

1200 Hours  
June 5, 1963  
Little River, TX

Chief drove slowly down Main Street in his Impala, one hand on the steering wheel and the other arm across the back of the white bench seat. The local cops loved to write tickets to anyone going one mile an hour over the 25 MPH speed limit.

The local motel was all he could afford with his limited funds. He had twenty dollars in his pocket, every coin and bill from his change jar.

A picture of a green tank in a passing store window caught his eye. Over the door, the sign said *U.S. Army Recruiting*. While registered with selective service, he never pictured himself joining the Army.

His great-grandfather served as an Osage code talker during WWI in a program so secretive most people today didn't know about it. Not a surprise since Native Americans didn't become citizens until 1924. President Calvin Coolidge, inspired by the high percentage of tribal enlistment during World War I, signed the Indian Citizenship Act.

But with nowhere to go, why not see what the Army offered? Who knows, he might get lucky.

He entered the office and looked around. Posters of soldiers doing different jobs, helicopters, trucks, and tanks lined the walls. A man in a classy-looking green dress uniform stood from behind a desk. On the left side of his chest was an impressive number of colorful ribbons. Chief imagined himself in the same uniform with a chest full of medals. Surely his father would be proud of him. Maybe not. His mother and Julie sure would, and that's what was important.

"Hello, young man. I'm Staff Sergeant Chosen. What can I do for you? Ready to join the Army and see the world?"

"Do you train people to fix engines?" Chief asked.

Staff Sergeant Chosen smiled. "We sure do. For both aviation and ground equipment."

"How much do you get paid?"

"You'd start basic training as a private at seventy-eight dollars a month. Once you graduate, that changes to eighty-three dollars a month. If you train for aviation, you can add another fifty a month to your pay. More is added to those numbers if you go overseas or into combat."

That was a hell of a lot more than he made at the gas station, and it would get him out of Little River. "Where do I sign?"