorist perspective, Kim TallBear (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe) critically interrogates the racialized logic underpinning both historical and scientific constructions of blood, noting that DNA and

⁴⁹ Eric Cheyfitz, *The Colonial Construction of Indian Country: Native American Literatures and Federal Indian Law* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023), 1.

⁵⁰ Katherine Ellinghaus, *Blood Will Tell: Native Americans and Assimilation Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 1660, <https://academic.oup.com/ahr/article-abstract/123/5/1660/5221109>.

blood are often treated as objective markers of identity when they are in fact socially and politically mediated⁵¹. For the ECBI, these imposed measures of “blood” intersected with land, sacred history, and cultural obligations, shaping how identity and belonging were negotiated.

The theoretical foundation for understanding this dynamic comes from Australian historian Patrick Wolfe’s framing of settler colonialism as a structure rather than an event, one whose enduring logic is the elimination of Indigenous peoples in order to secure settler access to land. Wolfe asserts, “Land is life—or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus contests for land can be—indeed, often are—contests for life”⁵². Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that even when treaties were signed under unequal and coercive conditions, they became binding instruments that Indigenous nations could wield to assert sovereignty. The Cherokee, like many Native nations, navigated these constrained choices with both resistance and pragmatism, ensuring that the very documents and policies meant to contain them—whether treaties, allotments, or blood quantum measures—could also become tools of resurgence. In doing so, they reinforced communal identity, spiritual continuity, and enduring connections to sacred lands, histories, and ceremonial practices, demonstrating that Indigenous notions of responsibility, place, and relationality could survive and even thrive under settler-colonial pressures.

⁵¹ Kim TallBear, “Racial Science, Blood, and DNA,” in *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science*, 31–66 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt46npt0.5>.

⁵² Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>.

Taken together, these analyses reveal that the ECBI navigated colonial impositions not only through legal or political resistance but also by sustaining connections to place, sacred history, and ceremonial cycles. Treaties and policies became sites of strategic negotiation, enabling the assertion of sovereignty while reinforcing a collective identity rooted in land and spirituality. In doing so, Eastern Cherokee peoplehood persisted: ceremonial practices, language, and sacred landscapes provided continuity and resilience even under coercive colonial pressures, demonstrating that legal, cultural, and spiritual survival were inseparably intertwined.

By 1822, William Holland Thomas, a white ally of the tribe, had become a successful businessman who was able to trade with both white settlers and the Eastern Cherokees people. His strategic actions shaped the political and economic life of the ECBI in Kituwah. As Elizabeth Giddens specifies, Thomas accepted credit until customers could pay through harvest yields or manual labor.⁵³ This decision could have been a way to build trust amongst the tribe; demonstrating understanding of the American Indians' ways of trade. The more Thomas grew closer to the tribe, the more he encouraged sobriety and Christianity amongst them as evidence of their moral character when advocating for their legal recognition. Yet, this cultural exchange was far from one-directional. The ECBI embraced Christianity through their own cultural lens, blending elements of traditional ritual with Christian practice—a clear example of religious syncretism rather than simple assimilation. This was a way to strategically present the tribe as “model residents” to appease white anxieties⁵⁴. Interestingly, as the author explains, the total

⁵³ Elizabeth Giddens, *Oconaluftee: The History of a Smoky Mountain Valley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 56.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Giddens, *Oconaluftee: The History of a Smoky Mountain Valley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 58.

immersion baptism rituals of the Baptists resonated with many Eastern Cherokees, as these practices mirrored the traditional “Going to Water” ceremony, a form of spiritual and physical renewal long observed before warfare or ball play⁵⁵. In this context, conversion was not merely assimilation—it was also a cultural translation, shaped by both political necessity and spiritual familiarity. As Mikaëla Adams writes, “Thomas helped those Indians who remained in North Carolina to consolidate their lands and rebuild their lives”⁵⁶.

Consequently, William Holland Thomas played a central role in consolidating land for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) in North Carolina. But before his intervention, many Eastern Band Cherokees held individual allotments under treaties, but their land titles were precarious, as the state of North Carolina often refused to recognize them as citizens.⁵⁷ Thomas worked strategically to consolidate these scattered holdings and acquire additional lands, laying the foundation for what would become the Qualla Boundary—a legally recognized and culturally significant EBCI territory.⁵⁸ His efforts not only secured a more cohesive land base but also supported the continuity of community and preservation of Eastern Band cultural identity.

Yet, the tribe continued to navigate a complex web of overlapping jurisdictions. Even as Thomas’s efforts helped secure what would become the Qualla Boundary, the EBCI were required to assert their sovereignty within a shifting legal landscape defined by competing

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Giddens, *Oconaluftee: The History of a Smoky Mountain Valley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 62.

⁵⁶ Adams, Mikaëla M. *Who Belongs?: Race, Resources, and Tribal Citizenship in the Native South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 145.

⁵⁷ John Preston Arthur, *Western North Carolina: A History* (Asheville: Asheville Printing Company, 1915), 243–245.

⁵⁸ William S. Powell, ed., *Encyclopedia of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 342.

federal and state claims. Early treaties such as the Treaty of Hopewell (1785) exemplified these contradictions: while the federal government pledged to protect Cherokee territory, it simultaneously assumed authority over “all [Cherokee] affairs.”⁵⁹ Rather than accepting subordination, the Eastern Cherokee engaged this structure strategically—petitioning, litigating, and invoking treaty rights to defend their homeland.⁶⁰ Although North Carolina and Georgia often prioritized settler expansion over treaty enforcement, the EBCI transformed these constraints into opportunities for endurance and adaptation. Their continued presence in the homeland, sustained through both legal action and cultural practice, revealed that Cherokee autonomy persisted not in the absence of challenge but through its continual negotiation.⁶¹

These political ambiguities shaped the modern legal position of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), whose status remains distinct from that of most other tribes. As Finger observes, the Band occupies a uniquely complex position in which federal recognition is preeminent, yet the state of North Carolina continues to exercise concurrent authority—producing a tripartite system of governance that intertwines federal, state, and tribal power.⁶² Within this structure, and amongst all these challenges, the EBCI has asserted considerable agency, legal advocacy, and cultural revitalization to preserve both sovereignty and identity. Federal and state recognition, therefore, should not be read merely as instruments of

⁵⁹ *Treaty of Hopewell*, 1785.

⁶⁰ John Preston Arthur, *Western North Carolina: A History* (Asheville: Asheville Printing Company, 1915), 243–245.

⁶¹ William S. Powell, ed., *Encyclopedia of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 342.

⁶² John R. Finger, *Cherokee Americans: The Eastern Band of Cherokees in the Twentieth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), xiii.

containment or paternalism. They have also functioned as contested spaces in which the ECBI has continually negotiated authority, defended cultural integrity, and cultivated self-determination—transforming structural constraints into enduring expressions of Indigenous sovereignty. Through the 1840s and 1850s, Thomas acquired new lands for the Eastern Band to reestablish a Cherokee tribal territory in the South.”⁶³. These lands eventually became the Qualla Boundary, a site of legal and cultural significance to the Eastern Band⁶⁴. However, even after gaining a clear title, the ECBI faced challenges.

Indeed, after the Civil War, the land purchased by Thomas on behalf of the ECBI came under threat due to lawsuits arising from Thomas’s personal and business debts. His generosity might not have played in the Eastern Cherokees’ favor when his debts complicated their life. As French and Hornbuckle explain, “Thomas deeded all this land to himself and not to the Cherokees, since by this time it was illegal for non-whites to own land in North Carolina”.

⁶⁵Though Thomas had acquired 38,000 acres for the Eastern Band Corporation by 1850—surpassing the 17,000 acres individually owned under the 1835 Treaty—he borrowed heavily to do so, and these debts went unpaid even when the U.S. government reimbursed him. This legal arrangement, while strategic at the time, left the Eastern Band vulnerable to outside claims and internal uncertainty⁶⁶.

⁶³ Mikaëla M. Adams, *Who Belongs?: Race, Resources, and Tribal Citizenship in the Native South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 145.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Laurence French and Jim Hornbuckle, *The Cherokee Perspective: Written by Eastern Cherokees* (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, Appalachian State University, 1981), 25.

⁶⁶ *ibid*

By the turn of the twentieth century, demographic data further complicated Cherokee identity and legal status. In 1900, “North Carolina Cherokees of mixed blood were predominantly white and Cherokee (429 individuals, or 92 percent of mixed-blood Cherokee), but there were 38 (8 percent) triracial Cherokees (white-Black-Indian), and 2 (4 percent) Black-Indian Cherokees (presumably allowing some double counting across categories to account for a total larger than 100 percent)”. This not only created racial categorization but potential inconsistencies in census and tribal records.⁶⁷

Despite various court rulings, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians continued to face deep uncertainty regarding their legal and political status which made it challenging to navigate historical events and assert their rights. Indeed, their autonomy, North Carolina citizenship, and role as federal wards were constantly called into question. As Giddens explains, “any issue that arose was an occasion to rehash this complex matter”⁶⁸. The federal and state governments were inconsistent in their dealings with the Cherokees, often unclear on who had the authority to make decisions. These governance issues might not have been so urgent had it not been for the immediate and pressing threats to their land—land they had spent years securing and identifying as their own. Giddens asserts that the situation created “a context of vulnerability”⁶⁹ that stalled progress for the community, as land disputes consistently overshadowed social needs like education and health care. Their legal status grew more uncertain. Their right to vote was

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Giddens, *Oconaluftee: The History of a Smoky Mountain Valley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 127.

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Giddens, *Oconaluftee: The History of a Smoky Mountain Valley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 175.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

challenged and ultimately denied in 1900, despite the fact that they were operating under a state corporate charter, paying taxes, and following state laws⁷⁰. Their citizenship rights were not fully reinstated until 1930 by federal law, and not enforced in practice until 1945, when Cherokee veterans returning from World War II successfully pressured local officials to let them vote⁷¹.

The legal and cultural challenges experienced by the Eastern Band did not erase their agency; rather, they sharpened it. As Giddens argues, “agency in the Oconaluftee valley must be understood not as open defiance but as tactical endurance”⁷². The ECBI strategies of peoplehood and survivance were embedded in everyday acts: land stewardship, preservation of ceremonies, and kinship networks that linked them to sacred geographies. They made use of legal channels, when possible, forged strategic relationships with white allies, and passed down oral histories to anchor themselves to place. Giddens notes that their presence in the Smoky Mountains was not a passive residue of removal’s failure, but “a deliberate act of cultural continuity, despite all pressures to the contrary”⁷³. This suggests that their survival in the homeland itself became an act of resistance. The ECBI cultivated a form of agency that responded to colonial violence not only through resistance but through insistence—on being, belonging, and enduring on their own terms.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Giddens, *Oconaluftee: The History of a Smoky Mountain Valley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 180.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² Elizabeth Giddens, *Oconaluftee: The History of a Smoky Mountain Valley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 149.

⁷³ Elizabeth Giddens, *Oconaluftee: The History of a Smoky Mountain Valley* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 150.

The tactics of attempted assimilation employed by the US government and the US military must be analyzed in order to comprehend the strategies that were employed to brainwash and whitewash Natives future WWI warriors. It is also essential to investigate the ways in which ECBI warriors demonstrated agency and cultural survival.

The Carlisle Indian Industrial School, founded in 1879 by Richard Henry Pratt, was the first off-reservation boarding school created to attempt assimilating Indigenous youth into Euro-American societal “norms” and as a result, repress and discourage any association with Native American beliefs, traditions, languages, and cultures. Modeled in part on his earlier work with Native prisoners at Fort Marion, Pratt instituted military marching exercises, outfitted male students in uniforms, and enforced strict routines. Pratt saw military life as salvatory for the Native students and as a way for them to adapt themselves faster to American customs.⁷⁴ Students marched to every location on campus—from dormitories to classrooms to work details—under constant supervision.⁷⁵

As scholar Sarah Margaret explains, Carlisle’s regime operated like a “military-industrial complex,” emphasizing strict discipline, physical conformity, and an exhaustive labor schedule designed to condition Native youth into ideal citizens of the settler state.⁷⁶ By World War I,

⁷⁴ Richard Henry Pratt, “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites,” in *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880–1900*, ed. Francis Paul Prucha (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 260.

⁷⁵ Jacqueline Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club: Schools, Race, and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 88.

⁷⁶ Sarah Margaret, “Uniform Indians: Personal Reflections on the Eastern Band Cherokee Boarding School Experience,” *Appalachian Heritage* 37, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 53,

Carlisle had fostered a climate of patriotism and military preparedness, presenting military service as both a duty and a pathway to U.S. citizenship—despite the fact that many Native people, including the ECBI, remained legally and socially marginalized. The school’s regimentation and ideological framework deeply influenced the way Native warriors, such as those from the ECBI, engaged with warfare, patriotism, and identity. For many Eastern Cherokee students, this process not only disrupted their connection to their nation and community, but also contributed to their later interest and participation in World War I.

It can be argued that the militarized education implemented by Carlisle and its educators fostered a sense of duty among many students, positioning them as potential future soldiers who could demonstrate their allegiance to the nation. This raises questions about the extent to which former students from the ECBI volunteered for World War I out of personal choice versus feeling that no alternative path existed. One of Carlisle’s key functions was the implementation of the “outing system,” a program that placed Indigenous students in white households during vacations to further separate them from their cultures and instill Western domestic and labor practices.⁷⁷ This system reinforced settler colonial ideologies, positioning Indigenous peoples as laborers, domestics, and, eventually, soldiers. The school’s vocational training, which included

<http://login.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/uniform-indians-personal-reflections-on-eastern/docview/220354571/se-2>.

⁷⁷ Sarah Margaret, “Uniform Indians: Personal Reflections on The Eastern Band Cherokee Boarding School Experience,” *Appalachian Heritage* 37, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 53, <http://login.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/uniform-indians-personal-reflections-on-eastern/docview/220354571/se-2>.

carpentry, blacksmithing, and engineering, aligned with wartime needs, creating a direct path from assimilation to military service.

The forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples in the United States was a systematic and violent process that sought to erase Native cultures. As Historian Ned Blackhawk (Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone Indians of Nevada) explains, “Boarding schools targeted children as young as four. Many were taken from their families, communities, and cultures for years on end”⁷⁸. This quote illustrates the core aim of these schools: the removal of Native children from their cultural roots and their indoctrination into Western values and ways of life. At the heart of this process was the idea that Native people could only be incorporated into American society through the adoption of Christianity, the English language, and Anglo-American practices⁷⁹.

The essays of student Alonzo Lee (Eastern Band Cherokee) written during his time in school, in Hampton Institute,⁸⁰ illustrated the deeply damaging effects of the boarding school experience and highlights the resilience of Indigenous identity in the face of cultural erasure. As a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee, he provided a powerful account through which one

⁷⁸ Ned Blackhawk, *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023), 354.

⁷⁹ Ned Blackhawk, *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023), 356.

⁸⁰ Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (founded in 1868 in Hampton, Virginia) was originally created to educate freed African Americans after the Civil War. By 1878, it expanded to include Native students and became the first federal experiment in off-reservation Indian boarding schools, serving as the direct model for Richard Henry Pratt’s Carlisle Indian Industrial School, established in 1879. See Jacqueline Fear-Segal, *White Man’s Club: Schools, Race, and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 41–46.

can understand the complexities of this forced attempted assimilation⁸¹. His time at the Carlisle Indian School, gives us the possibility of documenting the complexity of retaining personal identity and dealing with violent outside forces. Lee's personal experience at Carlisle is an illustration of the broader realities described by Blackhawk. Like many Indigenous children, Lee was removed from his family and placed in an environment designed to eradicate his Cherokee identity. Lee's time at the boarding school reflects the trauma caused by this forced separation. For example, in his essay, "The Trail of the Serpent",⁸² Lee reflects on the deep connection he felt to his Cherokee heritage, even as he was subjected to the pressures of assimilation. Despite the school's efforts to strip him of his identity, Lee's connection to his community and culture remained steadfast. Through his writing, Lee reveals the internal conflict many Native students faced: the pain of being disconnected from their families and traditions while simultaneously trying to survive in an environment that sought to erase their very existence. However, I argue that Lee's reflections are also a testament to the endurance of cultural identity. Despite being subjected to the trauma of forced assimilation, he persisted in keeping his Cherokee heritage. In "Indian Folk-Lore", Lee shares traditional stories, preserving the cultural knowledge that the boarding school system attempted to suppress. These stories, passed down through generations of Cherokee people, became an act of resistance—a means of asserting his identity and defying

⁸¹ Alonzo Lee, *The Trail of the Serpent*, in *Recovering Native American Writings in the Boarding School Press*, ed. Jacqueline Emery (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 83–89, accessed March 25, 2025, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁸² Lee, A. (1896/2017). *The Trail of the Serpent*. In J. Emery (Ed.), *Recovering Native American writings in the boarding school press* (pp. 83–89). University of Nebraska Press. ProQuest Ebook Central.

the school's efforts to erase it.⁸³ He also recognizes the danger of attempted assimilation in the preservation of his tribe's heritage, "Modern civilization, churches, and ministers are rapidly destroying such superstitions as these which our forefathers believed. It is worth our while to preserve them, for they have value. They furnished a clue to the past history and religion of the Indians."⁸⁴ It is interesting to note that as progressive, affirming, and advanced as his writing appears to be, his use of the term "superstitions" suggests a fight going on within himself. On the one hand, he claims that such beliefs are of value, but on the other hand, he attests the turmoil taking place in his heart by using colonial language.

One of the primary tools used by boarding schools to assimilate Native children was the imposition of Christianity. Lee, like many other students at Carlisle, was exposed to Christian teachings as part of his education. However, Lee's writing illustrates the tension between the forced adoption of Christianity and his deep-rooted Cherokee spiritual beliefs. In his essay "An Indian Naturalist", he expresses a deep understanding of the natural world, informed, and influenced by his Cherokee beliefs. While he was introduced to Western scientific methods at the school, his writing shows how these teachings coexisted with, rather than replaced, his Indigenous knowledge systems.⁸⁵

⁸³ Alonzo Lee, "Indian Folk-Lore," in *Recovering Native American Writings in the Boarding School Press*, ed. Jacqueline Emery (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), accessed March 25, 2025, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁸⁵ Alonzo Lee (Eastern Band Cherokee), "An Indian Naturalist," in *Recovering Native American Writings in the Boarding School Press*, ed. Jacqueline Emery (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), accessed March 25, 2025, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Among the many external influences and tools employed by the settler state to reshape the attitudes of Native students, school newspapers—often edited by the students themselves—became instruments of assimilation. These newspapers were read by the students and potentially helped to advance the negative images that some of them could have of their respective tribes. As an example, *The Red Man* describes the Cherokee language as “queer” and mocks the manner in which it was spoken, reinforcing the perception that Native languages were inferior or abnormal.⁸⁶ Through such representations, Carlisle and similar institutions not only sought to transform Native students into versions of “civilized” white Americans but also worked to instill in them a belief that their own languages and traditions were inferior and needed to be abandoned. Native children were punished for speaking their Native languages and were often forbidden from engaging in cultural practices considered “barbaric” by the school’s administrators.

Of course, amongst the negative image and influence, proof of ongoing resistance by Native students is clear. Lee continued to use his writing as a tool for cultural survival. While he acknowledged the educational opportunities offered by government schools, he was also painfully aware of their limitations and the toll they took on his Cherokee identity. As Lee observed, “These Indians are getting their education from the government schools; they are getting their whiskey from the Government stills. The Government is holding them up with one hand and pulling them down with the other.”⁸⁷ Despite these challenges, Lee remained

⁸⁶ *The Red Man*, March–April 1917, 115.

⁸⁷ Alonzo Lee, “An Indian Naturalist,” *Talks and Thoughts*, 1896, in *Recovering Native American Writings in the Boarding School Press*, ed. Jacqueline Emery (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 89, accessed March 25, 2025, ProQuest Ebook Central.

committed to the values and beliefs of his Cherokee heritage, recognizing that true cultural survival meant resisting assimilation. In “Transition Scenes,” Lee reflects on the emotional and psychological conflict of navigating these two worlds, conveying the tension between the Western education he was receiving and his deep connection to his Cherokee community. His essays from this period serve as a counter-narrative to the boarding school’s intent to erase Indigenous culture, advocating for the importance of his tribe's beliefs and way of life.⁸⁸In 1918, as WWI raged on, the War Department took over the Carlisle campus, repurposing it as a hospital and rehabilitation center for wounded soldiers⁸⁹. This transition marked the end of Carlisle as an educational institution, yet it highlighted, in analysis, the deep correlation between Native education and military service. Many former students had already enlisted by that time, reflecting how the school’s environment had conditioned them to see enlistment as an honorable obligation. The *Carlisle Indian School Yearbook* describes the shift as a necessary wartime measure, but the decision also reveals how the U.S. government continued to see Native bodies as expendable resources for national defense.

The closure of Carlisle in 1918 also symbolized the broader shift in federal Indian policy at the time. While boarding schools continued to operate, the emphasis on Native militarization grew stronger during World War I, with propaganda framing military service as a means for

⁸⁸ ———. “Transition Scenes.” *Talks and Thoughts*, 1899. In *Recovering Native American Writings in the Boarding School Press*, edited by Jacqueline Emery, [page range]. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017. Accessed March 25, 2025. ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁸⁹ Carlisle Indian School Digital Archives. "The Carlisle Indian School Taken Over by the War Department." *The Carlisle Indian School Yearbook*, 1918. Accessed April 1, 2025. <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/default/files/docs-publications/CIS-I-0081c.pdf>.

Indigenous people to prove their loyalty and assimilate. These perspectives contributed to a broader rhetoric that framed Native identity as something to be reshaped through military service. Despite this reality, many Eastern Cherokee men who enlisted in World War I did not do so out of economic desperation. Contrary to the assumption that poverty drove Native enlistment, Fred A. Olds noted in *The Raleigh Times* (1916) that the ECBI had substantial financial resources, including \$145,000 in federal trust funds and \$23,000 in personal savings in Asheville banks.⁹⁰ This economic stability challenges common narratives and suggests that other motivations—cultural, political, and social—played a greater role in Cherokee enlistment. Some saw military service as a means of protecting their sovereignty, while others viewed it as an extension of traditional warrior roles within Cherokee society. This financial stability directly contradicts the assumption that poverty was a driving force behind enlistment. The monetary resources available to the Cherokee suggest that their decision to enlist was influenced by factors beyond economic hardship, including cultural, political, and social motivations.

The Carlisle Indian Industrial School played a crucial role in shaping the paths of Eastern Cherokee students, many of whom later enlisted in World War I. The school functioned as an institution designed to assimilate Indigenous youth into Euro-American culture through strict discipline, industrial training, and patriotic indoctrination. One of the key aspects of this education was its emphasis on militarization. Students were subjected to regimented routines that mirrored military training, instilling in them a sense of order, obedience, and duty. Richard

⁹⁰ Fred A. Olds, "The Cherokee Indian School (Part III)," *The Red Man*, March-April 1917, 214, https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/default/files/docs-publications/RedMan_v09n06c.pdf.

Henry Pratt openly promoted the belief that Native people could achieve full citizenship only by abandoning their Indigenous identities and proving their loyalty to the U.S. through service. This approach laid the groundwork for many Eastern Cherokee students to view military enlistment as both a personal and collective means of demonstrating their place in American society. The very characteristics of the Cherokee language that were mocked—its distinct phonetic structure and fluidity—became sources of cultural resilience, enabling Cherokee speakers to preserve their heritage even under colonial pressure.

The question of citizenship and its implications for military service among the Eastern Cherokee people during World War I illustrates the deep ambivalence many had toward participating in the draft or enlisting. As Superintendent James Henderson of the Qualla Indian School worked to encourage Cherokee citizens to register for the draft, many expressed reluctances, driven by uncertainty about their legal obligations. James E. Henderson was a prominent figure in the early 20th century in the educational and political spheres concerning the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. As the superintendent of the Qualla Boundary School⁹¹, located on the Eastern Cherokee reservation, he played a significant role in promoting education among the Cherokee people, as well as in guiding them through various governmental processes,

⁹¹ The Qualla Boundary refers to the land reserved for the Eastern Band of Cherokee in North Carolina. The Qualla Boundary School was a key institution for the education of Cherokee children, designed to provide both formal education and skills that would aid in their integration into mainstream American society. This school, created in 1962 and which operated in various forms throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, played a significant role in shaping the educational and cultural lives of the Eastern Band of Cherokee. The school provided academic instruction, but it also focused on industrial training, a reflection of the assimilation policies of the time, which sought to prepare American Indian children to work in the broader American economy. Unlike the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, which forcibly removed children from their families and suppressed Native languages and traditions, Qualla Boundary was located on Cherokee land and allowed greater community oversight, helping to preserve Cherokee cultural identity (Loftin and Frey 2024, 34; Adams 1995, 123–126).

such as military enlistment during World War I. As superintendent of the Qualla Boundary School, Henderson was involved not only in running the educational programs but also in shaping the relationship between the Cherokee community and the federal government. Finger details Henderson's efforts during World War I to encourage the Eastern Band of Cherokee to register for the draft. Henderson wrote to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Cato Sells on June 8, 1917: "Their willingness far exceeded my expectations, and I am proud to say many of them seemed eager to register... and not one showed the least unwillingness in the matter."⁹²

There were, however, cases of opposition. David Owl, for example, questioned the legality of Native Americans being liable for the draft, while others cited their inability to speak English as a reason for exemption⁹³. By 1917, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians were still widely regarded as non-citizen or wards of the U.S. government, despite ongoing debates about their legal status. Because members of the Eastern Band were not fully recognized as U.S. citizens—lacking both state and, in practice, consistent federal protections—their decision to enlist in the military was not a legal obligation. Rather, it represented a deliberate act of political engagement and cultural negotiation, through which they asserted loyalty, navigated overlapping authorities, and reinforced their claims to sovereignty and belonging. Historian John R. Finger notes that although they were subject to federal authority, "Indians were not subject to the

⁹² Finger, John R. *The Eastern Band of Cherokees in World War I*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 287.

⁹³ Thomas A. Britten, *American Indians in World War I: At War and at Home* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

draft”⁹⁴ under the Selective Service Act of 1917, creating ambiguity around their obligations to the U.S. state.

Despite their ambiguous legal status, many Eastern Cherokee men were conscripted. Henderson claimed that he had received instructions to register all able-bodied males, effectively treating Cherokee men as if they were full citizens of the United States.⁹⁵ Finger explains that Henderson took initiative to ensure their participation, pushing enlistment as both a civic duty and a demonstration of patriotism. This move signified a performance of loyalty, despite underlying tensions regarding the Band’s continued struggle for recognition and sovereignty.⁹⁶ Issues of language and racial identity further complicated the draft process. As Finger recounts, tribal member Robert Lee Phillips objected to the inclusion of certain Cherokee men, particularly from the Snowbird community, on the basis that they did not speak English and would require translators throughout military service.⁹⁷ This argument reveals how language was weaponized to limit and redefine the boundaries of inclusion, not only within American civil society but within military structures that prized assimilation. Racial and cultural distinctiveness became grounds for exclusion, even within a system that simultaneously demanded their participation. The draft bureaucracy exposed the United States’ inconsistent approach to Native citizenship. The Bureau of Indian Affairs complicated matters by designating certain Cherokee as

⁹⁴ John R. Finger, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees, 1819–1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 284.

⁹⁵ John R. Finger, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees, 1819–1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 286.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ ———, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees in World War I* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 288–289.

“competent” individuals who could be treated as citizens, while others remained under trusteeship.⁹⁸ ECBI men were thus forced to navigate a system in which their identities were externally defined and internally contested.

In the end, Henderson’s efforts led to over one hundred ECBI men registering for military service, with nearly seventy actually enlisting—half of whom were draftees. Despite this progress, language barriers emerged as a major challenge for many Eastern Cherokee warriors. Even after completing their registration, some of the men struggled when reporting to army training camps, as they found it difficult to communicate with military personnel due to the language gap⁹⁹. This issue was especially pronounced among Eastern Cherokees from Graham County, North Carolina, who encountered significant difficulties at Camp Jackson in South Carolina during the summer of 1918. In response to these challenges, the local board proposed reassignment to the forestry service, where an Indian foreman could assist with communication in their native language. However, the provost marshal general’s office dismissed this suggestion, stating that although they acknowledged the language barrier, they did not have the authority to place Native Americans into the forestry service. The military insisted that the inability to speak English was not a valid reason to exempt these men from service.¹⁰⁰ This response, I argue, clearly stresses the deep-rooted belief that Indigenous people were expected to

⁹⁸ John R. Finger, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees in World War I* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 290.

⁹⁹ Thomas A. Britten, *American Indians in World War I: At War and at Home* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 58.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas A. Britten, *American Indians in World War I: At War and at Home* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 59.

fit into mainstream societal structures, even when faced with considerable cultural and linguistic challenges.

The case of Stephen Saunooke complicates narratives of Eastern Cherokee in World War I, illustrating the tensions between individual agency and structural constraint. Historian David Wallace Adams, who specializes in American Indian education and boarding schools, notes that such acts of resistance were common: “Students frequently resisted the strictures of Carlisle, challenging its authority and asserting agency in small but meaningful ways.”¹⁰¹ Saunooke’s initial escape from the Carlisle Indian Industrial School signals dissatisfaction with the institution’s strict discipline and assimilationist policies, reflecting a broader pattern of student resistance documented across Native boarding schools¹⁰². However, his later request to return to Carlisle raises questions about his motivations—was he genuinely seeking education, or was he attempting to escape challenging circumstances at home? His eventual enlistment further complicates the analysis: did he view military service as an extension of Carlisle’s imposed discipline, or as a pragmatic means of securing stability amid uncertainty? Carlisle officials framed Native students as willingly embracing assimilation, yet Saunooke’s story suggests a far more complex reality, one in which constrained choices shaped participation in U.S. military service (Carlisle Indian School Digital Archives, 1918)¹⁰³.

¹⁰¹ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 178.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Carlisle Indian School Digital Archives, 1918, accessed September 28, 2025, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/>.

The correspondence between Superintendent H.M. and Mr. Davis highlights bureaucratic skepticism toward Saunooke's sincerity. The stipulation that he finance his own return underscores the indifference of school officials to Native students' well-being. In this context, military service may have represented one of the few viable paths available to him. As Lawrence Barsh, a scholar of Native enlistment patterns and policy, observes, "institutions like the Carlisle School saw hundreds of Native enlistees, with some possibly viewing military service as an escape from these oppressive environments".¹⁰⁴ This observation reinforces the notion that Eastern Cherokee enlistment sometimes reflected constrained pragmatism rather than wholehearted support for the war.

For the ECBI, motivations to enlist were shaped by a complex interplay of historical, cultural, economic, and political factors. Their participation cannot be reduced to compliance with U.S. policies, but rather reflects broader efforts to assert rights, protect community, and navigate the pressures of settler colonialism. Historian John Finger observes that the Eastern Cherokee's persistence on ancestral lands—despite being considered "non-citizen wards of the United States"—produced a precarious legal status that influenced their engagement with federal institutions, including military service¹⁰⁵. Military enlistment was thus both a response to structural pressures and an expression of agency, a redefinition of warriorhood in a colonial context: Eastern Cherokee men combined traditional notions of community protection with the

¹⁰⁴ Barsh, *Native Americans and Military Service* (1991), 279.

¹⁰⁵ John R. Finger, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees 1819–1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 284.

obligations and limitations imposed by the settler state. Oakley (2018, p. 73) documents that approximately 600 Cherokee men from the Eastern Band enlisted during World War I, with over 300 serving in various branches and 18 losing their lives. This level of participation—roughly 25% of the reservation population—signals that motivations were multifaceted, encompassing patriotism, economic necessity, social pressure, and loyalty to community.

By examining Saunooke alongside broader trends in ECBI enlistment, it becomes clear that military service was neither straightforwardly coerced nor purely voluntary. It represented a negotiated space in which Indigenous youth navigated assimilationist schooling, settler colonial structures, and the pressures of wartime service. Through this lens, warriorhood is not merely a martial identity, but a socially and culturally mediated response to structural vulnerability, one that blends survival, pragmatism, and the assertion of community rights in the face of colonial imposition.

As a direct archival example of these complex motivations and emotions surrounding participation, George Allen Owl, a WWI Eastern Cherokee warrior, articulated the duality of loyalty and resistance in a wartime letter published in *The Cherokee Scout*, noting that “the Indian, as far back as one can read, has always been willing to fight for his country, and it is true today. Though ruled by people who fought us for this same country, we are not quitters. We are going to fight for our country as long as we live in it, and we are proud to have a chance to fight for it.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ George Allen Owl, letter to the editor, *The Cherokee Scout*, 1918, 1.

Owl's words reveal the depth of both Eastern Cherokee agency and a commitment in a broader national identity. His framing of service as a continuation of the Eastern Cherokee notion of the warrior tradition connects directly to the Peoplehood model, which emphasizes the role of sacred history, place, ceremonial cycle, and language in shaping Indigenous identity. Through military service, Eastern Cherokee warriors such as Owl reaffirmed their identity as protectors of their homeland, not merely participants in a colonial war effort. This perspective complicates simplistic narratives of assimilation and stresses their agency in adapting to external pressures while upholding and preserving their cultural values, beliefs, and traditions.

For George Allen Owl, military service was not just about fighting for recognition but also about self-empowerment. He emphasized the opportunities for growth and learning in the army, noting that “there is no end to the chance for learning here in the army. Every minute there is something to be learned, and one who does not take the advantage is no soldier.”¹⁰⁷

His affirmation in his letter illustrates the strategic ways Eastern Cherokee warriors used their experiences to acquire new skills, reflecting a broader theme of survivance as described by Vizenor¹⁰⁸. Ultimately, the Eastern Cherokee' nation 's contributions to WWI shows their enduring resilience and commitment to their peoplehood. Their service reflected not only a defense of the United States as a country, but also a defense of their cultural identity, homeland, and community. Through acts of military service, financial investment, and political advocacy,

¹⁰⁷ George Allen Owl, letter to the editor, *The Cherokee Scout*, 1918, 1.

¹⁰⁸ Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 1.

the Eastern Cherokee warriors embodied a profound sense of duty and resistance, ensuring their voices and legacy would endure despite systemic efforts to erase them.

Bread and butter of American students, patriotic displays were ubiquitous at Carlisle; as a foreign student, I note that such overt nationalism resembles how French people sing *La Marseillaise* during major occasions. In newspapers such as *The Carlisle Arrow* and *Red Man*, expressions of deep patriotism were common, emphasizing love for the United States even among students who, ironically, were not yet American citizens in October 1917. One illustrative example is the unsigned poem “*My Country*,” which reads like a love letter to the United States: “I belong to the United States of America, and am proud of it, because my country is great and strong, and its ideals are just and humane.”¹⁰⁹ The authorship is unclear—it could have been written by students, professors, or the school superintendent—but the poem’s rhetoric reflects more than personal affection; it echoes the manifest destiny narratives that justified dispossession and erased Indigenous sovereignty. A later verse claims, “I love my country because it never wishes to conquer any other country, nor to annex any territory that does not belong to it without the consent of the people who live in such a territory.”¹¹⁰ This patriotic performance can be analyzed through Audra Simpson’s framework of Indigenous political subjectivity. Simpson (Kahnawà:ke Mohawk, anthropologist) argues that Indigenous peoples’ engagement with settler states is rarely one of blind consent; rather, it is characterized by strategic refusal and careful negotiation, noting that “Consent is the ruse of the settler state. The fiction is that we have agreed

¹⁰⁹ Anonymous, “*My Country*,” *The Carlisle Arrow and Red Man*, October 1917, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, Dickinson College.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

to this.”¹¹¹ From this perspective, the poem may be understood not merely as an expression of loyalty, but as part of a complex negotiation with colonial authority, where Eastern Cherokee students were participating in a settler-imposed performance of citizenship while maintaining cultural and political awareness. The poem thus exemplifies how Indigenous youth navigated institutional pressures, outwardly performing patriotism while internalizing and subtly contesting the epistemological and political structures imposed upon them.

The ECBI showed efforts at preserving their cultural identity and agency, cultural persistence, and acts of resistance. These acts included defending their sacred lands (Kituwah), preserving their cultural practices, and resisting attempts to assimilate them. By the time of World War I, the Eastern Cherokee people had demonstrated that they were a resilient, self-sustaining community, and their involvement in the wars was a continuation of this resistance. By the late 19th century, U.S. Indian policy shifted from removal toward assimilation, aiming to erase Indigenous cultural practices and incorporate Native peoples into Euro-American society. Boarding schools, Christian missions, and allotment policies—most notably the Dawes Act of 1887—sought to “civilize” Native children by forbidding their languages, religions, and traditional practices.¹¹² These policies treated Indigenous identity as an obstacle to progress and positioned Native people as wards of the state rather than sovereign communities. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, like other communities, endured these pressures while striving to maintain language, ceremonial life, and gendered cultural roles—

¹¹¹ Audra Simpson (Kahnawà:ke Mohawk, anthropologist), *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 128.

¹¹² Vine Deloria and Clifford Lytle, *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 45–47.

efforts that would shape how men and women navigated military service, civic engagement, and postwar reintegration in the early 20th century.¹¹³

The narratives of the ECBI warriors during WWI reveal both continuity and change in their struggles against assimilation and marginalization. During World War I, Native peoples enlisted at incredibly high rates despite not being universally recognized as U.S. citizens. For the Eastern Cherokee people, military service became a means of demonstrating loyalty and securing political leverage while maintaining their cultural distinctiveness. Eastern Cherokee warriors faced systemic racism in the military, where they were often marginalized despite their critical contributions. The sacred language, Cherokee, suppressed in boarding schools, became invaluable as codes for secure military communication. This paradox highlights the complexities of their service: they were tasked with using a language that settler colonial policies had attempted to erase.

While some Eastern Cherokee people sought citizenship, many did so reluctantly, recognizing that it came with severe limitations that were incompatible with their sense of peoplehood. The federal government's attempts to assimilate Native peoples into broader American society through citizenship failed to address the underlying issues of sovereignty and cultural identity. For many, the choice between accepting limited citizenship or remaining noncitizens was a fraught decision, with some rejecting the notion of American citizenship altogether. They viewed it as incompatible with their own cultural and political frameworks,

¹¹³ Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, *The Cherokee Nation and the Trail of Tears* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 212.

which emphasized collective identity and sovereignty¹¹⁴. In a similar vein, Mikaëla Adams underscores how the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians navigated these complexities by developing their own system of blood quantum and residency requirements to assert who could claim citizenship.¹¹⁵ This approach was not only a response to external pressures from the federal government but also an attempt to protect their sovereignty and resist the imposed racial and legal categories of the U.S. government. As Adams notes, "Blood" for the ECBI carried both cultural and racial connotations, where "full blood" indicated adherence to traditional Cherokee practices, while "mixed bloods" were often considered as acting "white"¹¹⁶. The Cherokees adopted these categories to protect their sense of belonging and avoid the erosion of their political and cultural identity.

Historian and Vietnam Cherokee veteran Tom Holm further discusses the failure of the U.S. government's assimilation policies, noting that while the idea of Americanization and citizenship was promoted, the reality was far more complicated.¹¹⁷ The federal government, through its Bureau of Indian Affairs, continued to exercise significant control over Native lives even after citizenship was granted. Citizenship did not grant Native Americans full rights or autonomy; instead, it often kept them in a state of limbo, where they were neither fully integrated into American society nor allowed to retain their tribal sovereignty¹¹⁸. This tension between

¹¹⁴ Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: The Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 177.

¹¹⁵ Mikaëla M. Adams, *Who Belongs?: Race, Resources, and Tribal Citizenship in the Native South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 145.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹¹⁷ Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls*, 178–179.

¹¹⁸ *ibid*

imposed citizenship and the desire for self-determination was a central issue for many Native Americans during this period.

Finally, Holm concludes by emphasizing the resilience of Native American communities in the face of assimilationist pressures. Despite the federal government's attempts to erase Native identities, many tribes were able to "nativize" foreign religions and practices, adapting them to fit within their cultural and spiritual frameworks. Native languages and sacred histories were preserved through storytelling, religious ceremonies, and art, serving as vital symbols of cultural survival. The era of forced assimilation may have been a time of confusion and conflict, but it was also a period of renewal for American Indian identity, as Pan-Indian relationships began to form, providing a foundation for future resistance and cultural revitalization.¹¹⁹ Ultimately, the actions of the US's government to attempt assimilation and citizenship on the Eastern Cherokee people is not a simple incorporation into the settler state but a negotiation, refusal, and resilience. Even as they imposed Americanization and diminished tribal sovereignty, the Eastern Cherokee and other Native nations adapted, preserved, and reasserted their cultural traditions. This tension between imposed citizenship and Indigenous self-determination did not disappear with World War I; rather, it set the stage for how Eastern Cherokee warriors would navigate military service. Their participation in the war was not simply an extension of federal assimilationist agendas but an expression of longstanding traditions of warriorhood, sovereignty, and survivance—issues that the following chapter explores in greater depth.

¹¹⁹ Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: The Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 187.

Chapter Two: War, Identity, and the Struggle for Sovereignty (1917–1924)

This chapter examines how ECBI warriors' experiences during and after World War I shaped their identities, reinforced community ties, and complicated broader discussions of citizenship. While enlistment in the military was often framed by the U.S. government as a path toward assimilation, Eastern Cherokee soldiers navigated their service in ways that reflected long-standing traditions of warriorhood and resistance. Their service was not passive compliance but an assertion of sovereignty, cultural continuity, and survivance.

A central focus is the narratives of ECBI warriors during the war (1917–1918). This chapter explores their combat roles, the geographies of their deployment, and the ways they adapted traditional warrior practices to the realities of modern warfare. The Peoplehood model is particularly useful in understanding how connections to sacred land, language, and oral traditions shaped their engagement in combat and informed their resilience.

This chapter also examines the post-war period, when veterans faced new legal and political challenges, particularly in the context of the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act¹²⁰. Although often framed as a natural extension of Native military service, the Act played out differently for the ECBI, who had long resisted federal efforts to dissolve their community. Their reactions to this legislation highlight the complex ways Native service was entangled with broader struggles over sovereignty, recognition, and identity. By revisiting how Eastern Cherokee identity was articulated through kinship, community practices, and cultural ties—rather than external

¹²⁰ Indian Citizenship Act, Pub. L. No. 68-175, 43 Stat. 253 (June 2, 1924).

racialized categories—this chapter situates their military service within both the colonial state’s demands and the Cherokee nation’s enduring traditions.

For the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the warrior was never an isolated figure of control and conquest, but one shaped through spiritual knowledge, communal consultation, and ceremonial responsibility. This chapter explores what it meant to be a warrior for the Eastern Cherokee in the early twentieth century—how traditions of service, sacrifice, and protection were carried into the modern battlefield. In particular, I examine how the legacies of institutions like Carlisle influenced Eastern Cherokee warriors who enlisted in World War I. Through case studies of warriors like George Owl and Stephen Youngdeer, this chapter explores how Eastern Cherokee men navigated U.S. military service while remaining deeply tied to the values and responsibilities of their communities. These stories challenge dominant narratives of assimilation by revealing how Indigenous concepts of warriorhood persisted, adapted, and even flourished under the pressures of global war and settler-state expectations.

American military institutions like the Carlisle Indian School promoted a strict, hierarchical, and hyper-disciplined model of masculine and militarized authority—one grounded in posture, elocution, decisiveness, and emotional restraint. Essentially, the purpose beyond the integration of American Indians into American society, was to deprive the students of anything that remotely resembled warmth and emotions. The notion of emotional stability was viewed as a way to control the pupils and have them trained to become machine-like in my opinion. On the other hand, the Eastern Cherokee understanding of warfare was rooted in spiritual cycles, community consultation, and ceremonial balance. In a 1917 article published in *The Carlisle Arrow and Red Man*, Major General H. P. McCain listed “slouchiness,” inability to give

commands in a loud, clear voice, and hurt feelings in response to criticism as markers of unfit leadership among officer candidates, suggesting that real men should speak authoritatively, carry themselves with unwavering discipline, and exhibit mental alertness at all times.¹²¹ This notion of the ideal warrior reflects settler-colonial values—rugged individualism, control, and assimilation into a militarized, English-speaking framework.

Tom Holm defines warriorhood in Indigenous communities as a role imbued with significant ceremonial and spiritual meanings. Warriors were ritually prepared for war and offered protective medicine to ensure their safe return, demonstrating that military service was not merely a physical endeavor but a deeply spiritual and communal responsibility. In addition to pre-battle rituals, many tribes instituted purification ceremonies to restore both the individual warrior and the wider community to a harmonious state.¹²² This framework highlights that Eastern Cherokee participation in warfare—whether in traditional conflicts or in service with the U.S. military—cannot be understood solely through a lens of obligation or duty; it was shaped by cultural expectations, ritual preparation, and the broader ethical and spiritual responsibilities of warriorhood.

The ECBI viewed the warrior as multi-dimensional—not merely as a fighter, but as someone involved in the community's spiritual and ceremonial practices and rituals. In other words, the role of the warrior is not just to engage in battle but to embody and maintain the

¹²¹ Major General H. P. McCain, "Slouchiness and Leadership," *The Carlisle Arrow and Red Man*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (October 5, 1917): 14, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/publications/carlisle-arrow-and-red-man-vol-14-no-4>.

¹²² Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: The Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 243.

community's balance and harmony, with a strong emphasis on the spiritual health and wellbeing of both the warrior and the community they protect.

Moreover, the Eastern Cherokee model of warriorhood was relational rather than hierarchical. As Loftin and Frey explain, “The war organization seems to have been a much looser structure. When the village council decided for war, the red standard was raised and a new combination of organized officials went into operation”.¹²³ Indeed, the raising of the red standard was not simply a procedural step; it was a ceremonial signal that the community had collectively chosen the path of war. The color red, associated with blood, power, and the sacred, symbolized both the dangers of battle and the spiritual responsibility carried by the warriors. In this way, the red standard embodied peoplehood itself, linking communal decision-making with spiritual sanction and reminding warriors that they fought not for personal glory but for the survival and balance of the entire Cherokee nation. As a result, war and warriorhood was not solely about individual achievement or command, but about fulfilling obligations to the community, ancestors, and sacred protocols. Roles were not fixed; they shifted based on need, vision, and spiritual readiness. Leadership was not earned through loudness or bodily discipline but emerged through spiritual insight and relational accountability.

In addition, contrasting with the settler-colonial definition of the “warrior” as a stoic, cold, disciplined, and hyper-masculine soldier, the Eastern Cherokee warriors who served in World War I drew from a much older, culturally grounded understanding of what it meant to

¹²³ John D. Loftin and Benjamin E. Frey, *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2024), 34, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.12949145>.

protect their people. Taiaiake Alfred (Kanien'kehá:ka), writing on the broader Indigenous resurgence, highlights the limitations of the Euro-American concept of the warrior: "The way that word is understood is just one of the meanings of the term. It is European in origin and quite a male-gendered and soldierly image... It doesn't reflect real Onkwehonwe notions... especially that of the ideal we are seeking to understand and apply here, of men and women involved in a spiritually rooted resurgence to Onkwehonwe strength".¹²⁴ While Alfred does not speak specifically for the Eastern Cherokee philosophy on warriorhood, but from a Haudenosaunee perspective, his insight offers an explanation for interpreting Indigenous participation in warfare not as a departure from cultural identity, but as an extension of it. For the Eastern Cherokee, becoming a warrior in the modern military context did not necessarily mean abandoning Indigenous worldviews. Rather, it could be seen as a contemporary expression of a sacred responsibility—one rooted in community protection, ceremonial duty, and the enduring values of their people. Warriors were not simply combatants for indigenous peoples. They were moral and spiritual protectors of the people. Their responsibility extended far beyond the battlefield. As Winona LaDuke and Sean Cruz affirm by citing chief Sitting Bull, "For us, warriors are not what you think of as warriors. The warrior is not someone who fights, because no one has the right to take another's life. The warrior, for us, is one who sacrifices himself for the good of others. His task is to take care of the elderly, the defenseless, those who cannot provide for themselves and above all, the children, the future of humanity".¹²⁵ This definition challenges colonial narratives

¹²⁴ Taiaiake Alfred (Kanien'kehá:ka), "Warrior Spirit and the Ideology of Warriorhood," in *Indigenous Men and Masculinities: Legacies, Identities, Regeneration*, ed. Robert Alexander Innes and Kim Anderson (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014), 11.

¹²⁵ Winona LaDuke and Sean Cruz, *The Militarization of Native America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), 23.

of warfare, situating the warrior within a cosmology of care, protection, and generational responsibility. In this context, warfare itself was a ritualized act, spiritually and ceremonially embedded in ECBI life. Warriors fasted, observed taboos, and prepared themselves not only physically, but spiritually, for the burden they would carry. The raising of the red standard—a ceremonial war banner signifying that the ECBI was entering a sacred state of warfare—did more than signal conflict; it invoked spiritual authority and the protection of sacred life¹²⁶. As LaDuke and Cruz further note, “Men and women who are involved in killing are changed spiritual beings. In the act of killing you realign your relationship to your relatives”¹²⁷. This realignment speaks to the cost of warfare and the sacred responsibility warriors assumed, not only to protect, but to return and reintegration into community life with spiritual understanding and care. In this analysis of the heaviness a warrior carries, Indigenous warriors served as cultural protectors, carrying forward the traditions, values, and sacred duties of their people—not just in battle, but in the everyday act of survival and cultural preservation.

Gerald Vizenor describes a way of acting called “simulation’. According to him, the settler state’s strategy of producing false or superficial representations of Indigenous identity—images that reinforce colonial narratives while erasing the realities of Indigenous life.¹²⁸ In the context of wartime, these simulations constructed a version of the Native warrior that served U.S. nationalism rather than tribal sovereignty. This imposed identity ignored the deeper,

¹²⁶ John D. Loftin and Benjamin E. Frey, *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2024), 34, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.12949145>.

¹²⁷ LaDuke and Cruz, *The Militarization of Native America*, 39.

¹²⁸ Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 5, 15.

spiritual understandings of warriorhood embedded in Eastern Cherokee culture—understandings grounded in kinship, ceremony, and sacred responsibility. For the Eastern Cherokee, military service was not an act of mere assimilation, but rather a reaffirmation of their responsibility to protect their people, their traditions, and their sovereignty. Vizenor writes, “The postindian warriors¹²⁹ and the missionaries of manifest manners are both responsible for simulations... even that resemblance is a simulation that ends in silence, or the presence of an original referent to tribal survivance”¹³⁰. U.S. military officers often viewed Native soldiers as vessels for assimilation, projecting settler expectations onto Indigenous bodies in ways that ignored their deep connection to ancestral practices and spiritual responsibilities. As Vizenor argues, “Oral stories are the best performance of simulations, because the reference is in the performance”¹³¹. By positioning Indigenous warriors as mere instruments of U.S. militarism, settler narratives failed to recognize the possibility that Indigenous identity might be performative, subversive, and adaptive—rooted in survival mechanisms that resist assimilation even within colonial systems.

This indicates that colonial powers not only misunderstood but actively sought to erase Indigenous practices and beliefs, forcing a performance of warriorhood that lacked connection to its cultural roots. These simulations silenced the rich history and ceremonial context of warrior identity, pushing Native soldiers to embody a version of themselves that was unrecognizable and divorced from their true cultural significance. The Eastern Cherokee warriors’ enlistment in

¹²⁹ For the author, this definition encompasses any native warrior after the disruption of colonization and represents the ideal warrior resisting this act by existing and persisting in keeping their culture alive.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 163.

¹³¹ Ibid., 166.

World War I, then, should not be perceived as an act of submission to colonialism, but rather as an act of survivance—continuing the defense of their land, language, and culture. As Vizenor asserts, the postindian warrior “undermines the comparative poses of tribal traditions”¹³², exposing the absence of real power and voice in settler colonial portrayals of Native people. In this context, the Eastern Cherokee experience reflects not just a colonial response, but an ongoing struggle to assert sovereignty and identity in the face of forced cultural erasure. This assertion of identity can be read as a refusal to comply with the colonial simulations of their warrior status, instead upholding a sense of cultural continuity that is rooted in both military and ceremonial practices.

To better realize the depth of such commitment and the meaning it encompasses for the Eastern Cherokee people, I investigated their traditions through their storytelling practices within their sacred history. Their worldview is indeed connected with their relationship and understanding of the land as a sacred and living entity, forming the backbone of their cosmology. Kituwah is not merely a physical place – it is the birthplace of the Cherokee people, a living connection to the very origins of their existence. In Cherokee sacred tradition, the story of Creation is told not through conquest or a unique god, but through collaboration and adaptation with the natural world. As Loftin and Frey accentuate, Cherokee people believe that by physically entering Kituwah, Cherokee people symbolically return to the moment of creation, reinforcing their ongoing relationship with the world and their ancestors, “when the water beetle

¹³² Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 163.

first surfaced with a piece of mud that later became the island on which they lived.”¹³³ This affirmation emphasizes the ontological connection between the Cherokee people and their land. For the Cherokee nation, the land is an active participant in their creation story and spiritual life, not an element to use and abuse, but one living being and entity responsible for giving them life. This belief in the sacredness of land ties directly into their survivance, as they resist colonial narratives that seek to sever the link between Indigenous peoples and their ancestral territories. The land is not only a place of physical sustenance but a profound repository of identity, history, and spirituality. In this context, the Cherokee people's connection to their sacred sites is a form of resistance—preserving their culture, stories, and relationships to the land in the face of settler colonialism. The land is as much a being as they are. They are part of the land as their bodies represent this reality. As Cherokee storyteller Gayle Ross recounts, when the earth was still covered in water, “the water beetle offered to help... he swam, scooped up a tiny piece of mud. The tired small creature rested and left that handful of mud when he flew away. It began to grow and became our world—the middle world we know.”¹³⁴ This origin story emphasizes the Cherokee closeness to animals and nature. It is not a simple story—it is a spiritual truth that affirms human-animal-planet interdependence. Ross explains that such stories are passed down with reverence, and that their sacred essence is preserved, especially when it comes to

¹³³ John D. Loftin and Benjamin E. Frey, *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2024), 13, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.12949145>.

¹³⁴ *Gayle Ross: Storyteller*, directed by Dan Duncan (Carolyn Jones Productions, 1997), Alexander Street video, 6:50, <https://video-alexanderstreet-com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/watch/gayle-ross/details>.

ceremonial stories: “I don’t make any changes in that respect.”¹³⁵ The meaning and strength of these traditions are carried forward in living forms—similarly to honoring warriors at powwows, where U.S. military veterans now carry the flag in the grand entry. Ross reflects on this surprising revelation: “There is no more patriotic people than Indian people,” she says, recalling a conversation with a friend who was surprised to see an Indigenous man carrying the American flag.¹³⁶ These ceremonial practices are not contradictions but expressions of peoplehood, and deep cultural survivance. “What would our history be worth if we didn’t see America as being a great country? We are many people, but we are Americans.”¹³⁷ At the heart of it all, Ross reminds us, “traditions are a living, breathing thing.”¹³⁸ We can analyze this reality with the affection that is given to Kituwah by the Cherokee nation, the land lives and its traditions and ceremonies are carried by its people. As Ross reflects, “the storyteller is nothing more than a vehicle for the collective and histories.”¹³⁹ Her words affirm that storytelling is not about individual authorship but about embodying and transmitting the voice of the people. Kituwah, in

¹³⁵ Ibid., 6:52.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 18:07.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 18:20.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 19:38.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 20:35.

this light, becomes not only a sacred geographic origin but also a ceremonial act—an embodied story through which the Cherokee continue to live, resist, and remember.

These traditions of story and ceremony also shaped Cherokee approaches to warfare. Not only was war part of their regular practices, but the structure of Cherokee warfare and the roles of warriors in their society were deeply intertwined with their spiritual and social practices. It is an illustration of peoplehood and a direct representation of a deep commitment to respect, organization, and traditions. Cherokee governance, particularly during times of war, was highly structured but flexible, reflecting their unique approach to leadership and decision-making. As Loftin and Frey describe, the Red Council was responsible for military affairs and decisions regarding war. The Red Council had significant influence during times of conflict, serving as a sort of martial law when necessary. However, it was also composed of individuals who played vital diplomatic roles, ensuring that decisions about war and peace were made with the full understanding of their cultural, spiritual, and social implications. The White Council, on the other hand, was primarily concerned with civil governance, peace, and matters related to the internal functioning of the Cherokee community. Together, these two councils balanced the needs of the Cherokee people, creating a governance system that emphasized both military readiness and social harmony¹⁴⁰. The Red Council, in particular, was an essential component of the warrior culture of the Cherokee. According to Loftin and Frey, the military organization during wartime was structured around the decisions of the village council, which would raise the

¹⁴⁰ John D. Loftin and Benjamin E. Frey, *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2024), 34, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.12949145>.

red standard to signal the beginning of war. This marked the transition from civil to military governance. The council that followed was composed of military leaders chosen not by hierarchical rank but by wisdom, leadership, and experience. These leaders included the War Chief, War Priest, Speaker for War, and Surgeon, who were all elected by the warriors. They, in turn, appointed additional officers to manage various aspects of the war effort.¹⁴¹ In this way, Cherokee warfare was not just about fighting – it was an extension of the community’s broader cosmological and spiritual beliefs, illustrating the interconnections of their military practices and cultural identity.

Unlike the highly hierarchical structures of many Western militaries, the ECBI military structure was based on the decisions of the village council—a collective body that represented the community’s will. The red standard served as a signal that war had been sanctioned, marking the transition to an organized war effort. However, the structure was not rigid; instead, it relied on the flexibility of leaders who were chosen based on their abilities, wisdom, and experience rather than formal rank. The looser structure reflects the broader ECBI value system that emphasizes community consultation, consensus, and the spirituality of leadership. Warriors were not just trained in combat, but in the moral and spiritual duties that came with their roles. For the Eastern Cherokee, warriorhood was not simply about physical prowess—it was about fulfilling a sacred duty to protect and preserve their people, lands, and culture. This is especially important

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*

when considering that ECBI warriors served as cultural protectors, not only in battle but also in the preservation of their cultural identity and ways of life.¹⁴²

In this context, the warrior's role extends beyond physical combat. The act of warfare was often ritualistic, embedded in ceremonial practices that ensured the community's spiritual integrity. The raising of the red standard symbolized more than just the commencement of war—it represented the invocation of spiritual authority and the protection of the sacred. This duality of warrior culture, blending the physical and spiritual realms, challenges traditional Western ideas of warfare, which often view war as purely material and strategic. For the Cherokee, warfare was part of a broader cosmological order, where the sacredness of life and death, victory, and loss, were deeply connected to their creation stories and spiritual practices.¹⁴³ The figure of Tsali remains central to the Eastern Cherokee's collective memory, symbolizing resistance, and sacrifice in the face of settler colonialism. His legendary death, offered as an act of defiance and survival for his people, continues to echo through the community's sacred history. Tsali's story is not merely a relic of the past; it lives on as a powerful expression of ECBI *survivance* – the active resistance against cultural erasure and colonial domination. His legend, much like the Eastern Cherokee's ongoing battle for sovereignty, has not only endured through oral tradition but has also been reinforced in modern expressions, such as theater and cultural storytelling.

¹⁴² *ibid*

¹⁴³ John D. Loftin and Benjamin E. Frey, *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2024), 34-36, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.12949145>.

This trip, financed by the American Philosophical Society through their “Philip’s Fund foundation”, allowed me to engage more deeply with Eastern Cherokee notions of cultural resilience, survivance, peoplehood, and identity. Visiting these sites and interacting with the landscape revealed how the Eastern Cherokee honor their historical figures, preserve their sacred history, and maintain their connection to their ancestral land. These elements collectively reinforce their cultural distinctiveness and resistance to settler colonialism. During my trip to Cherokee, North Carolina, I had the opportunity to witness firsthand the enduring presence of Tsali’s story in the collective consciousness of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The place itself, deeply tied to the tribe’s sacred history, was an embodiment of resistance, survival, and cultural strength. The mountains, rivers, and land spoke volumes about the ongoing connection between the Eastern Cherokee people and their ancestral territory. The land, which Tsali fought to protect, continues to nourish the tribe, reinforcing the link between past struggles and present-day survival.

On July 1, I attended *Unto These Hills*, the historical drama that portrays key figures of Eastern Cherokee history. Tsali, in particular, was depicted as a Christ-like figure who made the ultimate sacrifice for the survival of his people. His martyrdom serves not only as a story of individual sacrifice but as a powerful symbol of the tribe's ongoing resistance to colonization. In the play, Tsali's defiance of external authority, including his rejection of Christianity, highlights the tension between traditional ECBI beliefs and the pressures of settler colonialism. Tsali’s sacrifice was portrayed as a reflection of the broader struggle for cultural survival, not just for his immediate family but for the entire tribe.

What struck me most during the performance was the profound sense of continuity between Tsali's legendary defiance and the community's ongoing struggle for cultural survival. As the actors depicted Tsali's martyrdom, I couldn't help but feel the weight of his sacrifice for future generations, including those of us who were witnessing the performance. The way Tsali's spirit resonated in the present moment was powerful. The audience, made up of Cherokee community members and visitors alike, responded not just with respect but with a palpable sense of pride and connection to the story. Tsali's death is not just a historical event; it is a living, breathing symbol of survival and defiance against forces that seek to erase the Cherokee identity. Tsali's martyrdom also represents the important role of the warrior in the Cherokee community—a figure who both defends the tribe and symbolizes the cultural strength of the people. In the play, Tsali's wife was depicted as a resilient and protective figure, someone who was dedicated to maintaining the traditions of her people and ensuring the survival of her children. Her portrayal reinforced the theme of maternal strength in the face of adversity, a theme that resonates deeply with the broader warrior narrative in ECBI culture. I found this portrayal of strength particularly moving, as it reflected not just Tsali's individual courage but the collective resilience of the entire Eastern Cherokee community—both male and female, young and old.

The legend of Tsali, as described by Lambert, illustrates how his story has evolved into an essential component of the Eastern Cherokees' sacred history. The story of Tsali's death has been passed down through generations, continually revitalized as a source of inspiration and pride. Lambert writes, "According to Eastern Band legend, their right to remain in North Carolina was sealed when the Qualla Indians brought Tsali and his family, a fugitive band of

Cherokees, to justice on behalf of the government. The story has it that as Tsali and his family were being marched to a holding camp in preparation for their removal to Indian Territory, an altercation erupted between Tsali and his family's military escorts"¹⁴⁴. At this point, the story diverged into three different accounts: all ending with Tsali's death and sacrifice for his people. This legend is not just a historical account but a living part of the community's cultural heritage, continuing to shape the way the Eastern Cherokee view themselves and their struggle for sovereignty.

Historian John Finger, on the other hand, has critiqued *Unto These Hills* as a production monopolized by white perspectives, arguing that it potentially does more harm than good by reinforcing historically inaccurate narratives.¹⁴⁵ While I acknowledge the origins of the play and Finger's valid concerns, I disagree with his conclusion. His account suggests that Tsali was older and did not speak English—a stark contrast from the younger, eloquent version presented on stage¹⁴⁶. Yet even if the historical Tsali differed in demeanor or background, what matters, as Finger himself ultimately affirms, is what Tsali has come to represent for the EBCCI.

The nation's belief that Tsali's choice to stand against the forces that threatened his people speaks to the Cherokee value of community over individual pride. His decision to die for

¹⁴⁴ Leonard Carson Lambert Jr., as told to Michael Lambert, *Up from These Hills: Memories of a Cherokee Boyhood*(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011).

¹⁴⁵ John R. Finger, "Tsali (1778?-25 November 1838), Cherokee Hero," *American National Biography*, February 1, 2000, accessed April 4, 2025, <https://www-anb-org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/view/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.001.0001/anb-9780198606697-e-2001699>.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*

his people, rather than bow to the demands of settler colonialism, highlights a profound connection to his community, land, and cultural sovereignty.

In contrast, Davey Arch's story, "The Brave, the Mighty Warrior",¹⁴⁷ is not one of celebration but rather a cautionary tale about the dangers of excessive pride and arrogance in warriors. In other words, what makes a bad warrior. As the grandfather tells the boy, the warrior becomes boastful and self-obsessed, constantly talking about his greatness in battle and the superior quality of his tools. The warrior, in his arrogance, loses touch with the humble responsibilities of being a true protector of the community. In this context, Arch's story underscores a negative example of what a bad warrior looks like. The story's moral is clear: pride and boasting destroy the essence of warriorhood. The warrior's actions – focusing more on the sharpness of his tools and his own glory than on the needs of his people – lead him to a tragic fate. When he is captured in battle, his enemies take his prized weapons and use them against him, symbolizing how the very tools of arrogance that he boasted about become his downfall. The warrior's boasting makes him disconnected from the community, and in the end, he is undone by his own arrogance. As the grandfather explains, "he was knocked unconscious from behind by one of his enemies and taken captive" (p. 92). The grandfather's story points out how arrogance and disconnection from community values left the warrior vulnerable and ultimately defeated. In contrast, Eastern Cherokee participation in World War I offers examples of warriors who embodied humility, resilience, and collective responsibility.

¹⁴⁷ Barbara R. Duncan and Davey Arch, *Living Stories of the Cherokee* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 91-92.

Unlike the warrior undone by his arrogance in the traditional story, real-life Eastern Cherokee warriors often demonstrated leadership that placed communal survival above individual glory. One striking example is Corporal Ammons Tramper. On October 5, 1918, amid the confusion and chaos of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive—one of the largest and bloodiest battles involving American forces—Tramper and his squad of five men found themselves disoriented and trapped behind enemy lines. The battlefield was a nightmarish landscape of shattered trees, deep mud, tangled barbed wire, and relentless artillery fire. Surely exhausted and exposed, the men took refuge in a small shell crater to avoid detection by German patrols. Yet in the maze of trenches and battle scars, they instead wandered deeper into enemy territory, where every shadow might conceal a hidden danger.¹⁴⁸

It was in this moment of overwhelming uncertainty and fear that Tramper’s leadership shone. Drawing on his composure, knowledge of the terrain, and the trust of his comrades, he took charge—quietly assessing their surroundings, charting a safe path, and encouraging his men to keep moving despite fatigue and despair. Slowly and cautiously, he guided them through tangled barbed wire and across open fields under intermittent machine-gun fire, navigating by landmarks and intuition until, against all odds, they reached the safety of their own lines. As Britten notes, “Facing constant danger and confusion on the front lines, Native soldiers frequently drew on their cultural values and community bonds to maintain their courage and cohesion. Leaders like Corporal Ammons Tramper exemplified this resilience, using calm

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Britten, *American Indians in World War I: The Eastern Cherokee Experience* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 134.

determination and knowledge of the land to guide their comrades to safety against overwhelming odds”.¹⁴⁹

In Eastern Cherokee tradition, the role of the warrior is intertwined with spiritual resilience and communal care. Warriors are taught to carry the burden of their people’s survival, land, and cultural integrity, enduring hardship with courage and humility. Trumper’s actions reflect this holistic understanding of warriorhood—his leadership was an act of protecting life, not only physically but spiritually and culturally. More than battlefield heroism; Trumper’s bravery and steady hand in the face of chaos exemplify the deeply rooted Eastern Cherokee warrior ethos, which stresses responsibility not just for individual survival but for the protection and wellbeing of the entire community. His ability to maintain calm and provide direction under extreme stress speaks to a form of survivance: an active assertion of Indigenous identity and resistance against colonial narratives that sought to depict Native soldiers as expendable tools of empire. Through his guidance, Trumper not only preserved the lives of his fellow soldiers but also upheld the sacred responsibilities and traditions that define Eastern Cherokee warriorhood. In doing so, he demonstrated how Indigenous warriors navigated the brutality of modern warfare while carrying the weight of cultural continuity and spiritual obligation.

Another Eastern Cherokee warrior’s role of Wesley Youngbird, on the battleship Wyoming is another example of the diverse contributions that Cherokee warriors made during World War I. As Historian Thomas Britten records, Youngbird was not merely an auxiliary figure—his service aboard a significant U.S. Navy vessel highlights how Eastern Cherokee men

¹⁴⁹ *ibid*

participated in modern, technologically advanced branches of the armed forces, which were often dominated by white servicemen and steeped in hierarchical and racially exclusive structures¹⁵⁰. Youngbird's naval service's analysis can be seen, I argue, as a disruption of monolithic portrayals of Native warriors as foot soldiers or scouts relegated to symbolic or romanticized roles. His presence in the Navy, an institution that historically excluded Indigenous men, marks an act of bravery and a sign of progress. Naval ships like the *Wyoming* represented the power of U.S. imperialism, and Youngbird's involvement places him within that machinery in a way that complicates both colonial expectations and Indigenous resistance strategies. His service—away from land, ceremony, and community—represents not a departure from Cherokee identity but rather its extension into new terrains. This mobility aligns with the Peoplehood model, which emphasizes how place, sacred history, ceremonial cycles, and language adapt and persist even under pressure. Youngbird may have been physically removed from Kituwah or the Qualla Boundary, but his actions can be seen as reinforcing Cherokee nationhood by asserting presence in dominant state institutions. Moreover, Youngbird's participation can be read through the lens of survival – Youngbird's service was not necessarily an act of assimilation; rather, it was a negotiation of identity in spaces that sought to erase or marginalize him.

The Eastern Cherokee people's engagement in wartime fundraising efforts reflected both community pride and political pragmatism. Finger highlights how the Qualla township met 100% of its war bond quota by summer 1918, suggesting not only collective support for the war

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Britten, *American Indians in World War I: The Eastern Cherokee Experience* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 139.

effort but also a strategic demonstration of national loyalty.¹⁵¹ These acts of “material patriotism” went beyond compulsory service—they symbolized a desire for political recognition, communal integrity, and a redefinition of Indigenous citizenship under settler-state terms.

Many Eastern Cherokee warriors saw combat on the Western Front, often serving alongside white troops. Finger notes that Stephen Youngdeer and Cain George fought in Belgium and France and were wounded in battle, with George receiving the Purple Heart.¹⁵² These stories resonate with the Cherokee tradition of the warrior, wherein acts of valor and protection are central to community identity. Participation in war thus became a form of survivance—a way to assert Indigenous identity through strength and sacrifice, even in foreign lands.

Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel and fellow scholars explain that Indigenous storytelling is inseparable from the land, rooted in the cultural and political resurgence of Indigenous nations. He argues that reconciliation, as a Western concept, is a tool for restoring asymmetrical relationships between Indigenous peoples and the state, a framework that inherently ignores the history of settler colonialism and its impacts on Indigenous sovereignty. Corntassel writes, “Given that reconciliation is not an Indigenous concept, our overarching goal as Indigenous peoples should not be to restore an asymmetrical relationship with the state but to restory our

¹⁵¹Finger, John R. “Conscription, Citizenship, and ‘Civilization’: World War I and the Eastern Band of Cherokee.” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 63, no. 3 (1986): 293.

¹⁵² John R. Finger, “Conscription, Citizenship, and ‘Civilization’: World War I and the Eastern Band of Cherokee,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 63, no. 3 (1986): 295–296.

communities toward justice.”¹⁵³Through Corntassel's notions on Indigenous storytelling and truth-telling, and his explanations on the act of restorying, it becomes clear that this concept plays a crucial role in cultural resurgence. By embracing their roles as warriors, Eastern Cherokee soldiers were reasserting their identity and sovereignty in the face of an oppressive state that sought to define them on its own terms. As they navigated the colonial structures of the military, their actions were a form of storytelling—one that both resisted and subverted the colonial narratives imposed upon them.

A visible obstacle faced by Indigenous recruits, including many Eastern Cherokee warriors, was the challenge of language and articulation. Many of these warriors came from communities where their native languages were spoken primarily in ceremonial and familial contexts, and they sometimes lacked formal training in English. This posed a problem in the military, where clear communication was paramount, especially in officer positions. As a result, many American Indian warriors were excluded from leadership roles or faced discrimination due to their inability to articulate commands effectively in English. The military's failure to accommodate Indigenous communication styles and the reliance on dominant cultural norms to define leadership not only limited the opportunities available to these warriors but also reinforced harmful racial stereotypes. This language barrier exemplified the broader struggles of Indigenous peoples in the face of settler colonialism, where their ways of knowing and being

¹⁵³ Jeff Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, and T'lakwadzi, “Indigenous Storytelling, Truth-telling, and Community Approaches to Reconciliation,” *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 35, no. 1 (2009): 145, <https://doi.org/10.1353/esc.0.0163>.

were often dismissed or undervalued (The Carlisle Arrow and Red Man, *The Carlisle Arrow*, Oct. 5, 1917, p. 14¹⁵⁴).

However, language and communication also served as a point of resistance and survival. As Cherokee linguist Thomas Belt explains, “language helps us interpret living in the world. If we lose these languages, we’re losing an accumulated knowledge of human existence here”.¹⁵⁵ Belt’s insight underscores that language is not simply a communication tool—it is a worldview, a vessel for ancestral knowledge, and a map for living in balance. Despite the language barriers they faced, many Cherokee warriors continued to draw strength from their cultural practices and linguistic heritage, adapting to military life while retaining their cultural identity. This adaptation was not merely about survival but also about resilience. The warriors may not have had formal linguistic resources or training to bridge these gaps, but they found ways to navigate the system, often relying on their sense of community and ancestral knowledge to transcend linguistic limitations. This ability to adapt and maintain language also ties into the broader concept of survivance, where memory and presence converge to resist colonial narratives. Joyce Duncan, in *Mothertown*,¹⁵⁶ highlights how cultural revival and history play a central role in sustaining identity: “People began to realize the importance of our history and what it means. And then it

¹⁵⁴ *Carlisle Arrow and Red Man*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Carlisle, PA: Dickinson College, Waidner-Spahr Library, 1917), 9.78 MB, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/publications/carlisle-arrow-and-red-man-vol-14-no-4>

¹⁵⁵ Thomas Belt, in *Reading Between the Lines in Cherokee*, directed by Jordan Layne and Adam Mazo, PBS, aired January 22, 2024, 4:48–4:57, <https://www.pbs.org/video/reading-between-the-lines-in-cherokee-glxfqf/>.

¹⁵⁶ Joyce Duncan, *Mothertown*, directed by Rebecca Bruton and Kelly M. Kinsey, aired April 15, 2024, on PBS, 8:39–8:53, <https://www.pbs.org/video/mothertown-dgrqw8/>.

just reverberates throughout the community... I think Kituwah created a cultural renaissance for our people” (Duncan, 2024). This cultural renaissance, fueled by an understanding of history and language, reflects how Cherokee sovereignty extends beyond legal or political boundaries—rooted in land, memory, and the collective act of survivance. Even in the constrained circumstances of military service, Eastern Cherokee warriors and their communities found ways to subvert colonial frameworks and protect their cultural heritage, not only through land and ceremony but also through the ongoing revitalization of language and cultural memory.

The forced imposition of U.S. citizenship on Native communities further illustrates these complexities. Scholar Christopher Capozzola notes, “Native sovereignty was not respected, their military exemption was ignored, property rights were not upheld, and the reality that many Native Americans did not wish to be U.S. citizens was disregarded”.¹⁵⁷ For many, U.S. citizenship represented a denial of Indigenous self-determination, reinforcing the coercive power of settler colonialism. However, as Grillot highlights, Native leaders and veterans also reappropriated U.S. national symbols, such as the flag, to articulate their identities and challenge colonial narratives: “This adaptation of national symbols demonstrates a complex negotiation between asserting cultural identity and navigating within dominant American frameworks”.¹⁵⁸

This intersection of military service and Indigenous tradition highlights the resilience of the ECBI. By reinterpreting military participation through their cultural frameworks, Eastern

¹⁵⁷ Christopher Capozzola, “Legacies for Citizenship: Pinpointing Americans during and after World War I,” *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 4 (2014): 713–26, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26376598>.

¹⁵⁸ Grillot, Thomas. *First Americans: U.S. Patriotism in Indian Country After World War I*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.

Cherokee warriors and their community resisted the erasure of their identities and affirmed their sovereignty. Rather than being passive participants in a colonial military structure, they actively transformed their experiences to align with their own values, demonstrating that military service could be a pathway to cultural continuity and resistance.

The journey to obtaining American citizenship profoundly influenced the experiences of Eastern Cherokee veterans during and after their military service. The Snyder Act of 1924, which extended U.S. citizenship to Native Americans, was part of a larger federal assimilation effort.¹⁵⁹ To illustrate this reality, the lives of George, David, and Henry Owl—Eastern Cherokee veterans of World War I—highlight the complexities of this era, particularly the systemic barriers they faced as Native citizens. Each brother demonstrated resilience and determination in the face of legal and racial challenges that denied their full participation in American political life. In North Carolina, the Eastern Cherokee nation had long been excluded from voting: beginning in 1900, local officials in Swain and Jackson counties blocked their registration, effectively silencing Eastern Cherokee voices in elections. This disenfranchisement persisted even after Native individuals gained citizenship under federal law.¹⁶⁰ Grillot recounts aspects of the Owl family’s involvement not only in the World Wars but in their persistent advocacy for equality and rights. After the war, George Owl joined the American Legion to defend his hard-won rights as a veteran, despite his initial resistance to the draft in 1917. His brother David took his advocacy to

¹⁵⁹ U.S. Congress, *Snyder Act of 1924*, Public Law 68-175, 43 Stat. 253, 1924.

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Grillot, *First Americans: U.S. Patriotism in Indian Country after World War I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 177–178.

the national level, participating in a delegation to Congress to secure a special citizenship act for the Eastern Cherokee in 1924. While the act granted citizenship, it also placed Eastern Cherokee lands under federal trust, creating legal mechanisms that local officials could exploit to continue disenfranchising Cherokee voters.¹⁶¹

Henry Owl, the youngest brother, illustrates the contradictions and challenges that indigenous peoples faced during that era. He earned a master's degree from the University of North Carolina (which was a first for the Eastern Band of Cherokee), yet he still could not exercise his right to vote due to ongoing discrimination. Frustrated by these challenges, Henry transitioned to teaching with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) – a bold move. David moved to New York, co-founding the Society for the Propagation of Indian Welfare—a move that, while arguably assimilationist, also reflects a survival tactic many Indigenous leaders used to protect their communities in a hostile settler state. The Society promoted the idea that Native peoples could only thrive by adopting certain settler values, but for figures like David Owl, this was less capitulation than pragmatism—a political act in a world that offered limited choices. In the meantime, George chose to remain on the reservation, working quietly for his community.¹⁶²

The Bureau of Indian Affairs has historically operated both as a tool of settler control and a platform from which some Indigenous advocates have worked to assert tribal sovereignty. This agency, which has long been viewed with ambivalence in Indian Country, demonstrates how navigating colonial institutions could serve both as a perceived betrayal and as a means of

¹⁶¹ *ibid*

¹⁶² Thomas Grillot, *First Americans: U.S. Patriotism in Indian Country after World War I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 177.

gaining influence from within. As Valerie Lambert notes, “Native employees often sought to use the institution to pursue tribal goals, despite its colonial roots,” and were not simply “dupes of the federal government,” but political actors working in difficult conditions.¹⁶³ All three brothers—bound by kinship and a shared cultural worldview—demonstrated a commitment to their people’s future. The Owl brothers, then, can be seen not only as individuals but as extensions of a broader Indigenous family committed to the collective survival and flourishing of the Eastern Cherokee.

The narratives of the Owl brothers demonstrate how Eastern Cherokee men navigated the contradictions of military service and settler institutions in the early twentieth century. Their enlistment, battlefield experiences, and later involvement with the BIA reveal both the coercive force of colonial systems and the strategic ways ECBI men sought to use those systems to advance collective survival. They embodied survivance through their warrior traditions, kinship obligations, and commitment to community well-being, even while operating within structures designed to suppress Indigenous sovereignty.

Yet the story of the Eastern Band in this era cannot be told through men alone. While Cherokee warriors bore arms in Europe and negotiated the demands of U.S. bureaucracy at home, Eastern Cherokee women played equally vital roles in sustaining their families, healing their communities, and asserting their authority within a gendered framework that colonialism sought to dismantle. The following chapter turns to their voices and experiences, tracing how

¹⁶³ Valerie Lambert, *Navigating the Bureau: Native Employees and Tribal Sovereignty in Federal Indian Policy* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2022), 5–6.

women like Sallie Graybeard and Lula Owl Gloyne carried forward traditions of care, sacrifice, and leadership that were indispensable to the survival of the Eastern Cherokee during and after the Great War.

Chapter Three: Eastern Cherokee Women, War, and Agency – Resisting Colonial Gender Norms (1914–1924)

This chapter examines the archival silence surrounding Eastern Cherokee women’s roles in history and military service, demonstrating how settler colonialism and patriarchal norms worked together to erase Native women’s contributions. Renya K. Ramirez emphasizes that “Native feminist consciousness is essential for addressing internal conflicts around gender oppression,” since Native women are “doubly disenfranchised—both by race and gender.”¹⁶⁴ Understanding Eastern Cherokee women’s participation in U.S. institutions, including the military, requires this lens: their service was not merely an act of loyalty to the state but a deliberate assertion of cultural resilience and survivance. The archival silence surrounding Indigenous women’s roles in both history and military service demonstrates how settler colonialism and patriarchal norms intersect to obscure Native women’s contributions. Ramirez further argues that sovereignty itself cannot be fully realized unless gender equality is incorporated into its framework, because settler colonialism targeted Indigenous women precisely for their central role in community survival. As she writes, “Native women are viewed as central to the survival of Native communities; therefore, they have been the focus of attacks on Native people.”¹⁶⁵ This lens is essential for understanding Eastern Cherokee women’s participation in institutions like the military, where their service was not simply about loyalty to

¹⁶⁴ Renya K. Ramirez, *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 22.

¹⁶⁵ Ramirez, *Native Hubs*, 40.

the state but about asserting cultural resilience and rejecting erasure as active agents of survivance.

Colonial institutions, particularly boarding schools such as the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, systematically shaped narratives that marginalized Indigenous women's authority and knowledge. I explore how Eastern Cherokee women navigated settler institutions—including military hospitals and federal offices—while upholding ceremonial and kinship responsibilities rooted in Cherokee matrilineal traditions. Their presence in these militarized and patriarchal spaces did not represent assimilation or complicity, but rather an extension of their roles as protectors, healers, and bearers of sacred knowledge. At the core of this analysis lies a challenge to colonial gender logics that sought to redefine blood, motherhood, and femininity. Cherokee spirituality, deeply influenced by figures like Selu the Corn Mother, venerated female blood as sacred and life-giving, radically contrasting with settler Christian notions of impurity. Yet institutions like the Carlisle Indian Industrial School systematically targeted these foundations, attempting to overwrite matrilineal authority with western ideals of womanhood and moral discipline. Through an Indigenous Feminist lens, this chapter reframes Eastern Cherokee women's wartime contributions not as supportive, but sovereign—embodied acts of survivance that asserted cultural integrity, redefined resistance, and nurtured futures beyond the reach of settler-imposed roles.

Several Eastern Cherokee women served with distinction during the early twentieth century in various roles within the U.S. military and allied institutions, though their stories remain underrepresented in mainstream historical scholarship. Hattie Feather served as a nurse at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C., one of the nation's premier military medical

facilities, and later worked in Philadelphia and Missouri, where she cared for patients among the Choctaw. Sallie Graybeard, another Eastern Cherokee nurse, was stationed at Hahnemann Hospital in Philadelphia; her later marriage is one of the few personal details that survives in the records. A woman listed only as “Miss Wolf”, or Lulu K. Wolf Hassenplug,” also served at Walter Reed Hospital, highlighting the limited documentation and recognition these Native women received. Lula H. Owl served in the U.S. Army at Camp Lewis in Washington State, a key training and deployment site during the First World War.¹⁶⁶

The 1916 article “The Cherokee Indian School (Part III),” published in *The Red Man*, reveals the settler gaze that shaped these institutions. The article refers to Cherokee elders who do not speak English as “old smokes” and portrays Cherokee mothers as having “contempt” for baby carriages and delaying their children's naming (Odds, 1916, p.213)¹⁶⁷. These remarks reflect the racial and cultural prejudices that were part of a settler-colonial boarding schools’ curriculum, portraying Indigenous mothers as backward, irrational, or even dangerous. In this way, Carlisle, and institutions like it worked to delegitimize ECBI cosmologies and cultural authority, particularly the spiritual and familial leadership traditionally held by women.

This perspective also helps correct older historiography that either minimized or ignored women’s contributions. Historian John R. Finger, in his influential book *The Eastern Band of*

¹⁶⁶ Information compiled by Dr. Thomas Grillot from Entry 977B, RG 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁶⁷ Odds, Fred A. 1916. “The Cherokee Indian School (Part III).” *The Red Man*, March–April, 213.

Cherokees, 1819–1900 (originally published in 1984), claimed that “no Eastern Cherokee served as officers during World War I.”¹⁶⁸ While Finger’s work was groundbreaking in documenting the persistence of the Eastern Band, this statement reflects the gendered silences in much of Cherokee historiography, where women’s agency was overlooked in favor of narratives centered on male warriors. In contrast, military historian Thomas A. Britten documents that Lula H. Owl, an Eastern Cherokee woman trained as a nurse, not only served during the First World War but achieved the rank of Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps. Britten emphasizes that “Owl was the only Eastern Cherokee woman to achieve the rank of Second Lieutenant during the war,” a fact that directly contradicts Finger’s earlier assertion.¹⁶⁹

In traditional Cherokee society, that is before settler colonialism intended to impose western thought and way of living, women’s power was integral, not supplemental. In their tribe, they held authority in decision-making, passed on clan identity through bloodlines, and ensured cultural continuity through both fertility and spiritual leadership. As historian Theda Perdue explains¹⁷⁰, ECBI women selected chiefs, owned their homes, and influenced decisions of war and peace, meaning that “women’s voices mattered profoundly in the shaping of communal life.”¹⁷¹ Blood, in this context, signified life, lineage, and responsibility. By contrast, settler colonial systems redefined blood as a mechanism of surveillance and control. Historian

¹⁶⁸ John R. Finger, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees, 1819–1900*, 2nd ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 145. Originally published 1984.

¹⁶⁹ Thomas A. Britten, *American Indians in World War I: At Home and at War* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 218.

¹⁷⁰ Mt. Pleasant, Wigginton, & Wisecup, *Native American and Indigenous Studies* (2018).

¹⁷¹ Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700–1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 56–61.

Katherine Ellinghaus shows how assimilation policy deployed blood as a racial category to strip Native people of land and rights, noting that “the removal of land from many Indians along with their official status was certainly an outcome of the way in which blood was used in assimilation policy.”¹⁷² Kim TallBear (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate) similarly traces how Native bodies were appropriated by settler science, where blood and later DNA became sites of extraction and control rather than kinship and belonging.¹⁷³ These distortions shaped the contexts in which Cherokee women entered Carlisle and, later, World War I.

Eastern Cherokee survivance, then, involves recognizing how women’s roles in cultural preservation, healing, and resilience persisted even in these spaces of colonial discipline. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) emphasizes that Indigenous sovereignty is enacted through relationality and care: “Our nations live because we live our ways, because we hold on to our languages, because we struggle to be in good relationships with each other and the earth”.¹⁷⁴ For Feather, Owl, Kelly, Wolf, and Graybeard, service in schools, hospitals, or wartime aid organizations marked an attempted assimilation by settler systems, and continuity with Cherokee traditions of healing and caregiving. Their contributions show that Cherokee women’s roles during World War I were not passive or secondary, but sovereign—acts of survivance that sustained community integrity and redefined resistance.

¹⁷² Katherine Ellinghaus, “Blood, Identity, and Assimilation in Native America,” *Journal of American History* 104, no. 1 (2017): 14.

¹⁷³ Kim TallBear, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 3, 9.

¹⁷⁴ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 45.

My methodology reflects this tension. I reconstructed these women's stories through archival triangulation, drawing on Carlisle Indian School enrollment files, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Tribal Archives, genealogical census rolls, and World War I service records. Confirming their identities and tracing their movement across settler institutions highlights both the silences of Western archives and the persistence of Cherokee women's presence within them. The fact that only a handful of women emerged from these sources is not merely an accident of selection but reflects the larger reality of archival silences: the systematic erasure of Native women's histories through settler-colonial documentation practices. This chapter argues that recovering the lives of Feather, Owl, Kelly, Wolf, and Graybeard allows us to see how Eastern Cherokee women's roles in cultural preservation, wartime care, and community survivance challenged the imposition of settler patriarchy and ensured the continuity of Cherokee identity.

ECBI cosmologies of womanhood emphasize the sacredness of blood, sacrifice, and generative power, themes embodied in the story of Selu, the Corn Mother. As historian Keith Parker explains, Selu, the Corn Mother, knowingly becomes a martyr at the hands of her sons, who have internalized fear and suspicion about feminine power and label her a witch. Yet Selu, in her final act of motherhood, offers instructions that ensure the survival of her people. Her body, and specifically her blood, gives rise to corn—the very substance of Cherokee life. “Where her blood drops,” Parker writes, “the corn springs up and grows to ripen overnight as they watch it”¹⁷⁵. Despite the violence enacted upon her, she “leaves food that can continue to nourish long

¹⁷⁵ G. Keith Parker, *Seven Cherokee Myths: Creation, Fire, the Primordial Parents, the Nature of Evil, the Family, Universal Suffering, and Communal Obligation* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2005), 75–76, accessed April 10, 2025, ProQuest Ebook Central.

after she is gone”¹⁷⁶. This myth cannot be comprehended fully by outsiders- and does not ask for a literal reading. But the symbolism of Selu’s blood as creative, nourishing, and sacred is both traditional yet innovative outside of western norms of society. Indeed, Selu embodies an Indigenous worldview in which blood and sacrifice are generative, not shameful.

When English settlers saw that their beliefs and notions of promiscuity and adultery was not considered a sin by indigenous societies and that the women were treated equally as their male counterparts, their sexual autonomy wasn’t just unsettling—it was *terrifying*, precisely because it unraveled colonial patriarchy’s central organizing logic: control over women’s bodies, reproduction, and bloodlines. Historian Rebecca Goetz notes that William Strachey, the secretary of the Virginia colony (early 1600s), was particularly scandalized by Powhatan women’s sexual autonomy and the matrilineal kinship system, where descent and property followed the mother’s line rather than the father’s.¹⁷⁷ Rebecca Goetz, a historian of early America, focuses on colonial North America, the Atlantic World, Native peoples, and religion. Goetz notes that William Strachey, the secretary of the Virginia colony (early 1600s)¹⁷⁸ was particularly scandalized by Powhatan women’s sexual autonomy and the matrilineal kinship system, where descent and property followed the mother’s line rather than the father’s as traditionally found in European societies. As the author specifies, these structures made bloodlines appear unstable, threatening, and morally corrupt. Thus, blood outside of Christian-patriarchal boundaries was described as “contaminated” or “diseased,” which foreshadows later colonial discourses of racial purity.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 28–31.

¹⁷⁸ Strachey wrote *The Historie of Travaile into Virginia Britannia* (1612), in which he described Powhatan society.

¹⁷⁹Some American Indian men had many wives, Strachey thought, “because they would have many Children,”¹⁸⁰ but he did not believe the Indians’ polygynous system achieved its object.

The disgust and incomprehension of matrilineality by the European settlers were not just perceived as immoral. To them; it was ontological. Carolyn Johnston, a historian of American South and American Indian history, examines the transformation of Cherokee women’s authority and kinship roles under removal, allotment, and assimilation policies. In her study *Cherokee Women in Crisis*, she demonstrates Cherokee women’s authority, was systematically undermined during the nineteenth century by the pressures of removal, allotment, and missionary influence. This framing helps explain why settlers projected fear onto Cherokee women: their balance of male and female power, the political authority of Beloved Women, and the cosmological grounding of gender roles disrupted the colonial gender order. As Johnston notes, “They were shocked to find that women had so much sexual freedom and held considerable political, economic, and domestic power (...) Cherokee women represented sexual danger”.¹⁸¹

The story of Selu reveals a fundamental clash between Cherokee and Christian cosmologies: where Selu’s sacrifice empowers women and sustains life, Christianity casts women as the origin of sin, justifying male authority and colonial control. Selu, the first woman in Cherokee cosmology, willingly allowed her children to put her to death to ensure their

¹⁷⁹ Goetz, *The Powhatan World and the Virginia Colony, 1607–1646* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 64.

¹⁸⁰ George Goetz, *The Powhatan World and the Virginia Colony, 1607–1646* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 64.

¹⁸¹ Carolyn Ross Johnston, ed., *Voices of Cherokee Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 11.

survival, the continuation of sacred knowledge, and the flourishing of her community—an act that highlights the sacred authority of women and challenges Christian patriarchal narratives of female power as sinful.¹⁸² The argument here is that in Cherokee cosmology, Selu embodies the spiritual and political authority of women, whose role in lineage, knowledge, and sustenance directly challenges the patriarchal logic of Christian missionary efforts. For the Eastern Cherokee to see Selu’s legitimacy as important as Eve is for Christians, is to recognize preserved epistemology/oral knowledge—one in which blood, especially women’s menstrual blood, is a site of renewal, community, and continuity with the ancestors. This is survivance, not only of people, but of meaning. Through the Peoplehood model, this survivance is linked to place, ceremony, language, and sacred history—Selu’s story connects all four. Selu’s sacrifice reveals why Cherokee women remained at the center of lineage, ceremony, and sovereignty. In Cherokee cosmology, Selu gave her life so that her people—and her sons—would always have knowledge and sustenance. Her death does not mark shame or transgression but renewal, for she leaves corn and beans as sacred gifts to ensure continuity.¹⁸³ The fact that the central deity in this story is a woman demonstrates the profound spiritual authority women held in Cherokee society. They were not ancillary to men but the conduits of lineage, sustenance, and the cosmos itself. This view stood in stark contrast to Christianity, where Eve’s act of taking fruit condemned humanity to sin and eternal damnation. In Christian cosmology, the first woman is the source of

¹⁸² Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700–1835* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 91–94; John R. Finger, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees, 1819–1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 11.

¹⁸³ James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee* (Bureau of American Ethnology, 1900), 242–46.

disorder and requires male authority.¹⁸⁴ For missionaries, the presence of a female deity who offered life and knowledge was a direct threat to patriarchal authority.

It is in this context that Cherokee women's roles became primary targets of settlers' point of view. As Theda Perdue demonstrates, missionaries sought to replace matrilineal descent with patriarchal nuclear families, to shift agriculture from women to men, and to delegitimize women's spiritual authority.¹⁸⁵ To undermine Selu was to undermine Cherokee sovereignty itself, because women embodied not only lineage and land but the sacred history that ordered the world. Cherokee women were thus not simply survivors of colonial imposition; they were keepers of a knowledge system that contradicted the very foundations of settler Christianity.

This explains why Native feminist theorists insist that gender must be understood as a site of colonial violence and resistance. As Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill argue, settler colonialism imposed the categories of "man" and "woman" in ways that delegitimized Indigenous kinship and ceremony.¹⁸⁶ Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance further illuminates how Cherokee women's continuance of Selu's gifts—through kinship, ritual, and food—represents an active assertion of Indigenous presence.¹⁸⁷ Selu's sacrifice was not only mythic but epistemic, grounding a Cherokee understanding of blood, lineage, and power that missionaries found

¹⁸⁴ Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 64–65.

¹⁸⁵ Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700–1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 33, 56–61.

¹⁸⁶ Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang, and Andrea Smith, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Wicazo Sa Review* 28, no. 2 (2013): 1–25.

¹⁸⁷ Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 1–5.

intolerable. This demonstrates that Selu's death is not a passive victimhood but a deliberate act of cultural and political authority; through her martyrdom, she asserts the centrality of women's bodies, blood, and knowledge in sustaining community life.¹⁸⁸

The formative experiences of Eastern Cherokee girls at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School reveal how settler colonialism sought to undermine Indigenous female authority and reshape Cherokee women according to patriarchal, Christian norms. Indeed, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School attempted to erase the sacred authority of Cherokee women, by imposing gendered discipline and white-coded domesticity, revealing how boarding schools functioned as tools of both patriarchal and colonial control. The narratives of the five Eastern Cherokee women who served during World War I cannot be fully understood without first examining the influential years they spent under the institutional surveillance of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School—settler colonialism sought not only to educate, but to discipline, reshape, and erase Indigenous girlhood. Carlisle's strictness did not merely attempt to educate; it imposed settler norms around gender, behavior, language, and health. It also cultivated a deep suspicion of traditional Cherokee kinship systems—especially matrilineal roles—and sought to realign Indigenous girlhood with white-coded femininity. Yet settler institutions systematically attempted to overwrite this authority. Carlisle Indian Industrial School, founded in 1879, targeted Indigenous girls for assimilation by inculcating patriarchal norms. Theorist Andrea Smith (Cherokee) observes that boarding schools functioned to strip Native women of leadership roles

¹⁸⁸ Keith Parker, *Seven Cherokee Myths: Creation, Fire, the Primordial Parents, the Nature of Evil, the Family, Universal Suffering, and Communal Obligation* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2005), 72–74.

and replace them with Western domestic ideals¹⁸⁹. The outing program¹⁹⁰ reinforced this agenda: girls were placed in white Christian households where they were judged on their morality, obedience, and domestic labor. Reports filed by household heads—often white men—evaluated these girls in ways that reveal not only settler attempts to discipline their behavior but also the extension of colonial surveillance into Indigenous women’s bodies and identities.

I argue that the boarding school curriculum, particularly at Carlisle, functioned as a crucial site of settler colonial discipline that directly shaped Eastern Cherokee participation in World War I. As David Wallace Adams shows, Commissioner Morgan’s 1890 curriculum emphasized arithmetic, geography, physiology, and United States history—subjects designed to “introduce Indians to the knowledge of civilization” and prepare them for citizenship¹⁹¹. Even in the sciences, what was taught was less about ecological interdependence and more about conquest: nature was no longer a spiritual relative, but a resource to be controlled and exploited¹⁹². This restructuring of knowledge was not a neutral pedagogical choice but a deliberate attempt to sever Indigenous students, including Eastern Cherokee, from their cosmological frameworks in which land, water, and animals were kin and sources of power. The “outing system,” which placed students in white Christian households to labor and be observed,

¹⁸⁹ Andrea Smith, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2005), 37.

¹⁹⁰On Carlisle’s outing program, see David Wallace Adams, *Away from Home: American Indian Boarding School Experiences, 1879–2000* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000). These outing records are often the only surviving evidence of Native women’s labor and discipline under the settler gaze.

¹⁹¹ David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928*(Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2020), 116.

¹⁹² David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928*(Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2020), 117.

extended this pedagogy of discipline into the intimate sphere, where Cherokee girls and boys were monitored, judged, and reshaped into gendered roles that aligned with settler expectations of domesticity for women and labor or militarism for men¹⁹³

Through my theoretical framework, I read this not simply as cultural “education,” but as an enactment of settler colonial hegemony that sought to overwrite Cherokee Peoplehood—place, language, ceremonial cycle, and sacred history—with Western epistemologies. In this sense, Carlisle’s curriculum and outing program are integral to understanding why Eastern Cherokee women later appeared in nursing and clerical roles during WWI, and why men were enlisted into divisions like the 81st Division (the “Wildcat Division”) reflected this broader attempt to reorganize Indigenous lives along settler lines of gender, labor, and militarism.. Their wartime contributions cannot be understood outside the disciplinary regimes of Carlisle, which recast Cherokee survivance into categories legible to the settler state. Yet, through an Indigenous feminist and survivance lens, I argue that Eastern Cherokee men and women did not simply assimilate into these roles. They reactivated older responsibilities of healing, communication, and protection, repurposing the very tools Carlisle used to erase them as means of sustaining their peoplehood and asserting cultural continuity in the most unlikely of places—on battlefields and in hospitals abroad.

To add to this argument, Josephine E. Richards’s 1900 address, *The Training of the Indian Girl as the Uplifter of the Home*,¹⁹⁴ captures the assimilationist logic behind the education

¹⁹³ *ibid*

¹⁹⁴ Josephine E. Richards, *The Training of the Indian Girl as the Uplifter of the Home*, NEA Proceedings, 1900, 701–705; repr. in Larry C. Skogen (ed.), *To Educate American Indians: Selected Writings from the National*

of Native women at Hampton and Carlisle. Richards argued that the “crying needs of the Indian home” required Indian girls to learn punctuality, domestic order, cleanliness, and refined housekeeping in “model cottages,” where they would internalize white middle-class gender norms.¹⁹⁵ In Richards’s framework, Native women’s futures were tethered to their ability to replicate settler domesticity and uphold bourgeois morality, a radical departure from the authority they traditionally held as landholders, agriculturalists, and clan decision-makers in Cherokee society. Her vision reflects what Audra Simpson calls the gender of settler sovereignty: the state’s insistence that Indigenous women be remade as dependent, feminized subjects whose labor secured the social order of colonial households.¹⁹⁶ Richards’s invocation of Sitting Bull’s lament that women “would be stripped of all which gave them power and position among the people” only underscores the extent to which boarding schools sought to replace Indigenous gender systems with settler patriarchy. What these prescriptions also reveal is the deliberate attempt to undermine women’s roles as cultural transmitters—whether in agriculture, medicine, or governance—by recasting them as “uplifters” of homes fashioned in the settler image.

Within this framework of gendered discipline and erasure, Eastern Cherokee girls like Sallie Graybeard were conditioned to succeed by embodying settler ideals. Her student file describes her as “ambitious, energetic, in splendid health,” with an “excellent disposition”

Educational Association’s Department of Indian Education, 1900–1904 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2024), 89–96. See also Audra Simpson, “The State is a Man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders, and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty,” *Theory & Event* 19, no. 4 (2016).

¹⁹⁵ Mary Richards, “Indian Girls’ Model Cottages,” *Journal of Education* 51, no. 10 (1900): 701–705; see also Skogen, *Indigenous Education and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2024), 89–96.

¹⁹⁶ Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 98.

(Graybeard Student File 1918¹⁹⁷). Carlisle staff proudly noted her four years of preparation for a career in nursing, her graduation from Narberth High School, and her application to Jefferson Hospital's prestigious training program. She was endorsed by letters that emphasized her moral character and physical fitness—key traits monitored and evaluated through Carlisle's outing program and daily inspections. When she requested a visit home before beginning her new role at Hahnemann Hospital,—a civilian medical institution— staff worried she might be “tempted to give up hospital work and stay with her people”¹⁹⁸, highlighting the perceived incompatibility between professional success and Indigenous community ties. In other words, Shoemaker's letter, more than trying to alert a superintendent that a student might be behind work-wise, serves to highlight a disturbing reality: in the perception of settler colonial institutions, Sally's community would drag her down and eventually could lead to Sally choosing her people and traditions over models of success and labor perceived as valuable by the American government. (Shoemaker, 1918, "Letter Regarding Sallie E. Graybeard's Application")

Moreover, another example is Hattie Feather's experiences at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Her students' reports provide a slightly different picture than Graybeard. Though she also served as a nurse—working at Walter Reed and later in Missouri—Carlisle officials noted periods of "unsatisfactory" conduct, describing her at times as “stubborn,” despite

¹⁹⁷ Graybeard, Sallie E. 1918. *Sallie E. Graybeard Student File*. Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center. Accessed March 30, 2025. https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/student_files/sallie-graybeard-student-file.

¹⁹⁸ Shoemaker, Nora. 1918. “Letter Regarding Sallie E. Graybeard's Application for Admission to the Jefferson Hospital Training School for Nurses.” *Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center*. Accessed March 30, 2025. https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/student_files/sallie-graybeard-student-file.

later reports praising her overall performance¹⁹⁹. In addition, the school’s outing system extended settler control into Cherokee girls’ bodies and identities, undermining matrilineal authority and reproducing colonial hierarchies of gender. A 1913 outing report, written when she was 18 years old, further reflects this contradiction. While the patron described her “conduct [as] very good,” Hattie was still labeled “stubborn at times,” with only “fair” cleanliness and room condition.²⁰⁰ I argue that, despite reports noting her helpfulness and sense of economy, Feather’s assertions of independence—such as coming home late—functioned as acts of survivance, resisting full assimilation while settler authorities interpreted them through a lens of suspicion and discipline. These small acts of self-direction reveal how Indigenous girls could assert agency even within highly surveilled environments. By labeling ordinary behavior as “stubborn” or “disagreeable,” settler institutions attempted to pathologize independence that threatened patriarchal and colonial norms. These evaluations highlight both the precarious position of Indigenous girls under constant surveillance, where even small acts of autonomy could result in reputational damage but also the invasive power settlers who are not teachers from the school also possessed. Their future depended on good grades and recommendations. In this light, Hattie’s behavior might be read as a quiet form of survivance: resisting full assimilation by asserting self-direction within a system designed to erase it. A second outing report on Hattie²⁰¹, goes even further, calling her conduct

¹⁹⁹ *The Carlisle Arrow and Red Man* 13, no. 3 (1917): 12.

²⁰⁰ “Outing Evaluation Report for Hattie Feather,” October 13, 1913, National Archives and Records Administration, RG 75, Series 1327, Box 133, Folder 5233, *Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center*, accessed April 23, 2025, https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/default/files/docs-ephemera/NARA_1327_b133_f5233.pdf.

²⁰¹ “Outing Evaluation Report for Hattie Feather,” may 10, 1913, National Archives and Records Administration, RG 75, Series 1327, Box 133, Folder 5233, *Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center*, accessed April 23, 2025, https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/default/files/docs-ephemera/NARA_1327_b133_f5233.pdf.

“very disagreeable at times” and noting limited progress in cleanliness and economy despite being in good health. The language is vague and harsh, describing Hattie as “quite dangerous,” “impertinent,” and “careless,” and claiming that she “had to be returned” due to her behavior, failing to specify any concrete behaviors while still rendering moral judgment. Such reports were often shaped less by the perceptions of the students’ white supervisors, whose expectations were rooted in settler values. Without further records from Hattie’s own voice, it’s difficult to determine the exact nature of her perceived “disagreeableness.” However, within the settler colonial framework, any assertion of autonomy or refusal to conform—especially by a young Indigenous woman—could be cast as a character flaw. In this light, what the report labels as “stubbornness” may in fact represent subtle expressions of survivance: small refusals to fully assimilate or a reluctance to submit entirely to white authority in domestic settings.

In addition, at Carlisle, Cherokee girls were not just removed from their communities; they were reshaped to embody roles that directly conflicted with their traditional responsibilities as landholders, agriculturalists, and decision-makers. Sallie Greybeard's academic record reveals the gendered expectations imposed on Cherokee girls at Carlisle. Her coursework included English (4th Year Vocabulary), General Exercises, Child Study, Plant Diseases, Insects and Insecticides, Household Chemistry, Cooking, and Sewing—a curriculum that combined scientific domesticity with caregiving and moral refinement. These subjects were intended to transform Cherokee girls into idealized settler women: educated enough to serve within white households or institutions, but never positioned to challenge structural hierarchies. In contrast, male students were more likely to be trained in agriculture, mechanics, or military preparedness, aligning them with laboring or warrior roles that upheld settler notions of masculinity. This

division reflects what Audra Simpson has extensively noted in her work—the ways in which colonial gender regimes sought to overwrite Indigenous relationality and matrilineal power structures. And yet, figures like Graybeard navigated this terrain with strategic adaptability: she earned strong recommendations, pursued professional nursing, and maintained ties to her community, resisting total assimilation.

Building from Graybeard's example, in this section, I draw on oral public history as a methodological practice to center the experiences and knowledge of Eastern Cherokee women. By engaging directly with interviews, I access perspectives and practices often absent from archival sources, revealing how care work, leadership, and cultural responsibility were negotiated across both Indigenous and colonial systems. These narratives allow me to trace patterns of agency, survivance, and relational authority, demonstrating how oral testimony can complement archival research to produce a fuller understanding of Cherokee knowledge traditions. This method not only highlights Indigenous ways of knowing but also models how public history approaches—through storytelling, transcription, and analysis—can make these histories accessible for both academic and community audiences.

In her interview, Lula Owl recounts a few elements of her life. One of them is at the missionary school on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in Wakapala, South Dakota where she served as a nurse. She indeed demonstrated her capacity to navigate both traditional expectations and Western forms of medical care. She recalled being taught how to milk cows during this period, a task that became symbolic of the precocity of the Sioux Indians and the

multifaceted aspects of her job.²⁰² Yet, her strength and leadership emerged most vividly when she was called upon to treat an ill man. As she explained, those around her were surprised a woman would take on such a role—washing a sick male body. Yet she asserted both care and authority, stating, “He is mine now,” and proceeding to lower his fever with precision and calm, giving instructions for aspirin and staying through the night, and allowing the family to perform a healing ceremony for the patient.²⁰³ That the family listened to her and combined her biomedical advice with ceremonial practice points to the ways in which Indigenous healing was never monolithic. Her story reveals how Native women like Owl Gloyne forged authority not in opposition to Indigenous tradition, but within its capacious ability to hold both ceremony and Western medicine.

What I recognize as being the capacity for cultural negotiation is further revealed in her commentary on identity and everyday practices. At one point in the interview, she recalls being offered coffee while attending to a woman in labor inside a tipi, noting with gratitude how “we had breakfast long ago,” but the host family remained generous in their hospitality.²⁰⁴ She then reflects: “I’m an Indian, I know, but I live like a white person. I eat when the sun comes up and when the sun goes down—and that’s how white people live”.²⁰⁵ At first, this remark made in a funny tone may appear as a simple comment about routine or a joke. However, after listening more, this moment speaks to a layered tension between cultural identity and settler-colonial

²⁰² Lula Owl Gloyne, interview by Jack Frederick Kilpatrick, *Cherokee Oral History Project*, July 20, 1969, Western Carolina University Hunter Library, Coulter Faculty Commons, audio recording, part 2, 13:50.

²⁰³ Gloyne interview, part 2, 25:50–28:50.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*, part 2, 35:04–36:10.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, part 2, 36:10.

assimilation. It reflects not just a change in dietary habits, but an internalized shift in temporal discipline and lifestyle necessitated by her immersion in institutions that privileged white, Western norms. The phrase “I know” acts as a form of self-assurance, suggesting a conscious awareness of cultural divergence—one that Gloyne does not outright critique, but subtly marks.

In the final segment of her oral history, Lula Owl Gloyne reflects on how the nursing profession had changed over time, “I don’t know why they (medical staff) go to school to spend a few hours with patients”.²⁰⁶ She views the healthcare system increasingly removed from relational, peoplehood-centered models of healing. She then explains that after a long career in field nursing, she left Cherokee to live in Oklahoma following her husband's death, but eventually returned to resume her work within the Qualla Boundary. Her decision to return to nursing in Cherokee territory—rather than retiring—further underscores her sense of responsibility to her community and the cultural centrality of care work.²⁰⁷

Moments after her return, she recalls, a man arrived urgently stating, “My wife is in labor” .²⁰⁸ Gloyne emphasizes that wherever she worked, she made it clear that patients were to “do what [she] wanted them to do,” not from a place of domination, but from a conviction in the efficacy of her experience and her capacity to lead with both firmness and gentleness.²⁰⁹ This blend of strength and care aligns with the ECBI cultural values around relational leadership. Her final note that “there needs to be strong leadership in Cherokee as well”²¹⁰ can be read as both a

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*, part 4, 29:15.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, part 4, 32:00

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, part 4, 32:50

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, part 4, 32:00–40:36.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, part 4, 40:36

call to action and a reflection on the burden borne by those, like herself, who navigated settler institutions while remaining deeply accountable to peoplehood-based forms of knowledge, authority and methods of healing.

Her education at Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, a school for minority students²¹¹, and the nursing training she received in Philadelphia, likely played a role in shaping her perceptions. Throughout her schooling and later work, it is clear that she struggled with aspects of her identity as an Eastern Cherokee woman. Her experience in South Dakota, where she was exposed to the traditional healing methods of other Native communities, further solidified her respect for Indigenous knowledge, and as such serving as an agent of pan-Indian solidarity²¹² even as she sought to promote more health-conscious alternatives. She extended her care beyond her immediate community, becoming an advocate for other Indigenous groups, showing that the resilience of Eastern Cherokee women was not limited to their cultural identity but also reflected in their commitment to improving the lives of others.

The contributions of Hattie Feather, Lula Owl Gloyne, Sallie Graybeard, and other Eastern Cherokee women before, during, and after WWI, reveal the complex interplay of gender, culture, and resistance under settler colonialism. Through their work in legal, military, and civil spheres, these women embodied both survivance and Peoplehood, asserting agency in the face of systematic erasure. Their actions were not isolated achievements but part of a larger, ongoing

²¹¹ Hampton University, primarily an institution for African Americans, was also tasked with educating Native students for a period, following the same model used by the Carlisle Indian Industrial School.

²¹² For more on this notion see *A Final Promise*, by Frederick Hoxie's

struggle for sovereignty, cultural survival, and gender equity within their communities. Importantly, the networks of care, knowledge, and cultural authority they sustained during wartime created a foundation for postwar resilience. Understanding these women's contributions provides critical insight into how Eastern Cherokee veterans and their families navigated the challenges of reintegration, healing, and cultural preservation after World War I. In this way, the stories of Eastern Cherokee women serve as a lens through which we can examine broader community practices of care, restoration, and resilience—a focus that guides the discussion in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: Returning Home – Post-War Challenges, Cultural Healing, and Reintegration (1918–1924)

This chapter turns to the post-war period and the challenges faced by returning Eastern Cherokee veterans. It examines how veterans navigated the various challenges that occurred after WWI and how the Eastern Cherokee community mobilized traditional practices—particularly through the work of conjurers and communal ceremonies—to support healing. These practices, however, were often met with outside hostility. In 1919, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Cato Sells expressed frustration that dances and ceremonies were being conducted for returning soldiers, reflecting federal discomfort with Indigenous approaches to psychological and spiritual recovery²¹³. By analyzing the intersection of traditional medicine, ritual, and community cohesion, this chapter demonstrates how the Eastern Cherokee resisted settler-colonial attempts to define healing, reaffirming their agency, survivance, and Peoplehood in the aftermath of global war.

Building on Chapter 3’s exploration of Eastern Cherokee warriorhood and the contributions of women in sustaining community and survivance. The veterans returned bearing deep psychological wounds, physical injuries, and the weight of racialized scrutiny from federal authorities and surrounding white communities. Reintegration was not a simple return to prewar life, but a complex negotiation between wartime experiences and Indigenous cultural life.

²¹³ Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 244.

In 1917, amongst the challenges and horrors of World War I, President Woodrow Wilson addressed American soldiers—many of them Native — urging them to draw strength from the Bible: “The Bible is the Word of life. (...) Read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, practice it to be holy. (...) It is the only book that can teach the soldier how to face death with calmness”²¹⁴. For Wilson, war was not merely a political act—it was a Christian moral trial. This message, published in a paper circulated among students at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, cast Indigenous enlistment within a nationalist-Christian framework, effectively silencing Native cosmologies in favor of spiritual assimilation. It buried Cherokee sacred knowledge beneath layers of military pageantry and salvationist rhetoric, where the state and the church converged to define the meaning of death and sacrifice.

Such rhetoric was mirrored in the landscape of memory itself. Graves, war memorials, and military honors—often installed by settler institutions—materialized a version of history that rendered Native particularity invisible. As Grillot argues, “graves and monuments materialized and spatialized the past. They indexed local memories on the national map”²¹⁵. These spaces demonstrated an idea of death, war and sacrifice, leaving little room for Indigenous ways of mourning, remembering, or healing.

But for the ECBI, memory is not confined to stone or nation. It is cosmological, ceremonial, and lived. Survivance—what Vizenor calls the active presence of Indigenous

²¹⁴ *Carlisle Arrow and Red Man*, Oct. 5, 1917, p. 8

²¹⁵ Thomas Grillot, *First Americans: U.S. Patriotism in Indian Country after World War I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvvndv7>.

peoples in defiance of colonial erasure—takes form in ritual dancing, storytelling, chant, and river purification. These practices persist not as remnants but as responsibilities, “They center Cherokee people not in a settler state, but in □□□ □□□—the middle world, where balance must constantly be maintained between the seen and unseen, the living and the dead.”²¹⁶

Western epistemologies often compartmentalize trauma, prescribing secular clinical solutions and rendering the veteran as an isolated subject of care. Cherokee knowledge systems, by contrast, embed the warrior within a sacred ecology—where words are deeds, ritual is medicine, and healing is an act of sovereign survivance. In this cosmology, ceremony is not a response to disorder. It is a return to order.

The Cherokee understanding of warriorhood also encompasses preparation for combat as a spiritual and cosmological responsibility. Ritual fasting, prayer, and abstinence were designed to align warriors with the natural and spiritual world, ensuring that physical bravery did not compromise spiritual balance.²¹⁷ As Tom Holm explains, Native warriorhood—including among the Cherokee—is defined not by martial prowess alone but by relational obligations: warriors protect, serve, and sustain the community, integrating sacred responsibilities with military engagement.²¹⁸ Within this framework, exposure to death, including battlefield casualties, was not merely physical danger. The ECBI traditionally required ritual purification after contact with

²¹⁶ John D. Loftin and Benjamin E. Frey, *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2024), 7. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520400344>.

²¹⁷ Loftin and Frey, *People of Kituwah*, 27–30.

²¹⁸ Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls*, 14–15.

the dead, reflecting an epistemology in which death could carry spiritual and communal consequences if not properly mediated.²¹⁹

Ultimately, Eastern Cherokee veterans' postwar experiences illustrate the inseparability of death, war, and healing within a Peoplehood framework. Veterans' reintegration involved restoring balance not just for themselves but for their families, communities, and the spiritual world. By privileging the term "warrior" over "soldier," this chapter situates Eastern Cherokee military service within an Indigenous epistemology that centers survivance, relational responsibility, and cosmological order rather than assimilation into settler norms.

Eastern Cherokee veterans' postwar lives reflected both the ruptures of military service and the continuities of Cherokee cultural healing. Although few personal letters or oral testimonies survive from individuals like James West, Luke Conley, or Stephen Youngdeer, their experiences can be read within the broader framework of Cherokee healing traditions. As Loftin and Frey argue, Cherokee warriorhood was not defined solely by battlefield success but by the responsibility to restore balance and care for the community²²⁰. Veterans' return journeys, therefore, were not isolated medical recoveries but communal processes of reintegration into these cycles.

For example, James West, who returned home permanently disabled after being gassed in France, would have required extensive support. Federal veterans' hospitals often focused

²¹⁹ Loftin and Frey, *People of Kituwah*, 90.

²²⁰ John D. Loftin and Benjamin E. Frey, *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2024), 34, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.12949145>.

narrowly on physical rehabilitation, neglecting the psychological and spiritual dimensions of Native veterans' needs. Eastern Cherokee traditions of purification and ceremonial healing offered alternative means of restoration.²²¹ Although we lack direct testimony from West himself, Cherokee practices such as “going to water,” ritual song, and the use of medicinal plants were longstanding community responses to both physical and spiritual imbalance²²². His reintegration into Qualla life thus likely involved not only medical treatment but also communal and spiritual practices aimed at restoring harmony.

By contrast, Lula Owl carried forward Cherokee healing responsibilities in modern contexts. Her nursing service at Camp Lewis, and later work in public health, exemplifies how Cherokee women adapted traditional roles of care and balance to new institutional settings, ensuring that both Native and non-Native communities benefitted from her expertise²²³. In this way, the Eastern Cherokee veterans' postwar lives illuminate the enduring significance of Cherokee cosmologies of balance, responsibility, and care in the face of modern western warfare and colonial disruption.

To comprehend the complexities, challenges, and narratives of the Eastern Cherokee veterans, or returning warriors, I familiarized myself with the beliefs and traditions the nation holds surrounding death, war, peace, and healing. These notions require rejecting Western binaries that separate strategy from spirituality. These elements are also deeply rooted in

²²¹ “Appendix A: Eastern Band of Cherokee Soldiers in WWI,” entry for James West.

²²² Irwin, Lee. “Cherokee Healing: Myth, Dreams, and Medicine.” *American Indian Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (1992): 237–257.

²²³ *Ibid.*, entry for Lula Owl.

ceremonial practices; in fact, more than tradition, these rituals and ceremonies are believed to be one of the reasons for the success and bravery of the nation. More than the physical difficulty imposed on warriors, with difficult and bloody battles and getting hurt, Cherokee people consider that mentally, the warriors need to be sustained by the creator and spirits. For them to bring success, they need to be extensively prepared. This means entering battle only after intensive practices such as fasting, prayer, and abstinence—rituals designed to bring them into alignment with the natural and spiritual world.²²⁴ The warrior’s role within Cherokee society was never reducible to martial prowess alone. As Tom Holm explains, in many Native cultures—including the Cherokee—warriorhood is defined by relationships, not roles. Warriors are not distant from their communities but are understood as integral protectors, scouts, and spiritual actors whose service ensures the survival and justice of the people²²⁵. This understanding of warriorhood is inherently tied to Peoplehood—where sacred history, place, language, and ceremonial cycle intersect to sustain collective identity. Within this framework, the healing of veterans becomes inseparable from the ongoing survival and cultural continuity of the ECBI itself.

In exploring the impact of military service on American Indian veterans, Winona LaDuke and Sean Cruz argue that the role of a warrior in Indigenous cultures is fundamentally different

²²⁴ John D. Loftin and Benjamin E. Frey, *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2024), 34, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.12949145>.

²²⁵ Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 119.

from the mainstream understanding of warfare. Drawing inspiration from Chief Sitting Bull,²²⁶ they stress that a warrior's primary duty is not to fight or take lives, but to serve and protect those who cannot protect themselves, such as the elderly, the defenseless, and, above all, children.²²⁷ This understanding of warriorhood is crucial when considering the healing of Native veterans, as it underscores the cultural values that prioritize the well-being and care of the community. For many Native veterans, the transition from military service back into civilian life is not just a personal journey but one that involves reconnecting to their community and cultural practices.

Moreover, for the EBCI, healing is not confined to the body or even the mind—it is a relational act that restores balance between the individual, the spirit world, and the surrounding environment, including the relatives and friends of the individual as well as their community. In other words, the idea that one is not doing the best is not stigmatized and the individual is not deemed responsible for their differences and/or issues. As Loftin and Frey note, “healing is not about curing an individual in isolation but restoring balance in a system of relations—including human and nonhuman kin.”²²⁸ Rather, it is both on the individual and on their community to provide and look for ways to get better and heal. Winona LaDuke echoes this in a broader Indigenous context when she writes, “The health of the people is tied to the health of the land,

²²⁶ Sitting Bull, quoted in Stanley Vestal, *Sitting Bull: Champion of the Sioux* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1932), 219; see also Winona LaDuke and Sean Aaron Cruz, *The Militarization of Indian Country* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 23.

²²⁷ Winona LaDuke and Sean Cruz, *The Militarization of Indian Country* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 23.

²²⁸ John D. Loftin and Benjamin E. Frey, *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2024), 103, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.12949145>.

and healing requires the rebuilding of community and relationships.”²²⁹ Healing, then, is not merely a reaction imposed by disorder but a way of reaffirming an individual’s place through various kinship and communal ties. Loftin and Frey also emphasize that “spiritual depression can lead to death if it is not treated properly,” highlighting how emotional pain is treated with the same urgency and sacred attention as physical illness.²³⁰ Tobacco, in this context, becomes more than a plant—it is a conduit for spiritual cleansing, especially in moments of loneliness, disconnection, or mourning.²³¹

Holm observes that Cherokee and other Native veterans who experienced symptoms associated with PTSD—rage, isolation, intrusive memories—found relief and spiritual restoration through participation in tribal ceremonies. These ceremonies not only affirmed veterans’ belonging within their communities but re-established their roles as protectors, not just of land, but of cultural memory.²³² The ceremonial path to healing often involves both prayer and conjuration. As Loftin and Frey explain, prayers are humble appeals to the Creator, while conjurations—performed by medicine people—draw upon “beloved power” that elevates the soul to the seventh heaven, where it unites with the Supreme Being.²³³

²²⁹ Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999), 131.

²³⁰ Loftin and Frey, *People of Kituwah*, 91.

²³¹ *ibid.*

²³² Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 123–24.

²³³ John D. Loftin and Benjamin E. Frey, *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2024), 95, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.12949145>.

These distinctions are crucial in comprehending Native understanding of healing: while prayer requests aid from beyond, conjuration is a deliberate act of agency, one that activates sacred lineage and spiritual inheritance. Within this worldview, war-related trauma is not an individual disorder but a communal imbalance requiring ceremonial intervention. Healing, therefore, is not just curative but reparative, affirming the warrior's sacred role and restoring their relational identity within the Peoplehood model.

While an extremely controversial figure, the anthropologist James Mooney²³⁴ emphasizes the contrast in his observations between Western and Cherokee medical practices. Whereas Western medicine focuses on physical ailments and disordered bodily systems, Eastern Cherokee healing traditions view illness as fundamentally spiritual and relational. The Eastern Cherokee doctor, rather than merely addressing the physical symptoms, works to expel malevolent spirits or forces, highlighting the importance of metaphysical factors in the process of healing. This distinction underscores the integral role of spiritual balance in ECBI health practices.²³⁵

Altman and Belt expand on this view, explaining that Eastern Cherokee medicine is highly specialized, with different healers focusing on distinct types of illnesses or injuries. This specialization reflects a system where knowledge is fragmented and passed down carefully, often through written formulas in the Cherokee syllabary. These formula books, created by individual

²³⁴ Mooney's work, including *Myths of the Cherokee* (1890), is foundational but problematic. As a product of salvage anthropology, his writings often frame Cherokee culture as vanishing and in need of preservation by outside observers. This lens erases Indigenous futurity and reflects colonial assumptions that diminish the complexity and continuity of Cherokee lifeways. While his records are valuable, they must be read critically and situated within the broader context of settler colonial ethnography.

²³⁵ James Mooney, *The Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees*, in *Seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1885–1886* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1891), 45.

healers, are cherished as sacred texts, each one encapsulating a healer's unique set of practices and healing knowledge.²³⁶ However, these texts are not simply practical tools; they are imbued with sacred significance, with their power believed to be tied to the language itself. The Cherokee language used in these formulas is seen as a divine gift, and improper handling or translation of these texts can diminish or even endanger the healing process.²³⁷

Thus, one might argue there are similarities to Judeo-Christian traditions of prayers and sacred texts being part of the ways why an individual gets better. The notion that sacred texts and prayers recited in a certain language have more power and reach a more sacred nature is inherent in western thought as well.

In this context, the Cherokee language itself becomes a vessel of memory and spiritual importance for the Eastern Cherokee Nation. It holds power as it is sacred. As Cherokee linguist Thomas Belt explains in the PBS documentary *Reading Between the Lines in Cherokee*, “language helps us interpret living in the world. If we lose these languages, we’re losing an accumulated knowledge of human existence here.”²³⁸ His insight reinforces the argument that language is more than a communicative tool—it is a vital conduit for ancestral knowledge, worldview, and the sacred protocols of healing.

Moreover, the concept of healing in Eastern Cherokee culture is deeply entwined with notions of balance, morality, and consequence. Altman and Belt describe how ECBI medicine is

²³⁶ Heidi Altman and Thomas Belt, *Reading Religion: Cherokee Medicine and Healing* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 10.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

²³⁸ *Reading Between the Lines in Cherokee*, directed by Neil Hutcheson (PBS NC, 2024), 4:48–4:57.

founded on a belief in the interconnectedness of actions and their consequences, both in the physical and spiritual realms. The idea that past wrongs can manifest as present afflictions illustrates a moral framework in which health is tied to ethical behavior. Disturbances in the natural order or in an individual's moral standing ripple out, affecting both personal well-being and the broader community.²³⁹

Consequently, the state of *tōhi:*, or balance, is central to Cherokee healing. It is not merely a matter of addressing physical symptoms but restoring an individual to a state of equilibrium where they are in harmony with both themselves and their community. The ideal state of being is described as centered, neutral, and grounded, like a rock surrounded by the flowing water of life. When an individual becomes unbalanced, whether through personal misdeeds or external disruptions, illness or harm may follow. Restoration to a balanced state can only be achieved through ceremonial cleansing, which is seen as a process of realigning the individual with the natural and spiritual order²⁴⁰.

In sum, ECBI medicine is more than a system of physical healing; it is a deeply spiritual practice rooted in concepts of balance, morality, and language. The practices of Cherokee healers reflect a sophisticated understanding of the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual worlds, where healing is as much about restoring harmony as it is about addressing illness. The role of language, especially the sacred Cherokee syllabary, adds an additional layer of depth to this healing practice, emphasizing the spiritual potency of words and their connection to the

²³⁹ Altman and Belt, *Reading Religion*, 14.

²⁴⁰ Heidi Altman and Thomas Belt, *Reading Religion: Cherokee Medicine and Healing* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 17, 22.

Creator. The use and transmission of healing knowledge is tightly controlled, reflecting the sacredness of this knowledge and the potential dangers of its misuse. Thus, Cherokee medicine serves as an illustration of how indigenous healing systems are not just about curing ailments but about restoring balance and integrity to individuals and communities.

Western medicine often pathologizes trauma in individualized, secular terms. In contrast, Cherokee healing is relational and ceremonial. It restores the veteran not only to health but to *Peoplehood*—that is, their interconnectedness with land, history, language, and ceremonial life. This distinction underscores the limitations of Western models of veteran care, which tend to prioritize biomedical interventions while neglecting spiritual and communal healing.

Settler society often misunderstood Eastern Cherokee veterans' return and recovery as signs of successful assimilation into American norms. However, as Vine Deloria Jr. reminds us, this perspective erases the diversity and sovereignty of Native cultures.²⁴¹ In truth, Cherokee veterans' rehabilitation—guided by traditional healing practices and community care—was not assimilation; it was cultural resurgence.

As previously addressed, in Eastern Cherokee thought, the return of the warrior was not merely a personal transition—it was a communal and cosmological event. This return was not an end but a sacred threshold, a passage into a renewed state of being that required deliberate ceremonial guidance. It is believed that the act of going to war, by its very nature, exposed the individual to spiritual imbalance, not just physical danger. A Cherokee warrior who had killed,

²⁴¹ Deloria, Vine Jr. *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988.

touched a corpse, or come into contact with a grave was considered spiritually unclean and required ritual purification to restore balance between the worlds.²⁴²

This very act of purification was not symbolic or psychological sin the Western sense—it was ontological. The imbalance caused by proximity to death was not just within the individual but within the spiritual ecology of the community and the land itself. Healing the warrior meant healing the nation. This sharply contrasts with Western epistemologies, where war trauma—classified as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder—is typically treated as a personal pathology requiring clinical intervention. Western models often isolate the mind from the body, the individual from the community, and the sacred from the everyday. Eastern Cherokee ceremonies, by contrast, recognize the warrior as a whole person whose body, spirit, and social role are all interdependent. The process of purification—a rite of passage—was not treated as exceptional but expected, as normative as attending therapy or taking a daily shower.

The notion that warriors need communal support also meant that they preferred taking their time to make sure they received the proper counsel and practiced needed rituals and ceremonies before interacting and moving back with their loved ones. Returning from conflict, they stayed at the council house for “up to twenty-four days to purify themselves before going home or associating with their wives”²⁴³. Each night featured a Scout Dance and a Snake Dance,

²⁴² John D. Loftin and Benjamin E. Frey, *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees* (University of California Press, 2024), 35.

²⁴³ John D. Loftin and Benjamin E. Frey, *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees* (University of California Press, 2024), 34.

designed to ritually process the residual presence of death, and reaffirm communal protection. A little before dawn, warriors would “go to the river and plunge in seven times,” while the red war priest offered a deer tongue sacrifice and tended the sacred fire²⁴⁴. This was not a private retreat, but a public reaffirmation of the warrior’s ongoing relationship to the land, the ancestors, and the ceremonial cycle. However, the belief that balance and harmony needed to be restored for the sake of the community explains this desire and need for them to isolate first and make sure they are safe and peaceful. Perhaps this solution is intended to protect the returning warrior from their triggers and their loved ones from the violent actions that might occur surrounding these triggers and trauma.

In this model, trauma is not pathologized or stigmatized—it is acknowledged, ritually addressed, and integrated into a communal framework of healing. The individual retains autonomy over their path but is never isolated from their people or their responsibilities. The ceremonies do not seek to erase the past but to rebalance its weight. As such, they offer an Indigenous epistemology of healing that resists colonial scripts of dysfunction. Instead of being treated as a broken subject, the veteran is seen as spiritually potent—someone who has moved through death and returned with knowledge, deserving of care, honor, and integration. The ceremony is not a cure—it is continuity.

Many Eastern Cherokee veterans experienced war as transformative—not necessarily in a positive sense, but in a way that altered their relationship to the state and to settler society. Their

²⁴⁴ John D. Loftin and Benjamin E. Frey, *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees* (University of California Press, 2024), 35.

service made undeniable the fact that Native people not only existed, but were courageous, skilled, and deeply committed to defending the nation—even one that continued to marginalize them. Paradoxically, this visibility could both challenge and reinforce stereotypes. On one hand, their bravery and loyalty made it harder for the broader public to cast them as uncivilized or irrelevant. On the other, their effectiveness in combat complicated dominant narratives that had long painted Native peoples as a threat to national security. The notion of belonging that emerged from military service was therefore fraught—it suggested conditional acceptance based on performance, rather than full inclusion grounded in sovereignty and mutual respect.

Legal recognition and policy changes following the war did improve material conditions for some Native veterans, but they did not erase the underlying inequalities and racialized assumptions that structured American society. As John Finger notes, some Eastern Cherokee men sought to reenlist after the war—not solely out of economic need, but because military service offered one of the few available routes to assert dignity and claim a visible, respected place in a society that otherwise denied them full recognition²⁴⁵. Military life—once seen solely as a colonial imposition—was reimagined by many Eastern Cherokee veterans as a space for survival, identity negotiation, and, at times, cultural adaptation.

Despite their sacrifice, Eastern Cherokee veterans faced systemic racism, much like other marginalized groups. Finger documents how, well into the 1940s, white election officials in western North Carolina denied many Cherokee citizens the right to vote, claiming they were not

²⁴⁵ John R. Finger, “Conscription, Citizenship, and ‘Civilization’: World War I and the Eastern Band of Cherokee,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 63, no. 3 (1986): 298.

U.S. citizens²⁴⁶. This contradiction—being asked to die for a country that refused to recognize their citizenship—reveals the persistence of settler colonial logic, where Indigenous peoples were rendered both hyper visible and invisible, loyal yet still alien.

In response to this marginalization, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians took active steps to honor their warriors and assert their presence within U.S. political memory. The establishment of the Steve Youngdeer American Legion Post in 1946 became a focal point of veteran pride and community solidarity.²⁴⁷ Far from a simple act of assimilation, this post symbolized a reclaiming of martial tradition on Cherokee terms—asserting that Indigenous participation in American wars was inseparable from Indigenous sovereignty and survivance.

Eastern Cherokee warrior Stephen Youngdeer’s death—resulting not from an immediate battlefield injury, but from pneumonia contracted after being wounded in action—was more than a tragic outcome of war; it was a death imbued with cultural purpose, duty, and enduring meaning. According to John R. Finger, Youngdeer was “seriously wounded in action” and later succumbed to pneumonia while still in France.²⁴⁸ Before his death, Youngdeer reportedly described his act of “going over the top” as one rooted in courage and obligation—not only to his military unit, but to his Cherokee people. This phrase symbolized not just physical courage but also a spiritual commitment to his people and nation. Finger notes that Youngdeer’s death was a

²⁴⁶ John R. Finger, “Conscription, Citizenship, and ‘Civilization’: World War I and the Eastern Band of Cherokee,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 63, no. 3 (1986): 299–300.

²⁴⁷ John R. Finger, *The Eastern Cherokees in World War I* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 293.

²⁴⁸ John R. Finger, “Conscription, Citizenship, and ‘Civilization’: World War I and the Eastern Band of Cherokee,” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 63, no. 3 (1986): 301.

poignant and personal act of resistance, one that transcended mere participation in war.²⁴⁹ For the Cherokee, this act was more than just military service—it was an embodiment of their ongoing fight for recognition, belonging, and survival.

To kill and to die, despite the history of violence against his people, and to fall in battle far from home and unable to perform essential rituals that might have led to a more peaceful passing, required a cultural reckoning. For the Cherokee, warfare was not just a political matter but a cosmological one—it disrupted the balance between the living and the dead, demanding specific rites of purification. However, for settler society, Indigenous death on the battlefield was framed as a symbol of assimilation and national unity—blurred with the notion of a “final closure” on the violent past, often referred to as “the real end of the Indian wars.”²⁵⁰ This tension between the sacredness of Indigenous death and how settler society interpreted it—aligning it with notions of equality—reveals how Indigenous sacrifice was simultaneously celebrated and appropriated by the broader American narrative.

The notion of brotherhood in arms—so frequently idealized—reveals itself to be complex and layered when examined through the lens of Cherokee experience. While official narratives often celebrate the integration of Native men into U.S. military ranks as a sign of assimilation and shared sacrifice, the reality was far more complicated. There was a kind of recognition—but one shaped more by wartime necessity than by genuine inclusion. As Guy Littlejohn of

²⁴⁹ *ibid*

²⁵⁰ Thomas Grillo, *U.S. Patriotism and Native Struggles: The Eastern Cherokee Experience* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 54.

Company I noted in a letter from Camp Jackson, he and his fellow Cherokee soldiers were “doing well” and that he had “made a number of friends among whites.”²⁵¹ Such statements suggest moments of camaraderie and equality, at least within the context of shared training and imminent danger. Yet even these moments cannot be separated from the larger settler colonial framework in which Native men were not yet considered citizens, though they were enlisted as useful individuals in a time of need.

This perceived brotherhood, while real in individual instances, did not eliminate the systemic forces that shaped the lives of Eastern Cherokee veterans upon their return. For many, the home they returned to no longer held the same promise. According to Finger, many Cherokee veterans found that returning home offered few economic prospects, and as a result, some began to view continued military service as a practical alternative to the limited job opportunities on the Qualla Boundary.²⁵² Others perhaps felt drawn to military life through a deeper current of ancestral memory—an echo of the ECBI warrior tradition that emphasized courage, responsibility, and protection of the people. Finger remarks that military recruiters even in the 1980s continued to find the Cherokee reservation a dependable source of enlistment, hinting at a lingering pride in this tradition and a cultural willingness to engage in soldiering as a meaningful path.²⁵³

Yet the meaning of military service for Eastern Cherokee veterans was far from uniform. Many soldiers experienced both the horrors and unexpected privileges of modern warfare—

²⁵¹ Finger, “Conscription, Citizenship, and ‘Civilization,’” 298, 299, 304, 306.

²⁵² *ibid*

²⁵³ Finger, “Conscription, Citizenship, and ‘Civilization,’” 298, 299, 304, 306.

“mud, filth, and destruction, yes, but also glimpses of a larger, more cosmopolitan world that contrasted sharply with the isolation and dispossession many faced upon returning home.”²⁵⁴ Their stories, transmitted through letters, photographs, and oral accounts, drew communities into broader networks of relationality and federal involvement. Healing from war, however, was not simply a matter of patriotic satisfaction or access to federal benefits; it was spiritual and communal labor that exceeded the scope of Western psychiatry. Warfare, as Tom Holm emphasizes, created a rupture not only in individual lives but in the cosmological balance central to Cherokee life. Trauma was understood not solely as psychological injury but as spiritual imbalance requiring ritual repair. Healing could not be achieved through clinical diagnosis or confession alone but through the revitalization of ceremonies grounded in sacred places, language, and memory. “The ceremonies are alive and well,” Holm observes, “the veterans need to seek them out.”²⁵⁵

This spiritual framing of warfare and recovery contrasts sharply with settler-colonial logic, which reduces Native soldiering to proof of loyalty or a route to social advancement. Winona LaDuke and Ana Cruz critique this reduction by centering Indigenous perspectives on the spiritual cost of war: “Men and women who are involved in killing are changed spiritual beings. In the act of killing, you realign your relationship to your relatives.”²⁵⁶ These ruptures are not merely individual—they reverberate through communities, which are transformed by both

²⁵⁴ John R. Finger, “Conscription, Citizenship, and ‘Civilization’: World War I and the Eastern Band of Cherokee,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 63, no. 3 (1986): 307.

²⁵⁵ Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 126.

²⁵⁶ Winona LaDuke and Ana Cruz, *Spirituality and Indigenous Veterans: Healing the Warrior’s Path* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), 39–40.

the losses they mourn and the responsibilities they re-assume. Although some veterans reported fleeting respect within military contexts, this recognition did not shield them from persistent racism, inadequate social services, or violations of treaties.²⁵⁷

The ECBI relationships with death and the dead were—and remain—complex, mediated by deep spiritual protocols that seek to preserve harmony between the living and the unseen. Many Cherokees have a strong aversion to being near the dead unnecessarily, not from fear, but from an understanding of the potency that death carries. Loftin and Frey explain that the dead body is not simply a physical remnant but a vessel of powerful and potentially harmful forces; to remain in proximity to the dead without ritual preparation risks illness or spiritual imbalance.²⁵⁸ This cosmology illuminates why traditional purification rituals following warfare were so vital. The act of killing, touching the dead, or being near the battlefield was understood as a disruption of sacred order, necessitating communal acts of cleansing to restore balance.²⁵⁹

In this sense, combat itself introduced spiritual contamination. For Cherokee warriors, the danger of war extended beyond the physical and psychological to the cosmological—an affront to *tōhi*, or balance.²⁶⁰ Upon returning from battle, warriors were not expected to immediately rejoin their families or communities. Instead, they entered a period of ritual separation and purification, often lasting up to twenty-four days, during which they stayed in the council house,

²⁵⁷ *ibid*

²⁵⁸ John D. Loftin and Benjamin E. Frey, *People of Kituwah: The Old Ways of the Eastern Cherokees* (Cherokee, NC: Museum of the Cherokee People, 2024), 54–57.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 34; Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 41–42.

²⁶⁰ Loftin and Frey, *People of Kituwah*, 66–68.

danced, prayed, and bathed repeatedly in the river.²⁶¹ These ceremonies, including the Snake Dance and the Scout Dance, served as symbolic negotiations with the powers of death, reestablishing right relationship with both the spiritual and social worlds.²⁶²

However, the ECBI relationship to death was not purely one of avoidance. The same cosmology that warned against contact with the dead also provided the means for memorialization and veneration. This is particularly visible in the Eastern Cherokee community's commitment to honoring their veterans through graves and monuments. These memorials, such as those maintained by the Steve Youngdeer American Legion Post, do not contradict the spiritual aversion to death but reinterpret it. They act as controlled, sacred spaces where memory can be mediated and honored within a context of balance. In these memorials, death is not desecration—it is transformation. The dead are not feared but cared for, ritually incorporated into the living fabric of Cherokee nationhood.

In this way, Cherokee understandings of death and memorialization challenge Western binaries between sacred and secular mourning. Rather than privatized grief, Eastern Cherokee memorial traditions express a communal and ceremonial remembrance, in which honoring the dead maintains rather than disrupts balance. Holm observes that Indigenous veterans' silence about their experiences often reflects not repression, but reverence—a refusal to desecrate the sacred boundary between the living and those who have crossed over.²⁶³ Healing, therefore, is not only the restoration of the living warrior but the ongoing maintenance of relationship with

²⁶¹ James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee* (Washington, DC: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1900), 333–334.

²⁶² Loftin and Frey, *People of Kituwah*, 70.

²⁶³ Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls*, 92.

the ancestors. The cemetery, the dance, and the river purification each form part of a continuum of survivance that allows the community to transform death into endurance.

The psychological toll on Native veterans returning from combat was immense. Among the Cherokee, the effects of war were not solely physical or psychological but spiritual. Trauma was understood as a disruption of balance—between the living and the spirits, between the individual and the community. Healing, therefore, required restoring harmony through ceremonial practices, sacred narratives, and communal support rather than simply addressing symptoms.

Tom Holm emphasizes that many Native veterans avoid recounting their combat experiences because the horrors of war exceed what language can hold. As he notes, “the feeling that others cannot possibly understand the horrors and terror of combat...is strong among combat veterans. That is precisely why many relatives of combat veterans say that the veterans rarely, if ever, speak of their wartime experiences.”²⁶⁴ In the Cherokee context, trauma is addressed ritually. Participation in ceremonies provides a space for veterans to re-establish spiritual balance and reaffirm their place within the community.²⁶⁵

These practices stand in contrast to settler colonial narratives that framed Native service as proof of assimilation. Finger notes that while Eastern Cherokee men gained visibility as soldiers during World War I, they often returned to homes where citizenship and rights were still

²⁶⁴ Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 126.

²⁶⁵ Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls*, 123–124.

denied.²⁶⁶ Their military service, then, should be understood not as assimilation but as a continuation of cultural resilience, a way to assert identity, belonging, and communal responsibility in a world structured to erase these very qualities.

Anthropologist Carroll emphasizes that Native communities reframed military service through their own traditions, creating rituals and memory practices that integrated warriors into ceremonial and communal life. These practices were not acts of cultural loss but adaptations rooted in longstanding beliefs. As Carroll notes, “Native veterans and communities created a newer, permanent, and far more widespread tradition... that allowed veterans to make military service meaningful to them according to traditional dictates.”²⁶⁷ This demonstrates how Indigenous frameworks allowed Eastern Cherokee veterans to navigate postwar challenges while maintaining cultural continuity.

The effectiveness of these cultural healing practices is evident in how veterans participated in ceremonies that honored their service and reintegrated them into their communities. Healing in this context was not merely individual recovery but a collective effort, reinforcing social, spiritual, and cultural bonds. Trauma was addressed ritually, and participation in these practices restored the veteran’s connection to their people, traditions, and sense of purpose. Ceremonies were both spiritually and communally grounded, providing a framework that Western medical approaches often overlooked.

²⁶⁶ Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls*, 123–124.

²⁶⁷ Carroll, *American Indian Veterans and Ritual Practices*, 2008, 134.

Holm highlights the contrast between Indigenous and Western approaches to trauma, noting that for Native veterans, healing is not a one-time event but an ongoing journey. He explains, “For Indian people, healing is an ongoing process, and ceremonies are conducted not to remove all trauma, but to incorporate it into the life of the people and to make sense of it.”²⁶⁸ The communal and spiritual nature of these practices emphasizes balance across mind, body, spirit, and environment, integrating trauma into a broader cosmological framework rather than isolating it within the individual.

While Holm’s work focuses on later generations, its framework is crucial for understanding Eastern Cherokee veterans after World War I, particularly given the scarcity of preserved testimonies from that era. This scarcity reflects both the oral nature of Cherokee memory and the erasure imposed by settler colonialism. Holm describes combat trauma as a form of “age acceleration,”²⁶⁹ in which exposure to death produces early maturity, understood in Indigenous worldviews as wisdom rather than pathology. Lefler and Belt further show how Cherokee law and ceremonial practices themselves function as methods of communal healing, emphasizing relationality, balance, and mindfulness.²⁷⁰ Healing, in this context, is relational and spiritual, inseparable from land, language, and community.

Ultimately, Indigenous healing is a lifelong practice of survivance. For Eastern Cherokee veterans, the journey home was embedded in a continuum of cultural renewal, resistance, and

²⁶⁸ Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), 219.

²⁶⁹ Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls*, 243.

²⁷⁰ Lefler and Belt, *People of Kituwah: Cherokee Law and Healing Practices* (2022), 50.

ceremonial care. Trauma was not erased but ritually integrated, and military service became a site where spiritual, communal, and political meaning could endure beyond the battlefield.

These postwar accounts demonstrate that Eastern Cherokee approaches to healing, reintegration, and memory were deeply rooted in cultural knowledge, communal responsibility, and spiritual practice. Veterans' recovery was inseparable from the networks of family, ceremony, and community that sustained them, illustrating that Indigenous epistemologies offered holistic frameworks for addressing trauma that were often overlooked by settler institutions. Through ritual, storytelling, and guidance from elders and conjurers, the community enacted survivance, ensuring that the lessons of wartime service extended beyond the battlefield into everyday life. This chapter highlights by centering these practices, how Eastern Cherokee veterans and their communities resisted erasure, preserved cultural continuity, and reinforced Peoplehood, demonstrating resilience that persisted well beyond the immediate postwar period.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the military service of Eastern Cherokee warriors during WWI, examining how cultural values, historical experiences, and structural pressures intersected to shape their decisions and actions. My work has attempted to shed light on archival silences and recover the experiences of individuals often omitted from mainstream Western historical narratives. By centering Indigenous traditions, beliefs, and governance structures alongside military participation, I have argued that Eastern Cherokee archives are not only repositories of historical fact but also vital sources for understanding resilience, agency, and cultural continuity. At the same time, I recognize that this dissertation can only begin to address those silences. My access to voices, memories, and sacred knowledge is necessarily partial, and the conclusions I draw are provisional. The histories of Eastern Cherokee warriors are deeply intertwined with the ongoing practices, knowledge systems, and values of their communities, and this study should be understood as one contribution among many to that larger, collective effort of remembrance.

The dissertation began with a theoretical foundation that integrates the Peoplehood model and Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance. The Peoplehood model, developed by Robert K. Thomas and Tom Holm, situates Cherokee experiences within the interrelated dimensions of place, sacred history, ceremonial cycle, and language, emphasizing that cultural and spiritual continuity underpins political and social agency.²⁷¹ Survivance, as conceptualized by Vizenor,

highlights the active resistance of Eastern Cherokee warriors and communities to erasure, asserting presence and identity despite the pervasive structures of settler colonialism. By combining these frameworks, I situate Eastern Cherokee military service within broader cultural and structural contexts, showing how service was simultaneously shaped by Indigenous strategies for survival and constrained by the political and social pressures imposed by settler colonialism.

The first chapter established this framework and provided context for the Eastern Cherokee experience post-Removal, examining the challenges of land insecurity, legal ambiguity, and political marginalization. Figures like William Holland Thomas and the families who remained in North Carolina navigated these challenges while maintaining ceremonial and governance practices, exemplifying the adaptability and resilience central to Peoplehood.²⁷² This chapter showed how treaties, even when imposed under coercion, became instruments through which the Cherokee asserted sovereignty and maintained community cohesion.

The second chapter examined the experiences of Eastern Cherokee youth in assimilationist institutions, focusing on the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Archival records revealed the tension between forced acculturation and cultural persistence. Students like Stephen Saunooke were subject to intensive assimilationist policies, yet they maintained connections to

¹ Robert K. Thomas and Tom Holm, *The Cherokee People: The Story of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 33–45; Gerald Vizenor, *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 7–12.

²⁷² John Finger, *The Eastern Band of Cherokees, 1819–1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 145–146.

their community, language, and ceremonial practices. Boarding school experiences shaped later decisions to enlist in the military, revealing that service was not only a pragmatic negotiation of limited options but also a continuation of the values and responsibilities instilled within community life.

The third chapter analyzed Eastern Cherokee enlistment in World War I, highlighting the interplay of economic necessity, social expectations, and communal responsibility. Cherokee men faced constrained choices: enlistment provided opportunities for economic stability and social mobility while simultaneously honoring obligations to family and community. Quantitative data indicate that approximately 600 men registered for the draft, with over 300 serving in various military branches and 18 dying in service. These statistics, paired with personal correspondence and service records, illuminated how service represented both agency and negotiation within restrictive circumstances. Military engagement functioned as a space where Indigenous cultural values could coexist with the demands of national service, illustrating the duality of constrained choice and cultural continuity.

The fourth chapter expanded the analysis to the impacts of military service on community life during and after wartime. This chapter demonstrated how ceremonial knowledge, kinship networks, and governance structures mediated veterans' reintegration and maintained cultural continuity. Attention to gendered roles and Indigenous feminist perspectives highlighted how women contributed to sustaining community and ceremonial practices while men served, revealing the complexity of social structures under the pressures of war and colonization. These findings showed that Eastern Cherokee communities actively reproduced cultural knowledge and

communal responsibility, embedding resilience and survivance within everyday life and long-term social practices.

Taken together, the chapters illustrate the contributions of this dissertation to scholarship in multiple areas. First, the project engages in archival activism, bringing attention to the richness of Eastern Cherokee records and addressing Western historiographical silences. By centering Indigenous archives and epistemologies, this work recovers voices and experiences omitted from conventional histories. Second, by integrating the Peoplehood model and survivance, this study provides a nuanced framework for understanding how cultural persistence, spirituality, and communal structures shaped decision-making and resilience. Third, attention to gendered roles and ceremonial knowledge expands traditional military history, demonstrating that understanding wartime experiences requires attention not only to men in combat but also to the broader cultural, familial, and spiritual contexts in which service occurred. Finally, methodologically, this dissertation demonstrates how archival research can be combined with Indigenous-centered analysis, offering a model for future research that integrates multiple epistemologies and historical perspectives.

And yet, this dissertation does not close the story. I am mindful that I write from a position outside of the community, and my interpretations must remain accountable to Cherokee knowledge holders, descendants, and future scholars. The questions that motivated this project—the silences in the archive, the lives and voices left out of official records, the richness of Cherokee archives themselves—remain pressing. What I have attempted here is not a final answer, but a gesture toward a different way of writing history, one that respects the resilience of Indigenous traditions while acknowledging the structural constraints of settler colonialism.

Looking forward, this work lays the foundation for several avenues of future research. The dissertation will expand into a book-length project that examines Eastern Cherokee military service more broadly, including World War II participation. Where possible, I aim to conduct oral history interviews with descendants of veterans to document intergenerational memory, knowledge transmission, and continued community resilience. Additionally, incorporating digital humanities approaches could make archival materials and recovered histories more accessible to both academic and tribal audiences, allowing for interactive engagement with these materials. These initiatives will extend the work of this dissertation, demonstrating how archival recovery, theoretical integration, and community engagement can illuminate Indigenous histories in ways that challenge dominant narratives and expand our understanding of resilience, agency, and cultural continuity.

In conclusion, this dissertation demonstrates that Eastern Cherokee military service cannot be reduced to patriotism or economic necessity alone. Service was an intricate negotiation of constrained choices, cultural continuity, and community responsibility. By integrating archival research, theoretical frameworks, and Indigenous-centered analysis, this study highlights the ongoing vitality of Eastern Cherokee Peoplehood, the resilience of ceremonial and linguistic traditions, and the capacity of Indigenous communities to assert agency within—and against—the structures of settler colonialism. At the same time, I recognize that the voices presented here represent only part of the story. The work of recovering and interpreting these histories continues, and it is my goal that this study contributes to a broader scholarly and community effort to honor past warriors, center Indigenous knowledge, and ensure that these histories remain alive for future generations.

Appendices

Appendix A: Eastern Band of Cherokee Soldiers in World War I

This appendix lists Eastern Band of Cherokee men who served in the First World War, based on archival research conducted in Entry 977B, RG 75, National Archives, Washington, DC, and the records of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. The Carlisle school officially closed in 1918, and its surviving records reflect only those former students who maintained contact with administrators. This list is therefore not exhaustive; rather, it demonstrates the breadth of service across different branches of the armed forces, as well as the participation of women as nurses and support staff.

The table highlights the diversity of roles—ranging from front-line infantry and artillery to nursing, technical, and naval service—and underscores the disproportionate burden borne by the Eastern Cherokee community. Approximately one-quarter of the male population of the Qualla

Boundary served in the war, a remarkable statistic that reflects both constrained choice and cultural responsibility.

Appendix A: Eastern Band of Cherokee Soldiers in WWI

| Name | Service Details | Carlisle Student ? | Drafted or Enlisted? | Gender | Where They Died | Disabled | Status |
|---------------------|--|--------------------|--------------------------------------|--------|-----------------|----------|----------|
| Bradley, Nick | 6th reg PA NG? | / | / | Male | / | / | / |
| Chiltoskey, Nick W. | Sgt bugler, 53d inf band AEF, pistol team | No mention | Enlisted | Male | / | / | / |
| Colonahesk i, Joe | 81st division, died of disease overseas | No mention | Drafted (reported by agent Thomason) | Male | France | / | Deceased |
| Conley, Luke | Navy | Yes | Enlisted | Male | / | / | / |
| Copper, Curtis | Radio company | / | / | Male | / | / | / |
| Crow, Ute | Army | / | / | Male | / | / | / |
| Feather, Hattie | Nurse, Walter Reed Hospital, later in Philadelphia | / | / | Female | / | / | / |
| George, Cain | Machine Gun (MG) | / | / | Male | / | / | / |
| Graybeard, Sallie | Nurse, Hahneman Hospital, Philadelphia | / | / | Female | / | / | / |
| Hick, Chiltosky | Cavalry | / | / | Male | / | / | / |
| Jackson, Jack | Navy | / | / | Male | / | / | / |
| Kelly, Lassie | Yeoman, Navy Dept., Washington, DC | / | / | Female | / | / | / |

| | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|---|-----|----------|------|----------|-----|----------|
| Levy, James W. | Physician, Medical Reserve Corps | / | / | Male | / | / | / |
| Mumblehead, Roger | Died in France | / | / | Male | France | Yes | Deceased |
| Owl, George Allen | Sergeant, Company I, 321st Infantry, 81st Division, Hampton | / | Drafted | Male | / | / | / |
| Owl, Samuel | Private, Bugler, 58th Field Artillery Battalion, overseas | / | Drafted | Male | Overseas | / | / |
| Owl, Walter Devil | 1st Sergeant, Field Artillery Battalion C, X Regiment, overseas, Hampton Class 1915 | / | Drafted | Male | Overseas | / | / |
| Owl, Will | Private, Medical Corps, overseas | / | Drafted | Male | Overseas | / | / |
| Tewatley, Cain | Army | / | / | Male | / | / | / |
| West, James | Enlisted 11/28, gassed, incapacitated for work | Yes | Enlisted | Male | France | Yes | / |
| Wilnota(h), Ned Wilbur | Enlisted 1917, musician, later blacksmith, reenlisted 1920 | / | Enlisted | Male | / | / | / |
| Wolf, Tahquette | Truck Company, Ammunition Train | / | / | Male | / | / | / |
| Youngdeer, Stephen | Died in France | Yes | Enlisted | Male | France | Yes | KIA |

This list was compiled thanks to records from Entry 977B, RG 75, National Archives, Washington, DC, and a list of Carlisle students identified as Eastern Band of Cherokee. The Carlisle school closed in 1918, and its records only reflect information about former students who maintained active communication with school administrators.

Appendix B: “My Country”¹²⁷³

I belong to the United States of America, and am proud of it, because my country is great and strong, and its ideals are just and humane.

I love my country because it is a democracy, where the people govern themselves, and there is no hereditary class to rule them.

I love my country because the feeling of the people is against all classes, and what classes we have are constantly mingling and breaking up.

I love my country because it never wishes to conquer any other country, nor to annex any territory that does not belong to it without the consent of the people who live in such a territory.

I love my country because the only use it has for an army and navy is to defend itself from unjust attack and to protect its citizens.

I love my country because it is founded on the principle of federation and not of empire.

I love my country because it is ready to join with the other Nations of the world in a

²⁷³ *he Carlisle Arrow and Red Man*, vol. 14, no. 5 (October 12, 1917), 2, Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/publications/carlisle-arrow-and-red-man-vol-14->. ↩

World Federation, and thus do away forever with war, whenever the other Nations are willing.

I love my country because it asks nothing for itself it would not ask for all humanity.

I love my country because it is the land of opportunity; the way to success is open to every person, no matter what his birth or circumstances.

I love my country because the oppressed of other countries are welcome here and have all the rights and privileges of native citizens if they obey our laws.

I love my country because every child in it can get an education free in its public schools and more money is spent on training children here than in any other country.

I love my country because women are respected and honored.

Analysis and Commentary:

This passage, published in *The Carlisle Arrow and Red Man* in 1917, reflects the patriotic ideals that Carlisle Indian School sought to instill in its students. The author's repeated use of "I love my country because..." emphasizes a performative devotion that aligns with the school's assimilationist mission. At the same time, the text highlights contradictions inherent in the American promise: the emphasis on democracy, opportunity, and rights coexists with the reality that Indigenous peoples were being forcibly removed from their homelands and culturally suppressed.

For example, the assertion that "the oppressed of other countries are welcome here" and "the way to success is open to every person" contrasts sharply with the lived experience of Eastern Cherokee and other Native students at Carlisle, whose educational experience was structured

around erasure of language, culture, and family ties. The text thus provides insight into how patriotic rhetoric was mobilized as both a tool of loyalty and a mechanism of cultural assimilation.

Additionally, the focus on “education” and the “rights of children” indicates the school’s claim to humanitarian purpose while also foregrounding the institutional control over Native students’ futures. This duality—between the ideals of freedom, democracy, and opportunity, and the realities of colonial education—reveals archival silences and the complex interplay between Indigenous identity and imposed national identity.

Appendix C: Eastern Cherokee Women in WWI

| Name | Tribal Affiliation | Role | Location/Details |
|------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Hattie Feather | Eastern Cherokee | Nurse | Walter Reed Hospital, Washington, DC; later served in Philadelphia, Missouri (among Choctaws) |
| Sallie Graybeard | Eastern Cherokee | Nurse | Hahnemann Hospital, Philadelphia; married |
| Miss Wolf | Eastern Cherokee | Nurse | Walter Reed Hospital |
| Lassie Kelly | Eastern Cherokee | Yeoman, U.S. Navy Dept. | Worked in Washington, DC |
| Lula H. Owl | Eastern Cherokee | Army (Camp Lewis) | Served at Camp Lewis, Washington |

Note: Table compiled by author of dissertation.

Appendix D: The Brave, the Mighty Warrior

by Davey Arch²⁷⁴

Explanation:

This story was recounted to the author by his grandfather. It illustrates traditional Eastern Cherokee teachings about humility, the dangers of pride, and the ethical lessons conveyed through storytelling. The narrative emphasizes the idea that overconfidence and boasting can lead to one's downfall, even for the mightiest of warriors. It also provides insight into cultural approaches to morality, strategy, and life planning.

When I was a young boy, this is what my grandfather told me. He said:

Once there was a brave warrior, one of the mightiest warriors that ever lived, who began to become very arrogant, proud of what he'd done, and began to boast to all the people in his village of how mighty a warrior he was.

And even though they knew of his reputation and knew of the deeds that he had done in battle, he still persisted on telling them how great he was and boasting how much better he was at being a warrior than the other warriors.

²⁷⁴ Davey Arch, *The Brave, the Mighty Warrior*, told to author by grandfather, pp. 91–92.

And soon this was something that became very annoying to a lot of the people around the village and to the other warriors. But still the brave warrior, the mighty warrior, persisted in boasting.

He began to think about the weapons and tools that he used in his work, and he began to fashion the best tools of anyone in the village. His war club was the best of any war club that had ever been made, his bow was the strongest bow, and his arrows began to be the best arrows that anyone had ever seen. He'd chip his arrow points to just a razor-sharp edge, fasten them onto the shafts, so that they would fly just as true as any arrow ever flew.

But still he boasted and went on and on with how great he was and how great the things that he used were.

The old men began to warn him that his boasting would cause him failure in the end. But he didn't heed the warnings and went on boasting.

Soon the tribe went to war with another enemy, and the brave warrior gathered up his fine tools of the trade and went off to war.

But in the battle he was knocked unconscious from behind by one of his enemies and taken captive. And all the things that he had carried with him into battle were taken with him into the enemies' camp.

When the enemy saw what he had been using against them, they decided that these would be the things that would be used in his demise. So they tied the mighty warrior up and shot him with his own arrows.

My grandfather told me this story hoping that I would understand that in planning life and arranging things that a man, even though he might accomplish things, should not boast of what he's done. And in planning to do things and in planning your life and the strategies of how you will accomplish your life's journey, you should be wary that in the end you won't be shot with your own arrows.

Appendix E: Photographic Evidence of Eastern Cherokee Women Cultural Presence and Agency

These images provide visual documentation of Eastern Cherokee women's leadership, participation in national efforts, and the assertion of cultural survivance, complementing the textual analysis in Chapter 3.

Figure 1, a 1919 photograph of Kelly, taken during the Victory Loan drive, presents her with a much shorter peer, emphasizing her commanding presence. While perhaps intended for amusement, the image visually asserts her role as an Indigenous woman in a public space, symbolizing her active participation in national efforts and her visibility as a leader. Kelly's visibility in such spaces stresses survivance and her role in defending Cherokee presence in both political and ceremonial realms.

Figure 2, Eastern Cherokee veterans receiving medals—featuring men and women like Lula Gloyne (née Owl) alongside male veterans such as Colman Smith and Frank Fry—serves as a powerful visual for illustrating the complex intersection of gender, culture, and resistance. By

placing female veterans like Gloyne in the same frame as their male counterparts, the photograph challenges the colonial view of gender roles and demands a broader recognition of women's agency in maintaining cultural survival and sovereignty. As Ramírez writes, "Sexism becomes too easily forgotten and is not adequately dealt with in Native scholarship and communities" (Ramírez, 2007, p. 26). This illuminates how the narrative of Indigenous resilience and survivance is often framed predominantly through male perspectives, while the contributions of Indigenous women—veterans, leaders, and cultural preservers—are marginalized or erased. Their achievements, alongside their male counterparts, assert a form of cultural survivance that resists colonial gender norms and highlights the necessity of integrating gender analysis in Native scholarship to understand the histories and struggles of Indigenous communities more fully.

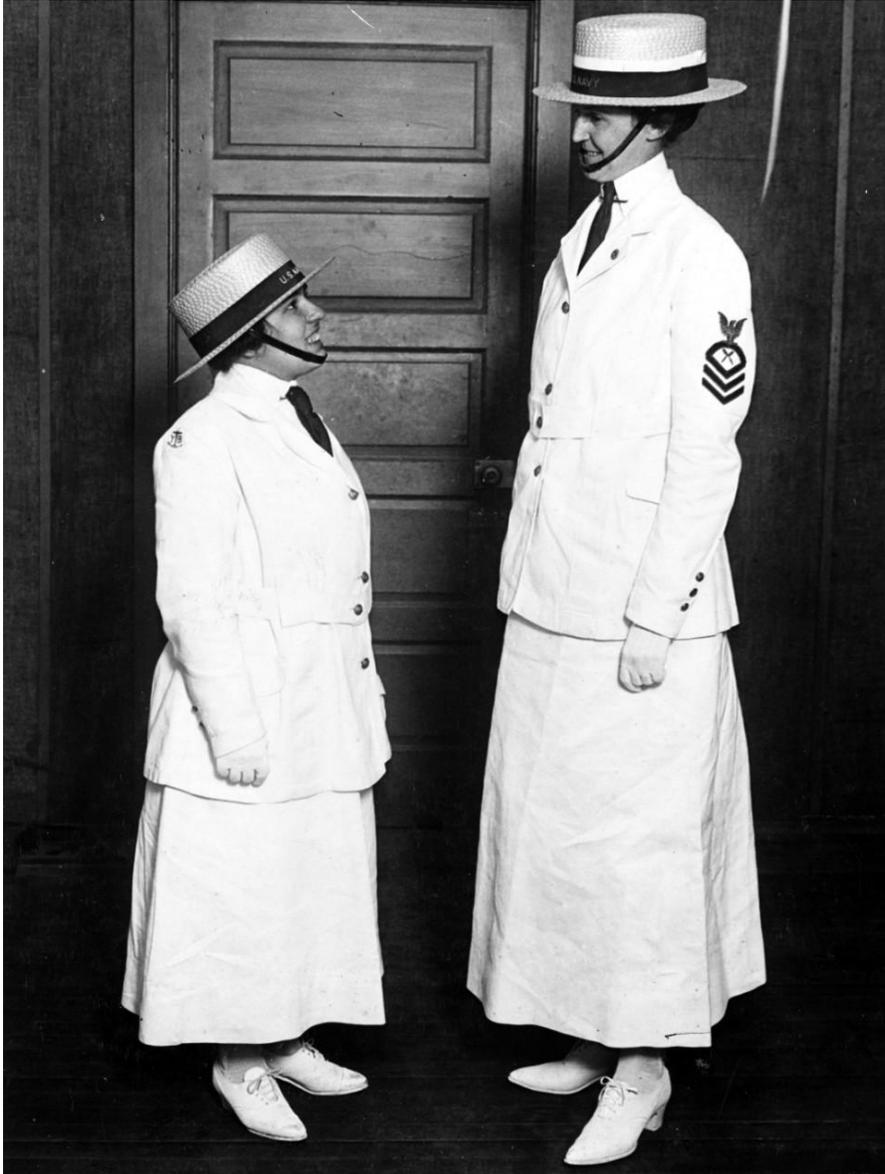


Figure 1. U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command, "Pose for a Tall and Short photograph, while visiting New York City, May 1919," *U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command*, <https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/us-people/k/kelly-lassie/nh-53170.html>.

Figure 2. *WWI Veterans Receiving Medals.* Museum of Cherokee People Archives, Image ID 2007.20.2194.



RECEIVE WWI VETERANS MEDALS — from left, Colman Smith, Frank Fry, Enoch Owl, Isaac Davis, Lula Gloyne, Jack Taylor, John Connington.

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