

# FUTURE OF NURSING™

## Campaign for Action

AT THE CENTER TO CHAMPION NURSING IN AMERICA



### Building a Culture of Health for Native Americans Through Nursing Education, Culture and Community Engagement

#### Webinar Summary January 29, 2019

This webinar highlights a Native American nurse leading a Culture of Health in Native American communities. Marcella LeBeau, RN (ret.) is a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux tribe who served in World War II as a lieutenant in the Army Nurse Corps. She is an advocate for Native American health, language and culture. Her many contributions to her Indian communities, state, and country are featured in this webinar.

#### Objectives

1. Discuss LaBeau's experience in WWII, her roles and leadership, and her post-war experience serving the needs of Native Americans.
2. Discuss current *challenges* and *strategies* for advancement in Native American health.

#### Presenters



**Winifred V. Quinn, PhD, FAANP (H),**  
Director, Advocacy & Consumer Affairs,  
Center to Champion Nursing in America



**Lisa Martin, PhD, RN, PHN, AHN-BC,**  
Immediate Past President, National Alaska  
Native American Indian Nurses Association  
and Associate Professor, St. Catherine  
University

Across the country, there is a movement to advance the field of nursing so that all Americans have access to high quality, patient-centered care in a health care system where nurses contribute as essential partners in achieving success. This national level [Future of Nursing: Campaign for Action](#) is a result of the Institute of Medicine's landmark 2010 report on the [Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health](#).

The *Campaign for Action's* field-based teams, the [Action Coalitions](#), are leading this movement and are equipping themselves with knowledge gained from technical assistance provided by the Center to Champion Nursing in America (CCNA), a joint initiative of AARP, the AARP Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Such technical assistance comes in the form of webinars, face to face interactions, and other facilitated engagements with public policy leaders, content experts, consultants, and Action Coalition peers across the country.



**Sandra Littlejohn, MA, BSN, RN**, President, National Alaska Native American Indian Nurses Mdewakanton Dakota



**Regina Eddie, PhD, RN**, Assistant Professor Northern Arizona University and Diversity Consultant, Center to Champion Nursing in America



**Marcella LeBeau, RN (ret.)**, Member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Lieutenant, Army Nurse Corps

## **Presentation Summary**

Winifred Quinn, PhD, FAANP (H), introduces one of the facilitators for the webinar: Lisa Martin, PhD, RN, PHN, AHN-BC. Martin shares how the National Alaska Native American Indian Nurses Association (NANAINA) is a partner with the Future of Nursing: *Campaign for Action's* Native American Learning Collaborative and a sponsor of these series of webinars on Native American nursing.

Martin introduces the incoming president of NANAINA, Sandra Littlejohn, MA, BSN, RN, as well as the webinar facilitator, Regina Eddie, PhD, RN and reviews their biographies.

Eddie introduces the guest speaker, Marcella LeBeau, RN (ret.), who is a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and served as a lieutenant in the Army Nurse Corps during World War II. In 2018, LeBeau received an honorary doctorate in public service from South Dakota State University.

## Early Life

LeBeau begins by sharing that her great-grandfather who signed the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 was required to live on the reservation and not allowed to practice the traditions of his people. He was given an allotment of land already considered treaty land and could not leave the reservation without having a signed permit. He was no longer allowed to hunt for buffalo and received rations.

LeBeau notes some of the instances where Native lands were taken from them:

- Doctrine of Discovery
- Cherokee's being removed from their lands on the Trail of Tears
- Dawes Act
- Homestead Act
- Citizenship Act took more land.

Diabetes was not a factor in those days. But when Native Americans' way of life was taken away, like hunting, their diet changed. Now, diabetes, alcoholism, and other health issues are at epidemic proportions.

LeBeau discusses how children were required to go to boarding schools, which was traumatizing. Some of the children were severely punished because they could not speak English, and they were not allowed to speak their own language. Their hair was cut without permission. All these traumas affect the Native American people today.

LeBeau attended a seminar where Native Americans were advised to talk about their experiences and write about them. She says, "this is a way in which we can help ourselves and help us overcome some of the issues facing our reservations today."

At boarding school, LeBeau and the other children were told they could not be more than maids, secretaries, etc., and were not encouraged to further their education. Her sister became a secretary, then World War II broke out, and she was sent to Washington, D.C. While she was there, the U.S. Army began to offer nurse cadet corps training, so she joined.

### Early Career and World War II

Like her sister, LeBeau was also trained as nurse. Her first job was in a small hospital where she accepted a job offered by a patient; she worked there with a friend. She and her friend then went to Michigan; then they heard about the need for nurses in the Army and signed up for the Army Nurse Corps. She was sent to California for training. She then went to Boston and left on the USS George Washington for Liverpool, England. There she went to Wales for a few weeks, then to Leominster, England and set up a barracks hospital preparing for D-Day.

On June 7, 1944, they received their first convoy of patients, many of whom were sent back to the U.S. for further care. In August, they were ordered to cross the English Channel into France. They stayed in a cow pasture for several weeks and were told not to venture out due to possible land mines. From there, they went to Paris and witnessed the rubble caused by the Germans. In Paris, they worked at a hospital that the Americans took over from the Germans.

From there, they went to Liege, Belgium and worked in a 1,000-bed tent hospital. She was assigned to the surgical ward. Because of the war, it was a sparse Christmas, so she decorated her ward door with Christmas decorations she found at a vacated castle.

### *Wartime Stories*

- At one point during their time in Liege, they were close to an area where the Germans overtook the Americans. The people at the hospital were told to be packed and ready to be evacuated on a moment's notice. LeBeau heard the machine guns and saw flares, but the Americans recovered their line.
- Penicillin was new at that time, and there was a team that would go around every four hours to give shots. The hospital had all supplies they needed, and the patients came and went rapidly.
- One Dutch soldier who joined the U.S. Army asked LeBeau if he could be her "pin-up" boy, knowing many of the American soldiers had pin-up girls. He then put his photograph on her board.
- One time when she was on night duty, she heard a noise and saw a plane coming; it was shooting and flew over the nurses' area. Shortly after that, she saw her tent-mate and friend who brought her the shrapnel that hit their tent as she was bathing. During a reunion after the war, her friend did not remember the incident at all.
- Another time, she and a friend were in the chapel when buzz bombs were dropped in their area. She later learned that 3,000 buzz bombs hit the Liege area.
- Another buzz bomb hit the military police area in the camp as she was getting off night shift. A friend told her not to go to the area because it was very gruesome. She said to go get sleep as she would be needed that night.

### Post-War

After the war, the Army sent the nurses away for a rest period, and LeBeau and her friend went to the French Riviera. Her friend was able to go home first, and she lost contact with her. They eventually reunited in Idaho.

Years later, LeBeau and her daughter took a trip to Paris and Liege. They were looking for the plaque made to honor twenty-five men killed during the buzz bombs. Strangers came up to her and thanked her and one offered to show her around. She went to the Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery and found the plaque; only one person was not identified.

Another man offered to research where the hospital was located. He learned of the location and informed the transportation company that was situated on that spot. The company reconstructed the plaque and displayed it.

### *French Legion Medal of Honor*

LeBeau met a lady one day who provides therapy to veterans and learned about LeBeau's military history. She gave LeBeau's information to an office in Washington, D.C. when they were selecting veterans to receive the French Legion Medal of Honor, and she was one of those selected. LeBeau traveled to France to receive the honor and had a memorable trip.

Before she left, a man whose father and friend were wounded during the invasion of Paris asked her to say a silent prayer on Omaha Beach.

LeBeau concludes the presentation by reading the prayer she said that day.

### Conclusion

Eddy notes that LeBeau's story is the first she has heard of a Native American woman nurse serving and helping during World War II. Eddy's grandfather served but due to Navajo tradition did not share his story; many other stories she heard were about men. She thanks LeBeau for sharing her story.

### Questions and Answers

**Q: You acknowledged that the way of life, including diet, changed for American Indian peoples, who now have one of the highest rates of diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. You also shared how early-on you were told that the only jobs available would be a secretary or maid. But somehow, you chose to pursue higher ambitions.**

**Today, one of our challenges is getting more Native Americans interested in nursing and other health professions. For you, what inspired you to get an education and become a nurse?**

A: I can't put my finger on any one thing. I lost my mother when I was 10 years old; she had a tumor, but they couldn't do anything for her. She was such a gracious woman.

At the boarding school, we weren't supposed to be more than a secretary, but I had a father who was Irish who always said, "get a good education; no one can take that away from you." I didn't get the full education at the boarding school as they only allowed us to go to school for half of the day and made us work the other half. I think it was because of the encouragement from father.

**Q: We've been featuring different Native American nurse leaders on these webinars. Considering the challenges we face with Native American health issues and getting more students interested in nursing, what words of wisdom would you offer to Native American nurse leaders and nurses?**

A: I think nursing is one of the greatest privileges a person can have. The satisfaction you get from helping others is something you carry throughout your life. I'm grateful for the opportunity to help someone else. The need is so great in our communities now, especially after all the traumas we faced during our life.

I know of one instance when I went to St. Mary's School of Nursing and another lady from the reservation came too. They gave us a pile of textbooks, and she never came back. It must've intimidated her.

The IOM's recommendations include: the need for more advanced education of registered nurses; nurses leading innovations in health care and being appointed to decision making bodies; all nurses practicing to the full extent of their education and training; a more diverse nursing workforce and faculty; and more interprofessional collaboration among nurses, physicians, and other members of the health care team in the educational and clinical environments.

### **CCNA Contact Information**

For more information about this webinar, technical assistance questions, or questions related to the Future of Nursing: *Campaign for Action*, contact [wquinn@aarp.org](mailto:wquinn@aarp.org) at the Center to Champion Nursing in America.

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