

# ***CHOCTAW COURAGE***

During the summer of 2009, he moved from his farm in Amelia County, Virginia to live near his daughter in Henrico County. A decorated WWII veteran, the 90 year old man gained national attention when the homeowner's association (HOA) of Sussex Square ordered him to remove a 21' flagpole he had erected to fly the American flag. He awoke every morning at 6:00 a.m. to hoist Old Glory, saluted the flag, and every evening at 5:00 p.m. he took it down. The old veteran stood his ground and refused to take down the flag. His name was Van T. Barfoot.



Representing the HOA, the law firm of Coates and Davenport threaten Barfoot with legal action if he did not cave to the HOA

demand. Barfoot's son-in-law got a local talk radio show, *Elliot in the Morning*, involved in the dispute, after which Fox News and other news outlets ran with the story nationally. Ironically, the bylaws of the HOA did not prohibit flagpoles, yet they ruled Barfoot could not fly the American flag "for aesthetic reasons."

Aesthetic reasons. By definition, the HOA made a legal case out of their conviction that Barfoot's American flag distracted from the beauty of their snooty neighborhood. I've never heard or read one story of the American flag diverting from the 'beauty' of Sulphur Island (Iwo Jima) nor distracting from the rubble of the Twin Towers. Nevertheless, under intense public pressure, including both Virginia U.S. Senators and White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs, the HOA abandoned their demand in less than a week. End of story. Not exactly.

If anyone, including the HOA, had done their homework, Van T. Barfoot had earned every right in the world to fly the American flag, a standard he had fought for and defended with his life in WWII, the Korea War, and Vietnam, plus in the process earned the Medal of Honor in Europe and a Purple Heart in Korea. And this is his story.

Barfoot was born in Edinburg, Mississippi on June 15, 1919. His grandmother was a full-blood Native American Choctaw Indian, yet his parents never enrolled their son as part-Choctaw hence he was not a legitimate member of the Choctaw Nation.

Barfoot enlisted in the Army in 1940. In December of 1941, he was promoted to sergeant and eventually hooked up with the

157<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to participate in several amphibious landings, including the invasion of Sicily, the invasion of mainland Italy, and the lengthy and lethal landing at Anzio Beach. May of 1944: Barfoot, now a technical sergeant, and his unit hunkered down near a little settlement in southern Italy called Carano. From there, Barfoot led patrols to scout the German positions.

On May 23, 1944, Barfoot's company was ordered to attack, yet Barfoot asked permission to lead a squad into enemy territory since he had already scouted the German positions, knew the terrain, and had knowledge of a path through the minefield in front of the German positions. His request was granted, and Van T. Barfoot entered American military and Native American Indian history. His Medal of Honor citation tells the story.

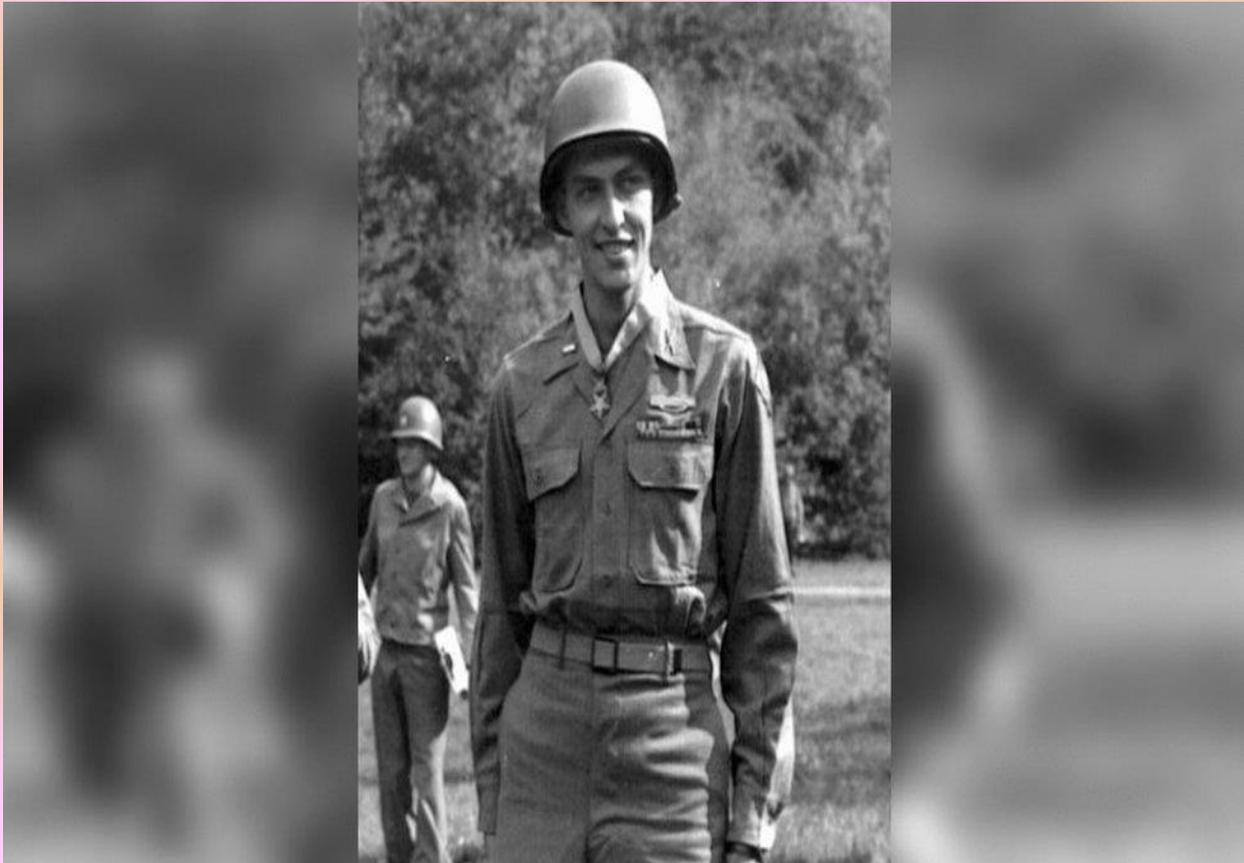


*For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty on 23 May 1944, near Carano, Italy. With his platoon heavily engaged during an assault against forces well entrenched on commanding ground, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Barfoot (then Tech. Sgt.) moved off alone upon the enemy left flank. He crawled to the proximity of 1 machine gun nest and made a direct hit on it with a hand grenade, killing 2 and wounding 3 Germans. He*

*continued along the German defense line to another machine gun emplacement, and with his tommy gun killed 2 and captured 3 soldiers. Members of another enemy machine gun crew then abandoned their position and gave themselves up to Sgt. Barfoot. Leaving the prisoners for his support squad to pick up, he proceeded to mop up positions in the immediate area, capturing more prisoners and bringing his total count to 17. Later that day, after he had reorganized his men and consolidated the newly captured ground, the enemy launched a fierce armored counterattack directly at his platoon positions. Securing a bazooka, Sgt. Barfoot took up an exposed position directly in front of 3 advancing Mark VI Tiger tanks. From a distance of 75 yards his first shot destroyed the track of the leading tank, effectively disabling it, while the other 2 tanks changed direction toward the flank. As the crew of the disabled tank dismounted, Sgt. Barfoot killed 3 of them with his tommy gun. He continued onward into enemy terrain and destroyed a recently abandoned German fieldpiece with a demolition charge placed in the breach. While returning to his platoon position, Sgt. Barfoot, though greatly fatigued by his Herculean efforts, assisted 2 of his seriously wounded men 1,700 yards to a positions of safety. Sgt. Barfoot's extraordinary heroism, demonstration of magnificent valor, and aggressive determination in the face of pointblank fire are a perpetual inspiration to his fellow soldiers.*

Sixty five years later, Medal of Honor recipient Colonel Van T. Barfoot, ret, was told to take down the American flag because

Old Glory distracted from the beauty of the neighborhood. A 90 year old decorated war veteran of three conflicts once again refused to surrender his honor, duty, country.



By September of 1944, Barfoot was in the Rhone Valley when he received word that the Medal of Honor was to be awarded for his actions near Carano, Italy. Barfoot requested the award presentation be in the field so his soldiers could attend. Lt. Gen Alexander Patch presented the Medal of Honor to Lt. Barfoot on September 28, 1944 in Epinal, France.

A native of then-segregated Mississippi, Barfoot raised racist's eyebrows when he commented on African-Americans in 1945. Democratic Senator and Ku Klux Klan member from Mississippi



Theodore G. Bilbo, asked Barfoot if he had much trouble with black soldiers during the war. Bilbo was stunned by Barfoot's answer, "I found out after I did some fighting in this war that the colored boys fight just as good as the white boys...I've changed my idea a lot about colored people since I got into this war and so have a lot of other boys from the south."

This heroic warrior, a patriotic man of honor and principle, fell in front of his home and suffered a skull fracture and bleeding in the brain. He passed from this life two days later on March 2, 2012 at the age of 92.

Native American Indian activist, Russel Means, an Oglala Lakota Sioux, best known for his starring role in the blockbuster movie *The Last of the Mohicans* as Chingachgook, the adopted father of co-star Daniel Day Lewis's character Hawkeye, stated his view of the American flag as, "*The red on the flag stands for the blood of the people split in the claiming of this land. The blue stands for the coldness of the white man's heart. The white stands for the white supremacy that this country was founded on. This is what I see when I look at the flag of this nation.*"

An activist Oglala Lakota Sioux demonstrated his *disrespect* for Old Glory with words; a Choctaw woman's grandson displayed

his *respect* for the American flag with bravery and confidence.  
His name was Van T. Barfoot.