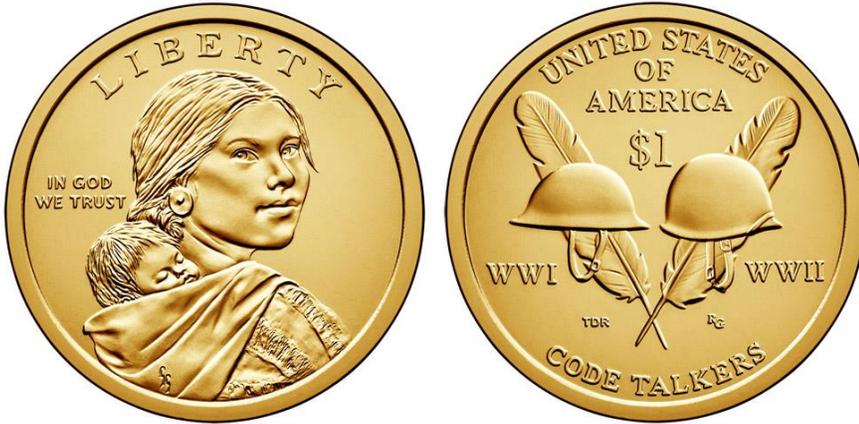


Don't overlook the overlooked



I grew up in Muskogee, Oklahoma the heart of the Five Civilized Tribes country. I went to school with Cherokee and Creek Native Americans. In School we studied Oklahoma and Muskogee history which covered a lot of information on Native American tribes. I was told for years that my great-great grandmother had walked the Trail of Tears. I thought I knew a lot about Native Americans.

I had missed a very important part of that story.

In the past few years, I have learned that missing story.

I learned about the Native American Code Talkers! Thanks to the United States Mint.

Not that I had never heard the term code talkers before. Most older Americans are familiar with the Native American Code Talkers from the 2002 movie “Windtalkers”. The movie depicted a US Marine Navajo Code Talker.

Some may even remember a movie from 1959 “Never So Few” in which Charles Bronson played a part as a Navajo Code Talker. Both movies leave viewers – at least they did me - with the idea that code talkers were all Navajo.

That is what I thought until I began looking at the Code Talker Medals made by the United States Mint.

Navajos were not the only code talkers or even the first code talkers.

Overlooked and mostly forgotten for 55 years – some as many as 80 years, in 2008 the US Government authorized Congressional Gold Medals for 34 Native American tribes that served as code talkers in both World War I and World War II.

In 2016 Native American dollar coin (illustrated at the top of this article) was issued to honor all Code Talkers as well. The only coin honoring the Code Talkers.

The first code talkers were 19 Native Americans from the Choctaw nation of Oklahoma, recruited into the US Army in 1918. Their duty was to communicate – in their native language for the Army in the field. Worldwide fewer than 20,000 people spoke the Choctaw language and most of it was never written down. This was a “code” the Germans could never break.



When WWI ended those men went back to their homes and seldom spoke of their work in the war. "It is not Choctaw belief to talk about your own achievements, it's up to others to praise you," says Nuchi Nashoba, president of the Choctaw Code Talkers Association. "The code talkers would not have told many stories about themselves, they regarded what they had done as just doing their duty. When my great grandfather was interviewed for a local publication after he returned from the war, he simply said, 'I went to France, I saw the country and I came back alive.' Just that."¹

Five other Native American Tribes were used in Americans from the Cherokee, Cheyenne, Comanche, also WWI code talkers. There were at least two from US Citizens at the time, but they did not hesitate to

Shortly after the United States became involved Native Americans as communicators was revived by the first called in WWII, were the Navajos, as the war went other tribes were used in service of the US Armed forces

The Code Talkers program was kept secret by the program was officially declassified. In 1989, the Comanche Code Talkers the Chevalier of the National Five Comanches served as Code Talkers in WWI and Comanches landed on Utah Beach in 1944.⁴



Chevalier of the National Order of Merit

WWI as code talkers as well. Native Osage and Yankton Sioux tribes were each tribe. Native Americans were not serve.

in World War II, the idea of using Marines and spread to all services. The on, more Native Americans form 33 around the world.

the US government until 1968, when French government awarded the Order of Merit, a very high honor². seventeen in WWII. Fourteen

Finally, in 2000, the United States Congress passed legislation to honor the Navajo Code Talkers and provided them with special gold and silver Congressional Medals. The gold medals were for the original 29 Navajos that developed the code, and the silver medals for those that served later in the program. A statement in the Navajo language on the back of the medals translates to: "With the Navajo language they defeated the enemy."



Navajo Medals

Seven years later The Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-420) was passed requiring the Secretary of the Treasury to strike Congressional Medals in recognition of the dedication and valor of all Native American code talkers to the U.S. Armed Services during World War I and World War II - 33 tribes.

On November 20, 2013, in Emancipation Hall at the U.S. Capitol, 33 tribes were recognized for the dedication and valor of Native American code talkers to the U.S. Armed Services during World Wars I and II. Of the tribes recognized, 25 were presented with their Congressional Gold Medals.

Under the Act, unique gold medals are struck for each Native American tribe that had a member who served as a code talker. Silver duplicate medals are presented to each code talker still living, their next of kin, or other personal representatives. Bronze duplicate medals were to be made for sale to the public.

Each medal contains an image of a code talker in action, most with a tribal image in the background on the obverse (heads).

Obverse Meskwake Medal



The reverse of each medal contains an image unique to the tribe or nation the medal honors with an inscription relating the war or wars the tribe served in.

Reverse Pueblo of Acoma Medal



The original gold medals were awarded to the few Code Talkers still living in the 2000's and to representatives of the respective tribes. Seven sculptors and 12 designers have created the 31 medals minted to date. Two other designers/engravers created the Navajo medal 8 years earlier.

The collectable medals available from the US Mint today are bronze replicas of the original gold medals. Copies of the original medals are available in both 1.5-inch and 3-inch bronze. 32 medals are listed now on the Mint website. Two additional medals will be released at a future date.



Collectors interested in Military history or Native American history, Code Talker Medals are a set that is well worth considering. They are inexpensive, \$20, even the large 3-inch medals are not especially expensive (\$160), and they will bring the last 100 years of American military history to life as you hold them in your hand. Code Talker Medals may never increase in value, but the stories they hold make them invaluable.

In 2016 it was believed only 10-12 code talkers were still living. It is believed the last code talker, Navajo, Marine, David Patterson Sr. died in October 2017⁵ in Rio Rancho, New Mexico, at the age of 94. It is not known absolutely because of the long-kept secrecy of the code talkers program.

Anyone interested in additional details on individual medals should visit the mint website, <https://www.usmint.gov/learn/coin-and-medal-programs/medals/native-american-code-talkers>.

Numerous websites can be found that tell stories of individual code-talkers and the tribes they are a member of simply by googling "code talkers".

A short video by a Navajo code talker is viewable at <https://youtu.be/QmiqnAQTTCI>.

Medal collectors are numismatists who collect exnumia, items other than money.

References:

1. <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-26963624>
2. <http://www.nmai.si.edu/education/codetalkers/html/chapter7.html>
3. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/navajo-code-talker-david-patterson-dies_us_59dc9464e4b00377980b7249
4. Personal conversation with Lanny Asepermy, Comanche Indian Veterans Association

5. <http://www.historynet.com/world-war-ii-navajo-code-talkers.htm>
6. Prices included are as of March 20, 2022.

The Code Talkers Congressional Medals

- Cherokee Nation
- Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe
- Choctaw Nation
- Comanche Nation
- Crow Creek Sioux Tribe
- Crow Nation
- Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribe
- Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes
- Ho-Chunk Nation
- Hopi Tribe
- Kiowa Tribe
- Menominee Nation
- Meskwaki Nation
- Muscogee (Creek) Nation
- Oglala Sioux Tribe
- Oneida Nation
- Osage Nation
- Pawnee Nation
- Ponca Tribe
- Pueblo of Acoma Tribe
- Pueblo of Laguna Tribe
- Rosebud Sioux Tribe
- Santee Sioux Nation
- Seminole Nation
- Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate (Sioux) Tribe
- St. Regis Mohawk Tribe
- Standing Rock Sioux Tribe
- Tlingit Tribe
- Tonto Apache Tribe
- White Mountain Apache Tribe
- Yankton Sioux Tribe

Two additional tribes are eligible and will receive their Congressional Gold Medals at a future date. They are:

- Lower Brule Sioux Tribe
- Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes

(List is from [Code Talkers Recognition Congressional Medals Program | U.S. Mint \(usmint.gov\)](#) March 20, 2022.)