

## Museum Notes

for the week of November 7-13, 2021

by Kristen Parrott, curator

The month of November is Native American Heritage Month, and November 11 is Veterans Day. These two commemorations come together in the person of Joshua Sanford. Joshua was a decorated World War II fighter pilot. He was also the son of Herbert Sanford of the Seneca (or Onondowahgah) tribe of New York, and Maud Decorah, of the Ho-Chunk nation. Joshua lived in Hillsboro for many years and is buried in Mt. Vernon Cemetery in Hillsboro.

In the course of learning more about Joshua Sanford, I've found a lot of conflicting information, mainly regarding specific details rather than the overall course of his life. I've tried to confirm all that I've written here, but know from the outset that there may well be mistakes.

Joshua Alfred Decorah Sanford was born in January 1919, near Friendship in Adams County. His parents separated when he was very young. He had three older half brothers, Lawrence, Stephen, and Arthur Kirkwood, who lived with their mother, but Joshua lived mainly with his dad. He grew up in the area, and census records indicate that he was living in Hillsboro by 1935.

A 1946 *Wisconsin State Journal* article says that Joshua graduated from Viroqua High School in 1936, but he is not on the list of graduates, nor in the yearbook, nor in the alumni index. There is no record of him or his family having lived in Viroqua. There are also no graduation records for him at Richland Center or Hillsboro high schools, two other likely schools. We are still researching this – please contact the museum if you have more information.

After high school graduation, Sanford worked in Hillsboro for Willis Hofmeister, at Willis' Radio and Electric Service. He furthered his education and experience by taking a University of Wisconsin extension course in order to become a radio technician. This provided a good background for him when he decided to enlist in the army in November 1940. He was inspired in part by the military service of his four uncles who had been scouts during World War I.

Joshua initially served with the 50th Field Artillery and was stationed at Ft. Sheridan, IL. He was chosen to be trained as a pilot in the U.S. Army Air Force, and attended advanced flying school at Spence Field, GA. He was commissioned in January 1943, and was sent to China to serve in the 75<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron of the famed "Flying Tigers", the 23<sup>rd</sup> Fighter Group, 14<sup>th</sup> Air Force. Many years later, Joshua was awarded the China War Memorial Medal, posthumously.

During his military career, Sanford rose to the rank of captain, flew about 100 missions, and received many awards, including two Distinguished Flying Crosses, two Air Medals, and a Purple Heart. He was seriously wounded, and suffered from those wounds for the rest of his life.

Four years after the war ended, Joshua, now living again in Hillsboro, helped to found a veterans group, the Wisconsin Winnebago Veterans. "Winnebago" was a name used at that time for the Ho-Chunk. Veterans of World Wars I and II formed the group in Tomah, and Joshua was chosen to serve as the vice-president.

Next week we'll look a little more at Sanford's post-war, civilian life.