

CMSgt of the AF Murray ends battle over usage of American Indian Chief, icons, logos and webpages by AF CMSgt's and groups around the World as their official Mascot... Honor has almost been restored. Some CMSGTs Groups have yet to remove American Indian images from their websites. See 2nd page



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Fellow Chiefs,

December 2004 marked the 45th year of the Chief Master Sergeant rank. During those four-plus decades, the roles and responsibilities of Chiefs have expanded and evolved to where we are today - senior enlisted leaders of a highly trained combat force that is heavily engaged in war and peace around the world.

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to those Chief Master Sergeants before us who helped build the solid foundation of today's Air Force. They led Airmen through wars in Korea, Vietnam, the Cold War, the Gulf War, and operations around the globe. They also passed a proud heritage to us - their legacy is a corps of leaders and an enlisted force that are well respected and extremely capable. We truly stand on the shoulders of giants, and must continue to work hard to pass along the same legacy to future generations.

Several milestones have recognized the top enlisted rank as the honored position it holds today -- In 1967, the first Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force was chosen - my dear friend Paul Airey. Five years later, 1972, the honor of officially being called "Chief" was given to the top enlisted rank. Throughout the years Chiefs proved their worth, to the Air Force, and the Nation.

More recently, in 2004, the value of Chief Master Sergeants was further recognized when we transferred the management of Chief Master Sergeants to the Air Force Senior Leader Management Office. This move solidified the recognition of Chiefs as key senior leaders in America's Air Force. As such, I believe today is a good and right time to look ourselves in the mirror and ensure the leadership we demonstrate and portray is befitting of the trust and confidence placed in us by our civilian and officer leadership, our peers, and most importantly, the Airmen we are charged to lead.

In November, I began wearing a new chevron that better symbolizes the thousands of Airmen that the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force represents to our senior leaders, Congress, international allies, and the American public. This change was approved and directed by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and endorsed by all the four-star generals at CORONA Fall, 2004. Equally important is the fact that this change was recommended and encouraged by the former Chief Master Sergeants of the Air Force. They too recognize that our enlisted force and the Office of the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force are evolving and the time to update this heralded symbol of 38 years had come.

Like the former Chief Master Sergeants of the Air Force, my great hope is that today's active and retired Chiefs will see our efforts to highlight and discuss some of our practices and traditions as an opportunity for us to build on the great legacy left to us. Your engagement in these efforts will help ensure we pass all that is good and right about us to those who follow in our footsteps.

Everything about us as Chief Master Sergeants should point to our high moral character, the leadership we bring to the force, the results of our experience and demonstrated performance. Aside from our official duties and status, customs and practices that have become traditions over the years are important, but should not define us. The unique blend of technical expertise, vast experience, determined leadership, and willingness to take on the hard tasks without reservation are what make us Chief Master Sergeants, and those are the elements we must always promote, protect and preserve for future Chiefs to lead our force into the future.

One of the practices embraced by Chiefs through the years is the use of Native American symbols in conjunction with the Chief Master Sergeant chevron. I believe the intent has always been to capture the virtues of courage, bravery, and honor associated with an American Indian Chief. However, there are some that take it too far, implying these symbols define their individual or group status, rather than keeping focus on the leadership that truly defines a Chief Master Sergeant. Today we find these symbols in the form of statuettes, busts, headdresses, crafts and artwork, and logos on hats, mugs, shirts, letterhead, coins and more. We give them as gifts and/or purchase ourselves to adorn offices, clubs and homes. We've gone so far as to create graphic displays with our heralded chevrons imbedded with these Indian symbols.

The fact is: There is no official correlation between the U.S. Air Force rank of Chief Master Sergeant and Native Americans. The use of Native American symbols in an official capacity to signify a rank or status is inappropriate. Letterhead, printed programs, itineraries, and other items related to our rank or insignia paid for with appropriated funds should not carry Native American symbols.

What we give as gifts, or purchase ourselves is a matter of private and personal business. What we adorn our offices and clubs with, and use government funds to purchase is a matter of professional and official business. Thus, I ask that we consider this and other traditions and practices, and evaluate them against the image we want to portray as Chief Master Sergeants and senior leaders in our great Air Force.

I ask that we take a close look at the way we recognize those who are newly promoted into our ranks, i.e., the "Induction Ceremonies" that have been prevalent since the 1980's. The spirit and intent of these ceremonies are to celebrate and congratulate the individuals and their families for reaching the top one percent of our active force and top two percent of our Air Reserve Component, and to inspire them as they step into the leadership role of a Chief Master Sergeant. That intent should never be shrouded. We must take care to avoid the perception that these ceremonies propel us into a separate class of Airmen. As the top enlisted leaders, we must also take great care to represent the Airmen we lead -- not separate ourselves from them. Our ceremonies should emphasize our role as senior NCOs who, because of our experience, work ethic and attitudes, are promoted to the highest enlisted rank. In the coming months, my office will publish guidelines and examples for these recognition ceremonies to help organizations around our Air Force highlight the achievements of these individuals, while imparting to them the awesome responsibility of leadership that awaits them.

Another practice we must give attention to is the initiation of the "Jeep Chief". Although the exact origin is hard to pinpoint, the "Jeep" emerged in the '80s, and picked up steam in the '90s. I suggest you look at the practice at your base to ensure, if used, it is a fitting representation of the respect those new Chiefs need to get their jobs done. Is it a distraction for them, with Airmen of all ranks trying to "steal" it, or is it a voluntary, short team-building practice that is done at functions with their peers, i.e., Chiefs' Group meetings, events and social gatherings for senior NCOs? I recently met a chief at one base who had carried a 15"x 24" jeep under his arm for over 3 months just hoping someone would get promoted the next month - Why? We must set these new Chief Master Sergeants up for success right from the start and give them the credibility and respect they will need to fulfill their role as a senior leader, in their unit and on their base.

As I travel throughout our great Air Force, I meet with many Chiefs Groups, and many more groups of Chiefs. While one is a formally chartered private organization, the other is an assembly of enlisted leaders who are part of an important chain of command. When a group meets with a senior leader, such as a wing commander, they must be cognizant of the relationship to and representation of the official organization vice the private organization. It's critical that we recognize the difference; the chain of command is where the mission-related work and official business must be done. The president and executive committee of the Chiefs' Group leads the group in its private organization activities. The command chief, group and squadron superintendents lead and support the mission and official duties within the chain of command. We run the risk of excluding representatives of squadrons and units that do not have Chiefs when we work mission-oriented issues through Chiefs' Groups versus the established chain of command. That said, our Chiefs' Groups are very important organizations that help further enlisted causes and support our communities.

I encourage each of you to engage in discussion on these topics -- healthy dialogue void of personal attacks or demeaning remarks that tear us down as Chiefs. The goal is the preservation of the professionalism and dedication that define us as Chief Master Sergeants. We must be sure that every thing we do clearly defines us as leaders with a single focus - propelling the greatest Air Force on the planet - and always, caring for, leading and representing our magnificent enlisted force to the absolute best of our ability; our Airmen deserve nothing less.

As always, thanks for what you do everyday; I look forward to what we will accomplish together in 2005, and beyond.



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Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force