### **UCLA**

# **American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

#### **Title**

Drawing Fire: A Pawnee, Artist, and Thunderbird in World War II. By Brummett Echohawk with Mark R. Ellenbarger.

#### **Permalink**

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1z00v12b

### **Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 43(4)

#### ISSN

0161-6463

#### **Author**

Meadows, William C.

#### **Publication Date**

2019-09-01

#### DOI

10.17953/aicrj.43.4.reviews

## **Copyright Information**

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/</a>

puts it, is a good move, overall I found that *Divided People* was strong in showing the need for academic disciplines to move the narratives concerning Indigenous people and educate the mainstream public to be more aware and responsive to the contemporary issues Native Americans face.

Elvia Rodríguez California State University, Fresno

Drawing Fire: A Pawnee, Artist, and Thunderbird in World War II. By Brummett Echohawk with Mark R. Ellenbarger. Edited by Trent Riley. Foreword by Lt. Col. Ernest Childers. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018. 231 pages. \$29.95 cloth; \$29.95 electronic.

Drawing Fire is based on a manuscript written by the late World War II veteran Brummett Echohawk (Pawnee), who served in Sicily and Italy as a member of the 45th Division, 179th Infantry Regiment. The work follows Echohawk's experiences in the war, primarily dating from the landing at Sicily to his evacuation for wounds at Anzio and return to the United States. A talented artist, Echohawk made numerous sketches of his experiences. Some images did not survive the war, but a sizable number did, so that images aided him after his postwar career as an illustrator and artist when he undertook writing this book in the early 1990s, which continued until until his debilitating stroke in 2005. Echohawk then charged his adopted nephew Mark Ellenbarger with seeing the manuscript published. He passed away in 2006.

Ellenbarger, focused on maintaining Echohawk's emphasis, initially edited the 350-page handwritten manuscript and provided the preface and a coauthored post-script. Ernest Childers, a lieutenant colonel who also served in the 45th Division, contributes a brief foreword, and character sketches of other Native soldiers in his unit, a glossary/Native lexicon, and footnotes, are included in the work, with the day-to-day accounts and associated data placed within the larger US military campaigns of the war. Echohawk's visually breathtaking sketches, for which he was so well known, depict soldiers of varied ethnicities and countries and rise off the page.

Strongly influenced by the warrior tradition of his ancestors and tribe, and desiring to live up to their accomplishments, Echohawk admired and longed for the status that came with military service. Like many young men of the time, he joined the Oklahoma National Guard in the late 1930s for a source of income, not knowing a major world war would soon develop. In 1941, his unit became federalized into regular service. Echohawk's experiences reflect those of Natives in general in World War II, such as prewar National Guard service pay income as motivation to enlist; recognition of a tribal warrior heritage; non-Indian stereotypes about Indians; and the "Indian Scout Syndrome."

Echohawk's experiences are unique as he was able to serve in a unit with a large number of Natives, including several fellow Pawnee in his company, which sometimes occurred in units like the 45th Division with large numbers of Natives. Their shared

Reviews 145

ethnicity, culture, and language greatly shaped their experiences and were a source of strength and comfort during combat and added to their pride in serving. This work offers insight into the daily actions and experiences of a small, largely Native American unit in much larger campaigns. In several portions of the work a sense of Native insight, wit, and humor is well demonstrated, such as an account of how upon landing in Italy, a Native soldier stuck a staff in the ground and informed Columbus that he was claiming Italy for Native Americans. Other targets for this wit include non-Indian groups (Americans and Germans), Western movies, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Echohawk describes in great detail the environmental conditions they faced, the trials of living in the field, and the long periods of tedium interspersed with sudden, often horrific combat. Similar to many WW II veterans I have interviewed he conveys the feelings of sheer terror and helplessness experienced during mortar and artillery attacks. Echohawk shares daily examples of the good, bad, and painful experiences he and his fellow soldiers encountered in combat, including the wounding and loss of close friends. His account provides a well-balanced mix of humor, wit, poignant observations of people and events, camaraderie, bravery, terror, fear, and mourning.

Heavy use of quoted dialogue allows Echohawk's account to flow, often reading like a screenplay. Like many accounts written more than forty-five years later, while adding flavor to the story it is likely written in the spirit of the situation than reporting exchanges verbatim. Although this primary account stands alone well, more explanatory notes, cited sources, greater biographical data on Echohawk, and a brief bibliography of related Pawnee and military sources could augment Echohawk's focus on the war and help the nonspecialist reader with context.

This is one of only two major written works on Brummet Echohawk to date. The other is a 2015 biography by Kristin Youngbull that also seems to have drawn from Echohawk's manuscript. The different approaches of these two works complement one another very well, as Youngbull recounts Echohawk's life in general, with a greater focus on his art that is drawn from family interviews and archival materials, and in *Drawing Fire* the primary emphasis is on the autobiographical account. Although Echohawk and other Pawnee were recognized as code talkers (216–217), little is known about this and Echohawk provides little detail. Their recognition seems to be based on using their everyday language, possibly Pawnee, after the capture of a civilian German woman and an elderly man (159–160). Youngbull's account sheds no light on code talking either.

Overall, this is an excellent addition to a small number of works authored by Native American WWII veterans. It emphasizes an individual's combat experiences from a Native point of view that not only chronicles his personal experiences, but also documents the service of the other Native men in his unit and honors them. Echohawk and Ellenbarger's work adds greatly to the existing literature and will be useful for anyone interested in the Pawnee, Native Americans in World War II, and as an example of one Native's views of military service and related cultural traditions.

William C. Meadows Missouri State University