



## "Footprints"



"We will be known forever by the tracks we leave."

We try very hard to keep you informed of the services we provide to Native American Veterans and their families on reservations in North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming and Montana. The work we do to provide necessity items like food, blankets, and firewood are our main focus. However, sometimes the services take a different turn.



This chilly morning in November I took part in the Wreaths Across America, placing wreaths on veterans' graves at the National Cemetery near Sturgis, South Dakota. When I left home it was 27 degrees. The snow was all gone from the week before. I drove the 30 miles from my house to the cemetery where I met several other volunteers to place wreaths.

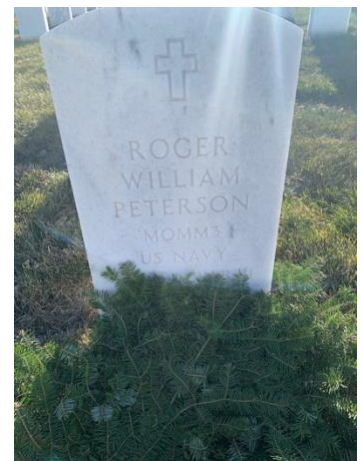
The Black Hills National Cemetery is a very picturesque location. Surrounded by the beautiful Paha Sapa (Black Hills). It is home to my parents now. They are both buried here. Someday I will be there as well.

I am humbled every time I go there. I think I spend more time looking at the thousands of headstones reading the names of the dead. I sometimes get a lump in my throat as I think of the millions of Veterans who have sacrificed so much for this country. Many gave the ultimate sacrifice.

I walked a lot today laying wreaths and reading the names. I often stop at Native American Veterans' headstones and say a few words. Today I had the honor of placing a wreath on one of my mother's brother's grave. My older sister asked if I wanted to place this one. She wanted to accompany me, but I told her I would do it alone.

As many of you know my grandmother was born on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota in 1899. She had 13 children. 4 of which were boys. All 4 of her sons, my uncles, served in WWII at the same time. My uncle Roger was a POW in Japan for 13 months near the end of the war. I only met this uncle a couple of times in my life. He rests in peace here at the foot of the beautiful Paha Sapa (Black Hills). I cannot imagine the pain and anguish my Lakota Grandmother must have endured having all 4 of her sons fighting in the Pacific in WWII. Then not knowing for months if Roger was alive or dead while he was in a Japanese Prisoner of War Camp.

I wish I had understood more in my youth. I would have liked to have had many more discussions with my uncles. Four Lakota Warriors who all **volunteered** to serve in WWII.



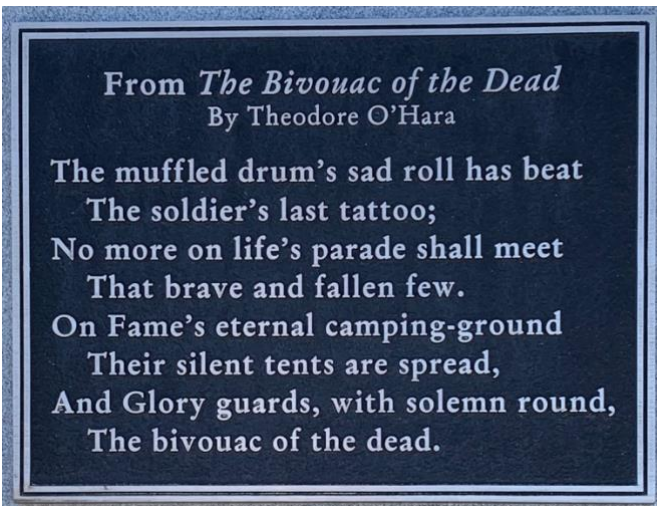


There are thousands of headstones at the cemetery. I am not sure how many will have wreaths placed this weekend. The group I work with planned to do 500. There are so many wonderful people who purchase these wreaths at \$23 a piece to have placed. Some request they be placed at some family members grave, others just want a wreath to honor a veteran who served and do not want them to be forgotten.



Near the end of the day I accompanied my sister to this section by the small chapel where I have attended several services. She had many wreaths not assigned to a specific grave. She wanted to fill this area with beautiful wreaths.

After placing dozens of wreaths myself the day was over. I walked around the cemetery. I came across this monument. I thought it was a fitting end to this update on who we are and what we do.



I copied the message of the memorial so you can read it easier.

Godspeed and Always Faithful,

Clay  
Major USMCR