Native American Heritage

Courtesy Lakota Nation

The surfboat crew at Station Neah Bay, Wash., about 1910.

Station Neah Bay breaks ethnic barriers at the turn of the century

The great whale-hunting tribes of the Pacific Coast were named Makah, meaning "cape people," because they inhabited the area of Cape Flattery and Cape Alara, Wash. The Makah's way of life was dependent upon strong men in smallboats hunting whales far offshore.

In more recent times, the Indians used their boat-handling skills for another purpose — saving lives.

The Neah Bay Lifeboat Station, Neah Bay, Wash., was once manned by Makah Indians. The station was built in 1877 at Washington's Waadah Island. It was moved to the mainland at Baaddah Point in 1910. The new site was located in the town of Neah Bay, headquarters of the Makah Indian Reservation.

Like their ancestors, the Makah lifesavers were known for taking smallboats far offshore.

"Actually there's no limit to the distance we go," said BMC Wayne Roberts in a May 1966 *Seattle Times* article entitled "Friend of the Fun Fisherman." Roberts served at Neah Bay during the 1960s.

A rescue Aug. 17, 1911, typified the service of these men. The keeper at Baaddah Point received a telephone call at noon reporting that a boat with five passengers had not been seen for two days. The crew went out in a power lifeboat and found the craft 20 miles west-northwest of the station. Heavy seas had disabled its engine. The lifesaving crew quickly passed a line to the fishermen and headed back to Neah Bay.

After traveling 5 miles, the lifesavers found another boat, the *Waaddah*, flying distress signals. The *Waaddah's* engine had also broken down, stranding its four passengers. After passing a line to the second disabled vessel, the lifeboat towed both vessels safely back to Neah Bay, arriving shortly before midnight.

In the early 1970s, Congress approved a $750,000 construction project for a new station equipped with modern housing. In 1972, the historic Neah Bay station was moved 920 feet west of Baaddah Point.

Since its origin, Neah Bay, like other lifesaving stations, has exemplified the Coast Guard's tradition of service to others.

"Though never in the mainstream of American life, these brave men of the surf began a long tradition of service to others," Dr. Dennis Noble wrote in *That Others Might Live.*

But what makes the establishment of an Indian-manned station at Neah Bay significant in Coast Guard history?

"It happened at a time when all minorities, including Indians, were not given an equal opportunity," said Dr. Robert Browning, Coast Guard historian. "I think it's an unusual event that this happened."

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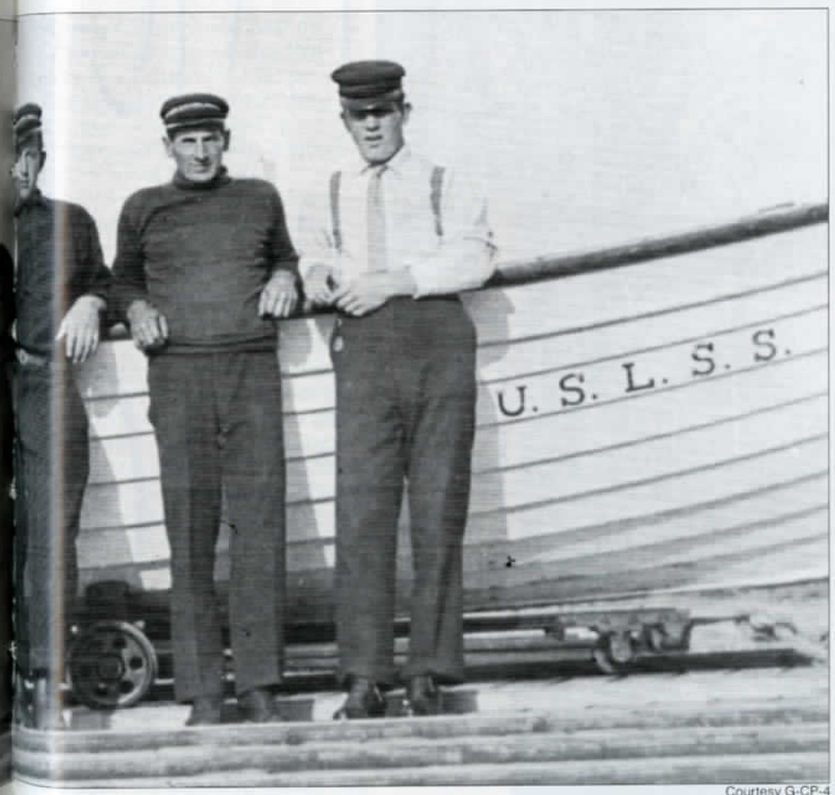

Courtesy G-CP-4

Cherokee Nation pride

The Cherokee Indians' language descended from the Iroquois linguistic stock. The Cherokee called themselves Ani'-Yun'wiya', meaning "Leading or principal peoples."

One of the greatest cultural contributions was the development of their written language by Chief Sequoyah in 1821.

Sequoyah created an ingenious system which contained 85 characters, called the "Talking Leaves." Within six months after completing his 12-year effort, nearly all Cherokees were literate.

The Cherokee Nation was and is a democratic society. The same strong traits that saw the Cherokee people survive repeated hardships will continue to serve them as they look toward the future. Because of hardships they did not have a principal chief for 64 years, until 1971.

Anyone who can show proof of having a lineal ancestor on the Dawes Commission rolls is eligible to register as a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.

For more information call Robert Albertson at (202) 267-6067.

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