

## THE CODE TALKERS

The use of American Indians as 'Code Talkers' was not new to the U.S. Military prior to WWII. During WWI both the Cherokee and Choctaw languages were utilized for coded messages. Cherokee was the first Indian language used to transmit a coded message. This was done by the American 30th Infantry Division serving alongside the British during the Second Battle of the Somme'. According to the Division Signal Officer, this took place in September 1918 while the Americans were under British command.

The second Native American Indian language used was Choctaw. They helped the American Expeditionary Force win several key battles in the Meuse-Argonne Campaign in France, during the final big German push of the war. The Americans were virtually surrounded and the Germans were breaking every coded message they sent. When Captain Lawrence overheard two of the Choctaw Indians in the battalion talking in their native tongue, he was hit with an idea to use their language as a code. He gathered all the Choctaw speaking Indians and began using them to send messages to test this theory. The Germans, who had tapped into the phone lines, were "going nuts" trying to break this "new code." In just a few short hours the tide had turned and the Germans were forced to retreat.

The Comanche language was also used in WWII but only in the European Campaign. Fourteen Comanche Code Talkers took part in the Invasion of Normandy, and continued to serve in the 4th Infantry Division until Germany surrendered.

There were other Indian languages used but none as widely effective as the Navajo (Dine'). They are the largest Native American tribe living in the Southwest. Their language was only spoken on the Navajo lands. This meant that very few knew of the language. Its syntax and tonal qualities, not to mention dialects, make it unintelligible to anyone without extensive exposure and training. One estimate indicates that at the outbreak of World War II fewer than 30 non-Navajos, none of them Japanese, could understand the language. This made it a perfect language for the 'Code Talkers'. Certain English military words were not used by the Navajo. This meant that they had to incorporate some new phrases to describe them. A pen was known as an 'ink stick' and a 'potatoe' was used for a grenade. These abbreviated terms are still used by the military today.

The Navajo Code Talkers took part in every assault the U.S. Marines conducted from 1942 to 1945. At Iwo Jima, Major Howard Connor, 5th Marine Division signal officer, had six Navajo Code Talkers working around the clock during the first two days of the battle. These six sent and received over 800 messages, all without error. Connor later stated, "Were it not for the Navajos, the Marines would never have taken Iwo Jima." The Navajo Code Talkers were commended for their skill, speed and accuracy accrued throughout the war.

As the war progressed, additional words were added to the code and incorporated program-wide. In other instances, informal short-cut code words were devised for a particular campaign and not disseminated beyond that area of operation. To ensure a consistent use of code terminologies throughout the Pacific Theater, representative Code Talkers of each of the U.S. Marine Divisions met in Hawaii to discuss shortcomings in the code, incorporate new terms into the system, and update their code books.

Although the Japanese were very skilled at breaking codes, they could not break the code of the Navajo language.

It is said by high military officers that World War II might have had a different outcome without the help of the Code Talkers. They were also used in Korea and shortly after the beginning of the Vietnam War. It was then the use of the Code Talkers ended.

It wasn't until Sept of 1972 that the Navajos were first honored by their country. In 1982, the Code Talkers were given a Certificate of Recognition by U.S. President Ronald Reagan, who also named August 14 "Navajo Code Talkers Day."

June 8, 2000 Update

Navajo Code Talkers Honored After 56 Years.

The Associated Press reported that the U.S. Senate had unanimously approved a proposal that would grant Congressional Gold Medals to the original 29 Navajo Code Talkers who served during World War II.

July, 2001

Twenty-nine Native Americans were finally honored by Congress for ancient language skills that helped the United States win World War II. President Bush personally presented the Congressional Gold Medal to four surviving Code Talkers (the fifth living Code Talker was not able to attend) at a ceremony held in the Capitol Rotunda in Washington, DC. Gold medals were presented to the families of the 24 Code Talkers no longer living.

September 17, 2007

18 Choctaw Code Talkers were posthumously awarded the Texas Medal of Valor from the Adjutant General of the State of Texas for their World War I service.

December 13, 2007

H. R. 4544, the Code Talker Recognition Act, was introduced to the House of Representatives. This act recognizes every Code Talker who served in the United States military with a Congressional Gold Medal for his tribe and a silver medal duplicate to each Code Talker, including eight Meskwakis.

## EXTRA EXTRA READ ALL ABOUT IT.

The reason Army helicopters are named after native tribes will make you smile or cry.

<https://www.wearethemighty.com/popular/the-reason-army-helicopters-are-named-after-native-tribes-will-make-you-smile/#:~:text=The%20Army's%20helicopters%20have%20a,which%20has%20since%20been%20rescinded.>