

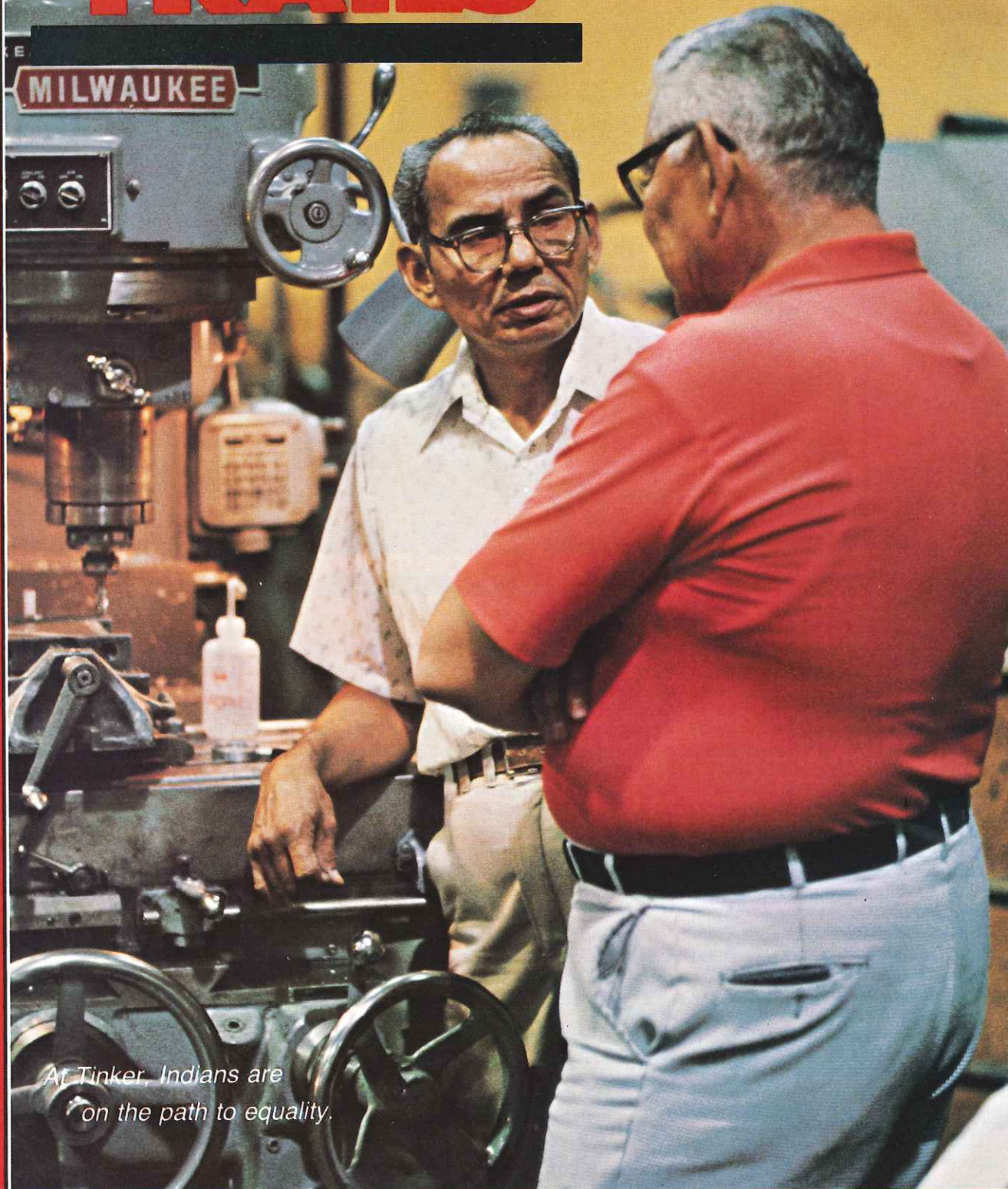
# AIRMAN

FEB/80



**TRAILS**

# TRAILS



*At Tinker, Indians are  
on the path to equality.*



American Indians have worked at Tinker AFB, Okla., since the base was founded in 1941. It's not surprising. Following the forced colonization of 67 Indian tribes in the Oklahoma Territory after the Civil War, the area became the most Indian-populated piece of land on the North American continent.

And when the territory was accepted into the Union in 1907, it entered with the name "Oklahoma," meaning "Red People" in the Choctaw tongue.

It was a fitting designation for a state that owes much of its heritage to the first Americans. One was Maj. Gen. Clarence L. Tinker, an Oklahoma-born, part Osage Indian whose bomber was apparently lost while attacking enemy ships during the Battle of Midway. The following year, the new air logistics center in Oklahoma City was named in his honor.

In the years that followed, though, few, if any, red men who followed the general into the white man's world reached his status. An example is the Tinker AFB Indian work force, which, for the most part, has been in a rut of lower-echelon jobs, grinding out airplane parts, hammering sheet metal, or pounding rivets on assembly lines.

But that is changing now. In 1972 Public Law 92261 brought the federal service under provisions of Title 7 of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. One directive under the law gave minorities a louder voice on local base councils.

Although it took five years to come to fruition, Tinker's Indian employees—now numbering close to 400 but representing just 2.3 percent of the Tinker work force—finally formed an intertribal council.

The following year, 1978, council

members asked for an Indian coordinator, and the Oklahoma City Air Logistics Center Commander, Maj. Gen. Cecil E. Fox, appointed one.

The man chosen was Clifford White-man. Not only is he the first full-time Equal Employment Opportunity Indian coordinator ever, but he's also the first Arapaho to earn a college degree, which he did on the GI Bill at the University of Oklahoma after World War II. Today, at age 56, he has 30 years' federal service. And he's seen a lot.

"The only opportunity for Indians when I was a young man was to serve in the military," he said. "After the war, we changed over to the white man's ways to work in his factories. But it was all new to us and we didn't know the rules. So Indians not only faced discrimination, but we had a lot to learn, too.

"That's why I have to help educate my

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by Sgt. Craig Pugh • photos by TSgt. Bob Wickley, AAVS



people. I tell young Indians that if they shoot for a college degree and learn the rules management goes by, they'll have a chance to change the system."

Clifford goes about his educational process by making regular trips to the Indian Center downtown, a prime source for the Tinker work force. There, he maintains a continuous dialogue with those enrolled in adult education classes. He also visits the local junior college, vocational-technical schools, and attends the numerous pow-wows held in the city and surrounding counties. And always he talks.

"I'm a recruiter of sorts and because I'm an Indian, other Indians listen to me," he said. Because of past experiences, many Indians shun and mistrust whites, according to Clifford, who takes some indirect hits because of his position.

"The militant Indians in the civilian sector tell him, 'OK, Cliff, you moved up there with the white folks and now all you know is how to talk like them,'" said Tinker EEO Director Bob Simmons. "And Cliff has to deal with that. Even

your family sometimes questions your motives in this business. When you have people barking at you all the time, you have to develop a tough hide to deal with the issues. You have to know what your values are."

Clifford Whiteman does, and he handles the doubting Indians head-on. "I don't back down," he said. "I tell the misbelievers that in spite of what they think is the truth, the fact is that Tinker hires qualified Indians. And that's a big part of my job—to find them."

The satisfaction comes, according to Clifford, when those who gave him a hard time one week call him the next, wanting information on how to get hired at Tinker. "About that time," he chuckled, "they realize I'm for real, and the program is too."

Air Force employment opportunities for Indians are very real, indeed. The track record shows the Air Force leads most federal agencies in minority hiring, and one of the people putting punch in the program is Maj. Gen. Fox, the Air Logistics Center commander.

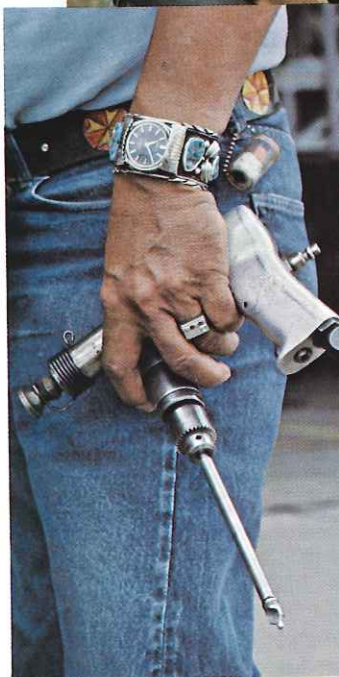
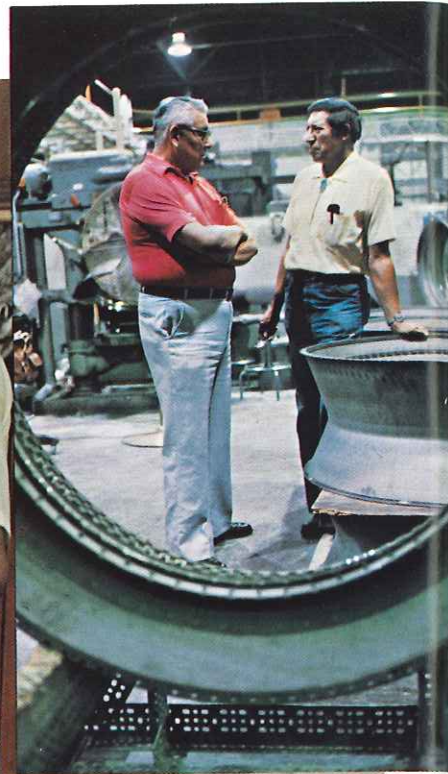
"Quite simply," he explained, "we're providing a service that society desires. With a 16,500-member work force, Tinker is the largest single-site employer in Oklahoma. We are a microcosm of our society. To hold the loyalty of our homogeneous population, we have to maintain a high, production-oriented morale. So it becomes incumbent upon managers to incorporate EEO practices into the management process, because they're providing a service people expect.

"And it works. Both sides benefit. It's not a matter of who comes out on top, or which side wins—it's just common sense."

One way Maj. Gen. Fox blends EEO

**OPPOSITE: Clifford Whiteman often travels to tribal pow-wows and other gatherings to inform Indians of work opportunities at Tinker. Here he discusses Air Force jobs with a Kiowa tribal director.**

**ABOVE: A native American in tribal dress during a celebration.**



objectives into the Tinker mission is to ensure that minorities and women are considered for promotion and training opportunities when they are discussed during staff management review boards. If a promotion does come about and a minority contender wasn't chosen, the selecting boss must explain to the general why he or she didn't select that person for the position.

"I'm not saying that women or minorities have to be selected," emphasized the general. "I just want the bosses to

know that if minorities and women aren't selected, that decision has to be based on the right reasons. We still select the most qualified people for the job. But there are pockets of resistance here in which a minority or a woman—even if qualified—would never get considered. And that's what our EEO program prevents—discrimination."

"We don't want a handout," said Tinker's intertribal council president, Sam Horse. "We just want fairness. I grew up the hard way and I know a lot of white

people did too. It's a misconception to think Indians want special treatment. We just want to be considered for promotions like everybody else.

"We know we'll get what we work for, and we are realistic about it. Fortunately, the government has given us the opportunity to get ahead now. And Indians, especially the younger generation, are responding.

"That's why we're glad to have Clifford," Horse continued. "We needed someone to carry the message to the

new crop entering the work force. And we 'old-timers' need representation too. If we can sit down with management and discuss our problems—bring the inner things out—then we will have a better Tinker work force. That's why the intertribal council wanted an Indian coordinator. Clifford helps us carry the load."

Among Whiteman's duties are lining up speakers for the tribal council's monthly meetings and keeping the Indians informed on latest job developments. He also put together American Indian briefings that are shown to visiting Logistics Command managers as well as local division chiefs.

Additionally, when each Tinker directorate sends in its EEO miniplans, Whiteman checks the Indian-related portions against census data, thus ensuring local compliance with Air Force and federal regulations. When the miniplans are consolidated into the annual Tinker EEO action plan, Whiteman has the satisfaction of knowing the Indian voice has been heard.

That in itself represents a major breakthrough for those trying to aid in the Indian effort. Their early attempts to organize a tribal council began in 1965, then foundered. A resurrection was attempted in 1970, but also failed. Even today, of the nearly 400 Indians employed at Tinker only 32 are intertribal council members. That's less than 10 percent.

"Maybe it's our culture," pondered Sam Horse. "Indians are quiet and reserved. If they have something on their minds, they won't tell you. I don't know what it is," he said, trying to define the mental and emotional complexities of his brothers.

"If one of us gets in a position to do some good, the other Indians won't rally behind the leader. Maybe it's jealousy. Here again, we're back to culture."

Whiteman added to the attempt at self-definition. "A lot of Indians don't know where to go with their problems. They keep them inside . . . they get frustrated. And then one day, they're walking out the gate.

"That's why if Indian employees have a problem, I want them to come see me. After all, they created my job. I won't send them down the hall to see so-and-so. I deal with the supervisors—the people who run the show. And I honestly think Tinker Indians are beginning to realize we have clout."

Creek Indian William Yardly Jr., a Tinker machinist with a college degree, realizes the change. "Ten years ago, a lot of Indians couldn't speak English," he said. "But the educational process has

really caught up with us. And we are slowly getting more clout.

"But one thing we have to do," he cautioned, "and I have taught my children this: we are Indians living in a white man's world. It's a fact we have to accept. And when we do, we'll get even more clout."

Other Indians share Yardly's assessment, but with a more guarded optimism. Full-blooded Choctaw Charles Brown, a machinist with 25 years on the Tinker AFB work force, said the intertribal council and the Indian coordinator position are "more like tokenism." But he, too, can see where progress is being made.

"Opportunity is much better now than when I was young, that's for sure," he said. "Today we have channels. That's where Clifford helps us. As long as he comes down on the assembly lines and gets acquainted with all the Indians, we'll make headway."

As evidence of the upward mobility of Tinker's Indians, five are GS-14s and five are GS-13s. And they were all hired because of high qualifications.

"Affirmative action treats people only on the basis of performance," said EEO chief Bob Simmons. "Either you have the skills or you don't. It's not personal. Remember, the Air Force has a profit/loss statement to deal with, too, just like any other business."

The dollars and cents problems of Air Force business became evident when an Office of Personnel Management study revealed that the average EEO complaint costs the Air Force thousands of dollars. Thus, just a few such complaints can prevent the construction of new facilities or the purchase of needed test and office equipment.

That's why EEO directors are more management-oriented now, according to Simmons. "We have to save the Air Force money just like everybody else," he said. "And we can't do that if we hand jobs to Indians just because their skin is red. And that goes for other minorities too."

Simmons' remarks don't mean EEO offices have given up on their original charter to redress discriminatory situations. What they do mean is that the whole EEO business has entered into a second evolution, and the people running the program realize it.

"Look at it this way," said Simmons, "and you will understand how we've gotten away from the initial social science concept. Cliff's an Indian, but he represents Tinker Air Force Base. He's not going to do us any good if he's hacked off at the way the Air Force runs things.



**OPPOSITE (clockwise):** Whiteman reviews Indian hiring program with Bob Simmons, Tinker AFB Equal Employment Opportunity chief, and Air Logistics Center Commander, Maj. Gen. Cecil E. Fox. Getting around to discuss jobs with Charles Brown and others is an important part of Whiteman's role in increasing Indian employment. During a break in a tribal celebration Whiteman informs Terry Tsoodle of work opportunities at Tinker. Indian jewelry is popular among Tinker workers.

**ABOVE:** Senior Indians wear World War II medals proudly at tribal ceremonies. This Kiowa man won the Bronze Star during the war.

"That's one of the ambiguities about being an EEO coordinator; you have to deal with the positive aspects of federal service, in spite of overwhelming statistics from the past showing people don't necessarily fare well just because they belong to a minority group.

"You can't run around hollering 'bigot!' That's why we have a new breed of EEO coordinators like Clifford. They are dealing with the positive aspects of moving their people forward—within the system."

Clifford Whiteman understands the challenge. "I'm older now," he reflected, "and I understand things better. Because I've spent my adult years working for the government, I know how to change the system for my people. And now that I'm in a position to do some good, it all hits pretty close to home."

Whiteman remembers sitting on his grandmother's knee as a child, listening to stories. She told how her ancestors chipped frozen deer and buffalo from huge sheets of ice—that would be the glaciers that covered the continent centuries ago.

She talked of the men with the "iron hats"—Francisco Coronado's Spanish expedition through the southern plains in 1540.

And Whiteman's grandfather told him as a youth how he used to hunt deer with bow and arrow in the forest, which downtown Oklahoma City now occupies.

To American Indians—the original Americans—there is this heritage. And there is a future. "We want very passionately to build again," Whiteman said, "that which was taken from us in the last hundred years."

Now they have a chance.



**INSET:** Tinker Intertribal Council President Sam Horse, a GS-9 production manager, talks to young Conrad Bointy during Kiowa festivities.

**RIGHT:** Although the old days are remembered and celebrated, Indians today are riding toward a brighter future and are more in control of their destinies.

