

Today (March 27) marks the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. The 69th Montana Legislature is honoring that date with Senate Joint Resolution No. 20. SJ No. 20 which recognizes the end of World War II and Montana's veterans who served during that war. Over 75,000 Montanans served with distinction. Montana's 163rd Infantry Division, 41st Sunset Infantry Division, also known as the Fighting Junglers, included over 230 Native Americans, representing eight tribals nations located in Montana. Kept as a national secret for decades after the war, we are now learning of the significant contribution some of these veterans played as Code Talkers, who used their native languages for communications in support of military operations. Members of the Crow, Assiniboine, Sioux, and Fort Peck tribes conveyed information that stymied German and Japanese troops with efficient coded messages.

The following articles further describe the members of this elite group and celebrate their venerable part in the Allies' victory over German and Japan.

1 SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 20

2 INTRODUCED BY M. CUFFE, E. BYRNE

3

4 A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF
5 MONTANA RECOGNIZING THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF WORLD WAR II AND MONTANA'S
6 VETERANS OF THAT WAR.

7

8 WHEREAS, Montana's 163rd Infantry Regiment, 41st Sunset Infantry Division, know to the world as the
9 Fighting Jungleers, was called to active duty on September 16, 1940, for 1 year of training; and

10 WHEREAS, on December 7, 1941, the United States came under attack by Japanese forces at Pearl
11 Harbor and locations throughout the Pacific, with the United States declaring war on December 8, 1941, and
12 subsequently declaring war on Germany and Italy; and

13 WHEREAS, the largest ever mobilization of American power took place, ultimately calling up over 15
14 million U.S. men and women to serve from 1941 to 1946. Over 75,000 Montanans served as a key part of that
15 force and over 6,000 Montana women volunteered to serve in the various military services and auxiliary
16 services in World War II, including the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), Women's Army Corps (WAC),
17 Army Nurse Corps (ANC), United States Navy Reserve (women's reserve), Women Accepted For Volunteer
18 Emergency Service (WAVES), Women's Reserve of the Coast Guard (SPARS), Women Airforce Service Pilots
19 (WASP), Public Health Service (PHS), and the Cadet Nurse Corps (CNC); and

20 WHEREAS, many thousands of Indian men and women of Montana served in all major elements of the
21 United States military during World War II with honor and great patriotism. They served as infantryman, code
22 talkers, air crewman, nurses, and many other roles throughout all branches of the United States military. The
23 163rd Infantry Regiment had over 230 Indians as members, representing the eight tribal nations located in
24 Montana, all of whom fought with distinction as Jungleers; and

25 WHEREAS, the 163rd Infantry Regiment, Montana National Guard, and 41st Infantry Division served
26 with distinction at Fort Lewis and various locations on the West Coast of the United States until their departure
27 to Australia in April 1942 as a part of the Southwest Pacific Command, going on to fight in the Pacific Theater of
28 World War II; and

1 WHEREAS, Montana's 163rd Infantry Regiment was recognized as the first U.S. unit to defeat Imperial
2 Japanese forces at the Battle of Sanananda, Papua New Guinea, in January 1943. They were subsequently
3 recognized by the 28th Montana Legislative Assembly through resolution and were the inspiration for a famous
4 painting by Irwin "Shorty" Shope in April 1943; and

5 WHEREAS, the 163rd Infantry Regiment served in the Pacific Theater in three major campaigns: the
6 Papuan Campaign in 1943, where they won epic battles at Sanananda, Gona, and Kumusi River; the New
7 Guinea Campaign in 1944, where they won the battles of Aitape, Wadke, and "Bloody" Biak; and the Southern
8 Philippines Campaign in 1945, where they won battles at Zamboanga, Sanga-Sanga Island, Jolo, and captured
9 the key village of Calinan from seasoned Japanese land forces, stopping only because hostilities were ceased
10 due to the dropping of atomic weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. They then became an occupation
11 force on the Japanese mainland before being demobilized in Japan on January 1, 1946, and sent home after
12 over 5 years of active duty; and

13 WHEREAS, the First Special Service Force, a unique joint US-Canadian special operations force, was
14 secretly formed at Fort William Henry Harrison near Helena, Montana, in April through July 1942, to organize
15 and train for the mission known as Operation Plough; and

16 WHEREAS, the First Special Service Force went on to serve in both the Pacific Theater and the
17 European Theater, where they fought in the Aleutians Campaign 1943, the Naples-Foggia Campaign 1943-
18 1944, the Anzio Rome-Arno Campaign 1944, recognized as being the first unit into Rome on June 4, 1944, the
19 Southern France Campaign, and the Rhineland Campaign. They were inactivated December 5, 1944, at
20 Villeneuve-Loubet, France, without losing a battle and with battle casualties equivalent to 137% of its strength.
21 The members went on to serve in the 474th Infantry Regiment in Norway through the end of the European
22 conflict as well as with other historical military units such as the 45th Infantry Division; and

23 WHEREAS, Camp Rimini War Dog Reception and Training Center was established in late 1942 west of
24 Helena at a former Civilian Conservation Corps site, where over 800 dogs and their handlers trained as a part
25 of the effort to disrupt the Axis powers. Unit members would go on to acquit themselves in places along great
26 circle military air routes as search and rescue and providing specialized transport in remote areas of the
27 Northern Hemisphere; and

28 WHEREAS, the Army Air Force organized and trained bomber forces throughout Montana at such

1 locations as Great Falls, Lewistown, and Cutbank from 1941 to 1945, training personnel in the use of heavy
2 bombers that were ultimately deployed to both the European and Pacific Theaters of World War II; and

3 WHEREAS, the 7th Ferrying Command, Air Transport Command, was formed at what is now the Great
4 Falls International Airport and at what is now Malmstrom AFB, to carry out the mission of providing aircraft and
5 critical supplies to our allies over the great circle route, a critical part of global war air operation of World War II;
6 and

7 WHEREAS, specialized units such as the first all-Black airborne unit, the 555th Parachute Battalion,
8 known as the Triple Nickels, trained and served in Montana at Missoula fighting forest fires throughout Montana
9 and the Northwest; and

10 WHEREAS, the people of Montana overwhelmingly supported the World War II efforts in many ways on
11 the home front, providing food and other strategic supplies and minerals and meeting or exceeding the quotas
12 for the eight war bond drives; and

13 WHEREAS, the population of Montana in 1941 was 558,000 people and only 514,000 in 1946; and

14 WHEREAS, Montanans supported, fought, died, and were wounded in all theaters of World War II.
15 Joseph Howard Kinsey wrote in his text "High, Wide and Handsome": "--of the more than 15 million men and
16 women in the US Armed forces during World War II, Montana furnished 75,000 to the effort."; "Proportionately
17 this was near the top of all states. In World War II as in World War I, Montanans were quick to enlist, and they
18 were healthy; the proportion rejected because of physical defect was smaller than the national average. Further
19 the Montana death rate in World War II was only exceeded by that of New Mexico in proportion to population.
20 Montana [also] had the record of oversubscribing first in eight World War II saving bond drives."

21

22 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF
23 THE STATE OF MONTANA:

24 That the 69th Legislature of the State of Montana recognizes the 80th anniversary of the end of World
25 War II and recognizes all Montanans who served in the armed forces, at home and abroad, and all Montanans
26 who aided in the war effort during World War II.

27 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Secretary of State send a copy of this resolution to the
28 Governor of Montana, the Department Commander of the American Legion of Montana, the State Commander,

1 the State Senior Vice Commander, the State Junior Vice Commander, and the State Adjutant/Quartermaster of
2 the Veterans of Foreign Wars of Montana, the State Commander of the Disabled American Veterans of
3 Montana, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, each of the federally recognized tribal governments in Montana,
4 and each member of the Montana Congressional Delegation.

5 - END -

MONTANA'S NATIVE AMERICAN CODE TALKERS

WORLD WAR II

During World War II, members of several Montana tribes, including the Crow, Assiniboine, Sioux and members of the Fort Peck Reservation served as code talkers, using their native languages to transmit vital military information, a program that was later recognized with Congressional Gold Medals.

Here's a more detailed look:

- **Montana's Role:**

Montana Native Americans, particularly from the Crow and Assiniboine & Sioux tribes, played a significant role in the code talker program during World War II.

- **The Code Talker Program:**

The code talker program, conceived in 1918, used unique Native American languages for communications, making it difficult for the enemy to decipher messages.

- **Crow Nation Code Talkers:**

Soldiers like Barney Old Coyote, Henry Old Coyote, Samson Birdinground, and Cyril Notafraid used the Crow language for military intelligence operations.

- **Assiniboine & Sioux Code Talkers:**

49 enrolled members of the Assiniboine & Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation served as code talkers in Company B, 163rd Infantry Regiment, 41st Infantry Division, Poplar, MT.

- **Recognition:**

The US Congress passed the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008, leading to the creation of Congressional Medals to honor Native American code talkers from World War I and World War II.

- **Medal Presentations:**

Unique gold medals were designed for each Native American tribe with code talker members and presented to the tribes in November 2013.

- **Fort Peck Reservation:**

Forty-eight members of Montana's Fort Peck Reservation served as code talkers in the Montana National Guard's Company B, 163rd Infantry Regiment.

- **Ceremony:**

A ceremony was held in Poplar, Montana, to honor the 48 Fort Peck code talkers, with family members receiving silver medals from the U.S. Mint.

- **Crow Nation Medal Presentation:**

The Crow Nation received a Congressional Gold Medal in December 2014, recognizing the service of their code talkers.

MONTANA'S MOSTLY FORGOTTEN CODE TALKERS –Taken from various reports found through computer search Compiled by Raymond K. Read, Director, Montana Military Museum, P.O. Box 125, Fort Harrison, Montana 406-324-3550 myfun51@msn.com

The Montana Native American Code Talkers played a crucial role during World War II. Forty-eight members of Montana's Fort Peck Reservation served as Code Talkers in the Montana National Guard's Company B, 163rd Infantry Regiment. These men used their native Sioux and Assiniboine languages to communicate messages that the enemy could not decode. Their contributions were recognized with the passage of the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008, which mandated the U.S. mint to strike gold medals for tribes and silver medals for individuals who served in this capacity.

One notable code talker from Montana was Gilbert Horn Sr., who grew up in the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. He used his knowledge of the Assiniboine language to encrypt communications during the war and later became a tribal judge and politician.

Gilbert Horn Sr. (May 12, 1923 – March 27, 2016) was an American military veteran who served as an Assiniboine code talker during World War II. Born on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in Montana, Horn enlisted in the United States Army at the age of 17 and was assigned to the 163rd Infantry Battalion¹. He received specialized training in communications and encryption and used his knowledge of the Assiniboine language to encrypt U.S. military communications against the Japanese.

Horn volunteered for an assignment with Merrill's Marauders, a U.S. Army special operations unit led by General Frank Merrill in the South-East Asian theater of World War II. As a member of the Marauders, Horn completed an 800-mile march across the mountains of Burma and southern China to cut off Japanese supply lines in the region. Fewer than 1,200 troops survived Merrill's Marauders' campaign, and Horn was awarded a Distinguished Unit Citation for "gallantry, determination and esprit de corps in accomplishing its mission under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions". He also received a Bronze Star Medal and a Purple Heart.

After the war, Horn returned to the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation and became involved in tribal politics and judiciary. He served on the Fort Belknap Community Council for nineteen years and wrote the first regulations to govern the Fort Belknap Tribal Juvenile Court. Horn also successfully lobbied the U.S. federal government for a new health clinic on the reservation. In 2013, Montana State University–Northern awarded Horn an honorary doctorate in humanitarian services. In 2014, he was named honorary chief of the Fort Belknap Assiniboine Tribe, becoming the first person to receive the title since the 1890s. The recently constructed early learning center on the Fort Belknap Reservation has also been named in Horn's honor.

Gilbert Horn Sr. passed away at the Northern Montana Care Center in Havre, Montana, on March 27, 2016, at the age of 92.

Footnotes:

1: Warrior Spirit: Celebrating Native American Veterans - Distinctly Montana : Code talker – Wikipedia -- Gilbert Horn Sr. - Wikipedia : Decorated World War II hero, code talker Gilbert Horn Sr. dies - Army Times : Code talker Gilbert Horn laid to rest - Great Falls Tribune



PUBLIC LAW 110-420—OCT. 15, 2008

CODE TALKERS RECOGNITION ACT OF 2008

Public Law 110-420
110th Congress

An Act

Oct. 15, 2008
[H.R. 4544]

To require the issuance of medals to recognize the dedication and valor of Native American code talkers.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

Code Talkers
Recognition Act
of 2008.
Armed Forces.
31 USC 5111
note.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008”.

SEC. 2. PURPOSE.

The purpose of this Act is to require the issuance of medals to express the sense of the Congress that—

- (1) the service of Native American code talkers to the United States deserves immediate recognition for dedication and valor; and
- (2) honoring Native American code talkers is long overdue.

SEC. 3. FINDINGS.

The Congress finds the following:

- (1) When the United States entered World War I, Native Americans were not accorded the status of citizens of the United States.
- (2) Without regard to that lack of citizenship, members of Indian tribes and nations enlisted in the Armed Forces to fight on behalf of the United States.
- (3) The first reported use of Native American code talkers was on October 17, 1918.
- (4) Because the language used by the Choctaw code talkers in the transmission of information was not based on a European language or on a mathematical progression, the Germans were unable to understand any of the transmissions.
- (5) This use of Native American code talkers was the first time in modern warfare that such a transmission of messages in a native language was used for the purpose of confusing an enemy.
- (6) On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and the Congress declared war the following day.
- (7) The Federal Government called on the Comanche Nation to support the military effort during World War II by recruiting and enlisting Comanche men to serve in the Army to develop a secret code based on the Comanche language.
- (8) The United States Army recruited approximately 50 Native Americans for special native language communication assignments.

(9) The United States Marine Corps recruited several hundred Navajos for duty in the Pacific region.

(10) During World War II, the United States employed Native American code talkers who developed secret means of communication based on native languages and were critical to winning the war.

(11) To the frustration of the enemies of the United States, the code developed by the Native American code talkers proved to be unbreakable and was used extensively throughout the European theater.

(12) In 2001, the Congress and President Bush honored Navajo code talkers with congressional gold medals for the contributions of the code talkers to the United States Armed Forces as radio operators during World War II.

(13) The heroic and dramatic contributions of Native American code talkers were instrumental in driving back Axis forces across the Pacific during World War II.

(14) The Congress should provide to all Native American code talkers the recognition the code talkers deserve for the contributions of the code talkers to United States victories in World War I and World War II.

SEC. 4. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act, the following definitions shall apply:

(1) **CODE TALKER.**—The term “code talker” means a Native American who—

(A) served in the Armed Forces during a foreign conflict in which the United States was involved; and

(B) transmitted (encoded and translated) secret coded messages for tactical military operations during World War I and World War II using their native tribal language (non-spontaneous communications)

(2) **SECRETARY.**—The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of the Treasury.

SEC. 5. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDALS.

(a) **AWARD AUTHORIZATION.**—The Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President pro tempore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements for the award, on behalf of the Congress, of gold medals of appropriate design in recognition of the service of Native American code talkers during World War I and World War II.

(b) **IDENTIFICATION OF RECIPIENTS.**—The Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense and the tribes, shall—

(1) determine the identity, to the maximum extent practicable, of each Native American tribe that had a member of that tribe serve as a Native American code talker, with the exception of the Navajo Nation;

(2) include the name of each Native American tribe identified under subparagraph (A) on a list; and

(3) provide the list, and any updates to the list, to the Smithsonian Institution for maintenance under section 5(c)(2).

(c) **DESIGN AND STRIKING OF MEDALS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary shall strike the gold medals awarded under subsection (a) with appropriate emblems, devices, and inscriptions, as determined by the Secretary.

(2) **DESIGNS OF MEDALS EMBLEMATIC OF TRIBAL AFFILIATION AND PARTICIPATION.**—The design of a gold medal under paragraph (1) shall be emblematic of the participation of the code talkers of each recognized tribe.

(3) **TREATMENT.**—Each medal struck pursuant to this subsection shall be considered to be a national medal for purposes of chapter 51 of title 31, United States Code.

(d) **ACTION BY SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.**—The Smithsonian Institution—

(1) shall accept and maintain such gold medals, and such silver duplicates of those medals, as recognized tribes elect to send to the Smithsonian Institution;

(2) shall maintain the list developed under section 6(1) of the names of Native American code talkers of each recognized tribe; and

(3) is encouraged to create a standing exhibit for Native American code talkers or Native American veterans.

SEC. 6. NATIVE AMERICAN CODE TALKERS.

The Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense and the tribes, shall—

(1) with respect to tribes recognized as of the date of the enactment of this Act —

(A) determine the identity, to the maximum extent practicable, of each Native American code talker of each recognized tribe with the exception of the Navajo Nation;

(B) include the name of each Native American code talker identified under subparagraph (A) on a list, to be organized by recognized tribe; and

(C) provide the list, and any updates to the list, to the Smithsonian Institution for maintenance under section 5(d)(2);

(2) in the future, determine whether any Indian tribe that is not a recognized as of the date of the enactment of this Act, should be eligible to receive a gold medal under this Act; and

(3) with consultation from the tribes listed in following subsection, examine the following specific tribes to determine the existence of Code Talkers:

- (A) Assiniboine.
- (B) Chippewa and Oneida.
- (C) Choctaw.
- (D) Comanche.
- (E) Cree.
- (F) Crow.
- (G) Hopi.
- (H) Kiowa.
- (I) Menominee.
- (J) Mississauga.
- (K) Muscogee.
- (L) Sac and Fox.
- (M) Sioux.

SEC. 7. DUPLICATE MEDALS.

(a) **SILVER DUPLICATE MEDALS.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary shall strike duplicates in silver of the gold medals struck under section 5(b), to be awarded in accordance with paragraph (2).

(2) ELIGIBILITY FOR AWARD.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—A Native American shall be eligible to be awarded a silver duplicate medal struck under paragraph (1) in recognition of the service of Native American code talkers of the recognized tribe of the Native American, if the Native American served in the Armed Forces as a code talker in any foreign conflict in which the United States was involved during the 20th century.

(B) DEATH OF CODE TALKER.—In the event of the death of a Native American code talker who had not been awarded a silver duplicate medal under this subsection, the Secretary may award a silver duplicate medal to the next of kin or other personal representative of the Native American code talker.

(C) DETERMINATION.—Eligibility for an award under this subsection shall be determined by the Secretary in accordance with section 6.

(b) BRONZE DUPLICATE MEDALS.—The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in bronze of the gold medal struck pursuant to section 4 under such regulations as the Secretary may prescribe, at a price sufficient to cover the cost thereof, including labor, materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses, and the cost of the gold and silver medals.

SEC. 8. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF SALE.

(a) AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.—There are authorized to be charged against the United States Mint Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be necessary to pay for the cost of the medals struck pursuant to this Act.

(b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—Amounts received from the sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under section 7(b) shall be deposited into the United States Mint Public Enterprise Fund.

Approved October 15, 2008.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 4544:

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 154 (2008):

Sept. 23, 25, considered and passed House.

Sept. 30, considered and passed Senate.



Crow Nation code talkers awarded Congressional Gold Medals

[December 30, 2014](#)

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Four Crow Nation code talkers were honored on Dec. 4 with Congressional Gold Medals given to their descendants.

Montana soldiers Barney Old Coyote, Henry Old Coyote, Samson Birdinground and Cyril Notafraid used the Crow language during military intelligence operations in World War II to save countless lives. Conceived in 1918, the code talker program used unique Native American languages for communications, and was comprised of more than 400 Native Americans who volunteered to defend the country.

Montana Sens. Jon Tester and John Walsh, along with U.S. Treasurer Rosa Gumataotao Rios, presented the descendants with the awards.

“The Crow Tribe has a long and proud history of serving in the Armed Forces,” said Tester, Chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee. “These young men transmitted secret coded messages using their language, which was so unique that the code could not be broken by enemy forces. That unbreakable code and the spirit of the code talkers lives on today in the language and culture of the Crow Nation.”

Walsh echoed those sentiments and explained that the honor was long overdue.

“These four American heroes represent the best of Montana and our nation,” Walsh said. “And I’m proud that these men and their families are finally receiving the proper recognition for helping free our world of tyranny.”

House of the Crow Nation Chairman Darrin Old Coyote and Speaker Knute Old Crow accepted the medals on behalf of relatives and their families.

“Today was a historic day for our tribe,” Old Coyote said. “Two of my grandfathers were honored today, and this recognition means a lot to us. All of the code talkers sacrificed a lot for this country, utilizing our language to protect and serve this nation. We wouldn’t be here today without their service.”

Ceremony salutes WWII code talkers

Rich Peterson

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1:08

POPLAR -- Erick Buck Elk's grandfather, Harvey Buck Elk, was always a private man, especially when asked about his World War II military service with the Montana National Guard's Company B, 163rd Infantry Regiment.

That's because the late soldier, a member of the Fort Peck Tribes, was sworn to secrecy about being a Sioux code talker in the Pacific Theater.

"I'm not an emotional guy, but when I found out what he did for our country in the war, I kind of teared up a little," said Erick Buck Elk, 37, of Dickinson, N.D., who is also a military veteran.

Buck Elk was one of 48 soldiers from the Fort Peck Reservation who were honored Saturday for their code talking services during their military duty.

Family members of the soldiers were each presented a silver medal from the U.S. Mint honoring the Company B regiment. The medal was designed with help from the Fort Peck Tribes and has an etching of the reservation, an eagle staff, a buffalo and soldier's helmet.

About 75 tribal members were part of the regiment, but a little more than half of them were utilized for their knowledge of the Sioux or Assiniboine languages.

Fort Peck Tribal Chairman A.T. "Rusty" Stafne said it's ironic that most of these soldiers attended religious or government boarding schools and were beaten for speaking their native languages rather than English.

"Some of them were well punished for speaking Assiniboine or Sioux. But their native tongue helped the United States win the war," Stafne said. "These are the people being honored today."

The code talkers from about a dozen tribes in the United States used their language in battle as a means of secret communication during wartime. The Navajo code talkers became famous for their service, but more information on the other tribes was later revealed as it became declassified and legislation passed recognizing them, tribal officials said.

The Fort Peck Tribes officially learned four years ago about their soldiers being code talkers when the U.S. Mint requested more information about the soldiers in Company B. When The Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008 was passed, the law required that medals be made to honor the soldiers from the Comanche, Choctaw, Cherokee, Navajo, Oneida, Sioux and Crow code talkers. A gold Congressional Medal of Honor was also presented to each tribe in November at a ceremony on Capitol Hill.

1. The War

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ARTICLE

American Indian Code Talkers

The idea of using American Indians who were fluent in both their traditional tribal language and in English to send secret messages in battle was first put to the test in World War I with the Choctaw Telephone Squad and other Native communications experts and messengers. However, it wasn't until World War II that the US military developed a specific policy to recruit and train American Indian speakers to become code talkers.



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What is a code talker? A code talker is the name given to American Indians who used their tribal language to send secret communications on the battlefield. Most people have heard of the famous Navajo (or Diné) code

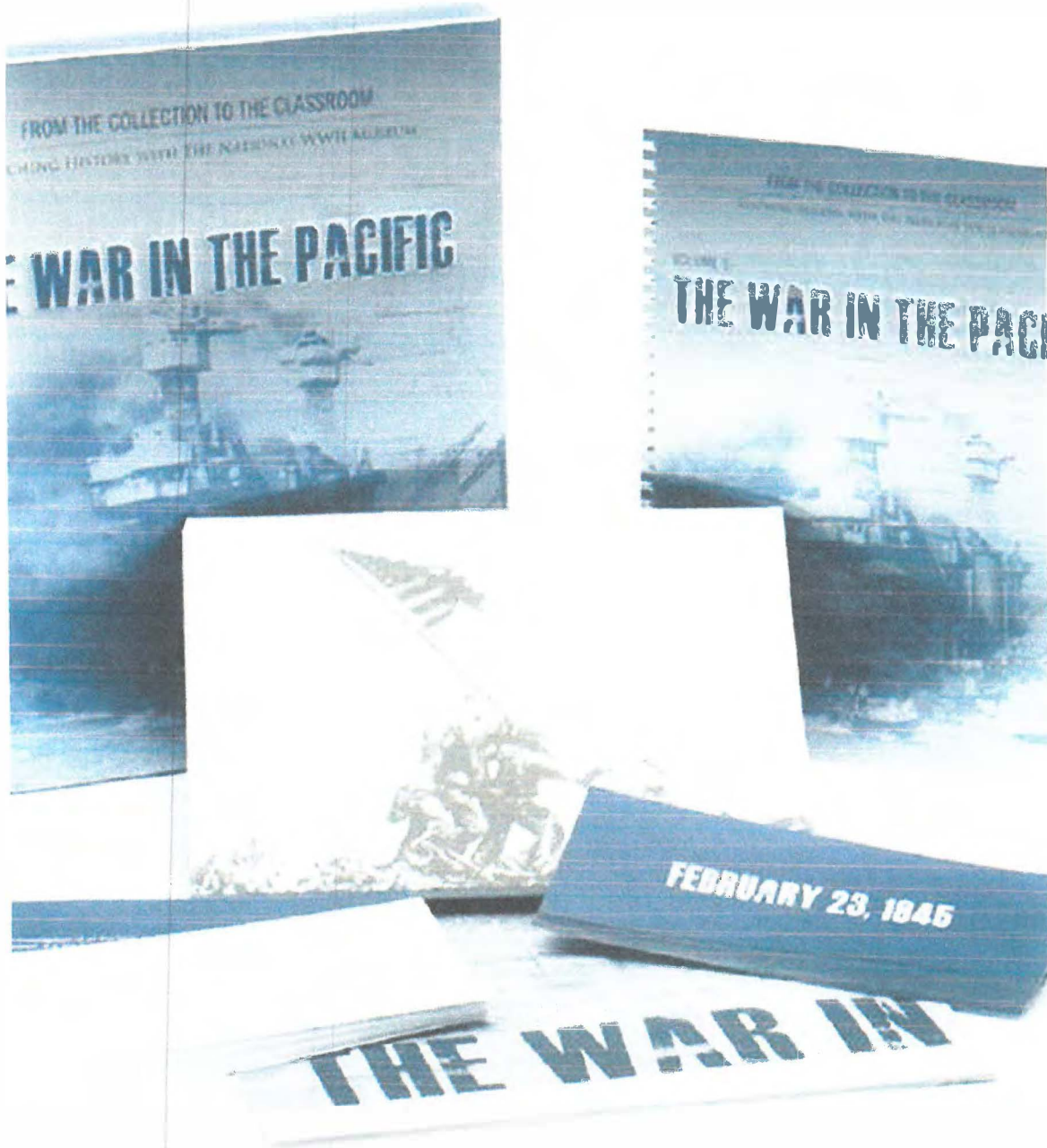
talkers who used their traditional language to transmit secret Allied messages in the Pacific theater of combat during World War II. But did you know that there were at least 14 other Native nations, including the Cherokee and Comanche, that served as code talkers in both the Pacific and Europe during the war? The idea of using American Indians who were fluent in both their traditional tribal language and in English to send secret messages in battle was first put to the test in World War I with the Choctaw Telephone Squad and other Native communications experts and messengers. However, it wasn't until World War II that the US military developed a specific policy to recruit and train American Indian speakers to become code talkers. The irony of being asked to use their Native languages to fight on behalf of America was not lost on code talkers, many of whom had been forced to attend government or religious-run boarding schools that tried to assimilate Native peoples and would punish students for speaking in their traditional language.

The US Army was the first branch of the military that began recruiting code talkers from places like Oklahoma in 1940. Other branches, such as the US Marines and Navy, followed a few years later, and the first class of 29 Navajo code talker US Marine recruits completed its training in 1942. Apart from basic training, these men had to develop and memorize a unique military code using their mostly unwritten language, and were placed in a guarded room until this task was completed.

The first type of code they created, Type 1 code, consisted of 26 Navajo terms that stood for individual English letters that could be used to spell out a word. For instance, the Navajo word for "ant," wo-la-chee, was used to represent the letter "a" in English.

Type 2 code contained words that could be directly translated from English into Navajo, and the code talkers also developed a dictionary of 211 terms (later expanded to 411) for military words and names that didn't originally exist in the Navajo language. For example, since there was no existing

Navajo word for “submarine,” the code talkers agreed to use the term besh-lo, which translates to “iron fish.”



The War in the Pacific

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Most code talkers were assigned in pairs to a military unit. During battle, one person would operate the portable radio while the second person would relay and receive messages in the Native language and translate them into English. Their work was highly dangerous especially in the Pacific, because Japanese soldiers would deliberately target officers, medics, and radiomen, and code talkers had to keep moving as they transmitted their messages. The work of hundreds of code talkers was essential to Allied victory in World War II, and they were present at many important battles, including at Utah Beach during the D-Day invasion in France, and at Iwo Jima in the Pacific. In fact, 5th Marine Division signal officer Major Howard Connor stated, "Were it not for the Navajos, the Marines would never have taken Iwo Jima."

Despite their heroic contributions during the war, American Indian code talkers were told that they had to keep their work secret. They couldn't even tell their family members about their communications work. Since the codes that they developed remained unbroken, the US military wanted to keep the program classified in case the code talkers were needed again in future wars. Even when the WWII code talker program was declassified in 1968, national recognition of code talkers was slow. While there was some recognition in the 1970s and 1980s, it wasn't until 2001 that Congressional Gold Medals were given to the Navajo and other code talkers.

"Codetalkers" redirects here. For the band, see [the Codetalkers](#).



[Choctaw](#) soldiers in training in World War I for coded radio and telephone transmissions

A **code talker** was a person employed by the military during wartime to use a little-known language as a means of secret communication. The term is most often used for United States service members during the [World Wars](#) who used their knowledge of [Native American languages](#) as a basis to transmit coded messages. In particular, there were approximately 400 to 500 [Native Americans](#) in the [United States Marine Corps](#) whose primary job was to transmit secret [tactical](#) messages. Code talkers transmitted messages over military telephone or radio communications nets using formally or informally developed codes built upon their indigenous languages. The code talkers improved the speed of [encryption](#) and decryption of communications in [front line](#) operations during [World War II](#) and are credited with some decisive victories. Their code was never broken.

There were two code types used during World War II. Type one codes were formally developed based on the languages of the [Comanche](#), [Hopi](#), [Meskwaki](#), and [Navajo](#) peoples. They used words from their languages for each letter of the English alphabet. Messages could be encoded and decoded by using a [simple substitution cipher](#) where the [ciphertext](#) was the Native language word. Type two code was informal and directly translated from English into the Indigenous language. Code talkers used short, descriptive phrases if there was no corresponding word in the Indigenous language for the military word. For example, the Navajo did not have a word for *submarine*, so they translated it as *iron fish*.^{[1][2]}

The term *Code Talker* was originally coined by the United States Marine Corps and used to identify individuals who completed the special training required to qualify as Code Talkers. Their service records indicated "642 – Code Talker" as a duty assignment. Today, the term Code Talker is still strongly associated with the bilingual [Navajo](#) speakers trained in the Navajo Code during World War II by the US Marine Corps to serve in all six [divisions of the Corps](#) and the [Marine Raiders](#) of the [Pacific theater](#). However, the use of Native American communicators pre-dates WWII. Early pioneers of Native American-based communications used by the US Military include the [Cherokee](#), [Choctaw](#),

and [Lakota peoples](#) during World War I.^[3] Today the term Code Talker includes military personnel from all Native American communities who have contributed their language skills in service to the United States.

Other Native American communicators—now referred to as code talkers—were deployed by the [United States Army](#) during World War II, including [Lakota](#),^[4] [Meskwaki](#), [Mohawk](#),^{[5][6]} [Comanche](#), [Tlingit](#),^[7] [Hopi](#),^[8] [Cree](#), and [Crow](#) soldiers; they served in the Pacific, North African, and European theaters.^[9]

Assiniboine

Native speakers of the [Assiniboine language](#) served as code talkers during World War II to encrypt communications.^[10] One of these code talkers was [Gilbert Horn Sr.](#), who grew up in the [Fort Belknap Indian Reservation](#) of Montana and became a tribal judge and politician.^[10]

Cherokee

[\[edit\]](#)

The US military's first known use of code talkers was during World War I. [Cherokee](#) soldiers of the US [30th Infantry Division](#) fluent in the [Cherokee language](#) were assigned to transmit messages while under fire during the [Second Battle of the Somme](#). According to the Division Signal Officer, this took place in September 1918 when their unit was under British command.^{[16][17]}

Choctaw

[\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [Choctaw code talkers](#)

During [World War I](#), company commander Captain Lawrence of the US Army overheard Solomon Louis and Mitchell Bobb having a conversation in [Choctaw](#). Upon further investigation, he found eight [Choctaw](#) men served in the battalion. The Choctaw men in the Army's [36th Infantry Division](#) were trained to use their language in code. They helped the [American Expeditionary Forces](#) in several battles of the [Meuse-Argonne Offensive](#). On October 26, 1918, the code talkers were pressed into service and the "tide of battle turned within 24 hours ... and within 72 hours the Allies were on full attack."^{[18][19]}

Comanche

[\[edit\]](#)



Comanche code talkers of the 4th Signal Company

German authorities knew about the use of code talkers during World War I. Germans sent a team of thirty [anthropologists](#) to the United States to learn Native American languages before the outbreak of World War II.^{[20][21]} However, the task proved too difficult because of the large array of Indigenous languages and [dialects](#). Nonetheless, after learning of the Nazi effort, the US Army opted not to implement a large-scale code talker program in the [European theater](#).

Initially, 17 code talkers were enlisted, but three could not make the trip across the Atlantic until the unit was finally deployed.^[22] A total of 14 code talkers using the [Comanche language](#) took part in the [Invasion of Normandy](#) and served in the [4th Infantry Division](#) in Europe.^[23] Comanche soldiers of the 4th Signal Company compiled a vocabulary of 250 code terms using words and phrases in their own language.^[24] Using a substitution method similar to that of the [Navajo](#), the code talkers used descriptive words from the Comanche language for things that did not have translations. For example, the Comanche language code term for *tank* was *turtle*, *bomber* was *pregnant bird*, *machine gun* was *sewing machine*, and *Adolf Hitler* was *crazy white man*.^{[25][26]}

Two Comanche code talkers were assigned to each regiment, and the remainder were assigned to the 4th Infantry Division headquarters. The Comanche began transmitting messages shortly after landing on [Utah Beach](#) on June 6, 1944. Some were wounded but none killed.^[25]

In 1989, the French government awarded the Comanche code talkers the *Chevalier* of the [National Order of Merit](#). On November 30, 1999, the [United States Department of Defense](#) presented [Charles Chibitty](#) with the [Knowlton Award](#), in recognition of his outstanding intelligence work.^{[25][27]}

Cree

[\[edit\]](#)

In [World War II](#), the [Canadian Armed Forces](#) employed First Nations soldiers who spoke the [Cree language](#) as code talkers. Owing to oaths of secrecy and official classification through 1963, the role of Cree code talkers was less well-known than their US counterparts and went unacknowledged by the Canadian

government.^[28] A 2016 documentary, *Cree Code Talkers*, tells the story of one such [Métis](#) individual, [Charles "Checker" Tomkins](#). Tomkins died in 2003 but was interviewed shortly before his death by the Smithsonian [National Museum of the American Indian](#). While he identified other Cree code talkers, "Tomkins may have been the last of his comrades to know anything of this secret operation."^{[29][30]}

Hungarian

[\[edit\]](#)

In 2022 during the [Russo-Ukrainian War](#), the [Hungarian language](#) is reported to be used by the [Ukrainian army](#) to relay operational military information and orders to circumvent being understood by the invading [Russian army](#) without the need to encrypt and decipher the messages.^{[31][32]} Ukraine has a sizeable [Hungarian population](#) of over 150,000 people who live mainly in the [Kárpátalja \(in Hungarian\) or Zakarpatska Oblast \(in Ukrainian\) division](#) of Ukraine, adjacent to [Hungary](#). As Ukrainian nationals, men of enlistment age are also subject to military service, hence the [Ukrainian army](#) has a Hungarian-speaking capability. It is one of the most spoken and official languages of this [region in present-day Ukraine](#). The [Hungarian language](#) is not an [Indo-European language](#) like the [Slavic Ukrainian](#) or [Russian](#), but a [Uralic language](#). For this reason, it is distinct and incomprehensible for Russian speakers.

Meskwaki

[\[edit\]](#)

A group of 27 [Meskwaki](#) enlisted in the US Army together in January 1941; they comprised 16 percent of Iowa's Meskwaki population. During World War II, the US Army trained eight Meskwaki men to use their native [Fox language](#) as code talkers. They were assigned to North Africa. The eight were posthumously awarded the [Congressional Gold Medal](#) in 2013; the government gave the awards to representatives of the Meskwaki community.^{[33][34]}

Mohawk

[\[edit\]](#)

[Mohawk language](#) code talkers were used during [World War II](#) by the [United States Army](#) in the Pacific theater. [Levi Oakes](#), a Mohawk code talker born in Canada, was deployed to protect messages sent by Allied Forces using *Kanien'kéha*, a Mohawk sub-set language. Oakes died in May 2019; he was the last of the Mohawk code talkers.^[35]

Muscogee (Seminole and Creek)

[\[edit\]](#)

The [Muscogee language](#) was used as a type two code (informal) during World War II by enlisted [Seminole](#) and [Creek people](#) in the US Army.^[36] Tony Palmer, Leslie Richard, [Edmund Harjo](#), and Thomas MacIntosh from the [Seminole Nation of Oklahoma](#) and [Muscogee \(Creek\) Nation](#) were recognized under the [Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008](#).^[37] The last survivor of these code talkers, Edmond Harjo of the [Seminole Nation of Oklahoma](#), died on March 31, 2014, at the age of 96. His biography was recounted at the [Congressional Gold Medal](#) ceremony honoring Harjo and other code talkers at the US Capitol on November 20, 2013.^{[38][39][40]}

Navajo

[\[edit\]](#)



Navajo code talkers, Saipan, June 1944

[Philip Johnston](#), a civil engineer for the city of Los Angeles,^[41] proposed the use of the [Navajo language](#) to the United States Marine Corps at the beginning of World War II. Johnston, a World War I veteran, was raised on the [Navajo reservation](#) as the son of missionaries to the Navajo. He was able to converse in what is called "Trader's Navajo" - a [pidgin language](#). He was among a few non-Navajo who had enough exposure to it to understand some of its nuances. Many Navajo men enlisted shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor and eagerly contributed to the war effort.

Because Navajo has a complex [grammar](#), it is not [mutually intelligible](#) with even its closest relatives within the [Na-Dene family](#) to provide meaningful information. It was still an unwritten language at the time, and Johnston believed Navajo could satisfy the military requirement for an undecipherable code. Its complex syntax, phonology, and numerous dialects made it unintelligible to anyone without extensive exposure and training. One estimate indicates that fewer than 30 non-Navajo could understand the language during World War II.^[42]

In early 1942, Johnston met with the commanding general of the Amphibious Corps, Major General [Clayton B. Vogel](#), and his staff. Johnston staged simulated combat conditions, demonstrating that Navajo men could transmit and decode a three-line message in 20 seconds, compared to the 30 minutes it took the

machines of the time.^[43] The idea of using Navajo speakers as code talkers was accepted; Vogel recommended that the Marines recruit 200 Navajo. However, that recommendation was cut to one-platoon to use as a pilot project to develop and test the feasibility of a code. On May 4, 1942, twenty-nine Navajo men were sworn into service at an old US Army Fort converted into a BIA Boarding School: [Fort Wingate](#). They were organized as Platoon 382. The first 29 Navajo recruits attended boot camp in May 1942. This first group created the Navajo code at [Camp Pendleton](#).^[44]

The First Twenty-Nine and the creation of the code

[\[edit\]](#)

One of the key features of the Navajo Code Talkers is that they employed a coded version of their language. Other Navajos not trained in the Navajo Code could not decipher the messages being sent.

Platoon 382 was the Marine Corps' first "all-Indian, all-Navajo" Platoon. The members of this platoon would become known as *The First Twenty-Nine*. Most were recruited from near the Fort Wingate, NM, area. The youngest was William Dean Yazzie (aka Dean Wilson), who was only 15 when he was recruited. The oldest was [Carl N. Gorman](#)—who with his son, R.C. Gorman, would become an artist of great acclaim and design the Code Talkers' logo—at age 35.

Names of the First Twenty-Nine and areas of birth^[45]

Code talker's name	Area of birth	Other notes to service
Samuel Begay	Toadlena, AZ	
John Brown, Jr	Chinle, AZ	
Lowell Damon	Fort Defiance, AZ	
James Dixon	Shiprock, NM	
Carl Gorman	Chinle, AZ	
Alfred Leonard	Lukachukai, AZ	
Johnny Manuelito	Sheep Springs, NM	
William McCabe	Ganado, AZ	Purple Heart

Names of the First Twenty-Nine and areas of birth^[45]

Code talker's name	Area of birth	Other notes to service
Balmer Slowtalker (aka Joe Palmer)	Leupp, AZ	
Nelson Thompson	Leupp, AZ	Purple Heart
Benjamin Cleveland	Fort Defiance, AZ	Purple Heart
Jack Nez	Canyon del Muerto, AZ	
Oscar Ilthma	Lupton, AZ	Purple Heart
George Dennison	Fort Defiance, AZ	
Chester Nez	Two Wells, AZ	
Roy Begay	Black Mountain, AZ	
Cozy Brown	Chinle, AZ	
Eugene Crawford	Tohatchi, NM	
John Benally	Fort Defiance, AZ	
Lloyd Oliver	Fruitland, NM	
John Willie	Shonto, AZ	
Charlie Begay	Tocito, NM	Purple Heart
Wilsie Bitsie	Rehoboth, NM	
Frank Denny Pete	Fruitland, NM	Purple Heart
John Chee	Tocito, NM	
Alien Dale June	Kaibito, AZ	
Harry Tsosie	Rough Rock, AZ	Purple Heart, KIA

Names of the First Twenty-Nine and areas of birth^[45]

Code talker's name	Area of birth	Other notes to service
David Curley	Phoenix, AZ	
Bill Yazzie (aka Dean Wilson)	TecNosPos, AZ	

The Navajo code was formally developed and modeled on the [Joint Army/Navy Phonetic Alphabet](#) that [uses agreed-upon English words to represent letters](#). Since it was determined that phonetically spelling out all military terms letter by letter into words while in combat would be too time-consuming, some [terms, concepts, tactics](#), and instruments of modern warfare were given uniquely formal descriptive nomenclatures in Navajo. For example, the word for *shark* referred to a destroyer, while *silver oak leaf* indicated the rank of lieutenant colonel.^[46]

Deployment and evolution of the code and post-war code talkers

[\[edit\]](#)

A [codebook](#) was developed to teach new initiates the many relevant words and concepts. The text was for classroom purposes only and was never to be taken into the field. The code talkers memorized all these variations and practiced their rapid use under stressful conditions during training. Navajo speakers who had not been trained in the code work would have no idea what the code talkers' messages meant; they would hear only truncated and disjointed strings of individual, unrelated nouns and verbs.^{[47][48]}



Code Talkers Monument Ocala, Florida

Memorial Park

The Navajo code talkers were commended for the skill, speed, and accuracy they demonstrated throughout the war. At the [Battle of 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 said, "Were it not for the Navajos, the Marines would never have taken Iwo Jima."^[44]

After incidents where Navajo code talkers were mistaken for ethnic Japanese and were captured by other American soldiers, several were assigned a personal bodyguard whose principal duty was to protect them from their side. According to Bill Toledo, one of the second groups after the original 29, they had a secret secondary duty: if their charge was at risk of being captured, they were to shoot him to protect the code. Fortunately, none was ever called upon to do so.^{[49][50]}

To ensure consistent use of code terminologies throughout the Pacific theater, representative code talkers of each of the US Marine [divisions](#) met in Hawaii to discuss shortcomings in the code, incorporate new terms into the system, and update their codebooks. These representatives, in turn, trained other code talkers who could not attend the meeting. As the war progressed, additional code words were added and incorporated program-wide. In other instances, informal shortcuts [code words](#) were devised for a particular [campaign](#) and not disseminated beyond the area of operation. Examples of code words include the Navajo word for *buzzard*, *jeeshóó'*, which was used for *bomber*, while the code word used for *submarine*, *béésh tóó'*, meant *iron fish* in Navajo.^[51] The last of the original 29 Navajo code talkers who developed the code, [Chester Nez](#), died on June 4, 2014.^[52]

Four of the last nine Navajo code talkers used in the military died in 2019: [Alfred K. Newman](#) died on January 13, 2019, at the age of 94.^[53] On May 10, 2019, [Fleming Begaye Sr.](#) died at the age of 97.^[54] New Mexico State Senator [John Pinto](#), elected in 1977, died in office on May 24, 2019.^[55] William Tully Brown died in June 2019 aged 96.^[56] Joe Vandever Sr. died at 96 on January 31, 2020.^[57] [Samuel Sandoval](#) died on 29 July 2022, at the age of 98.^{[58][59]} [John Kinsel Sr.](#) died on 18 October 2024, at the age of 107.^{[60][61]} Only two remaining members are still living as of 2024, Thomas H. Began and former Navajo chairman [Peter MacDonald](#).^[62]

Some code talkers such as Chester Nez and William Dean Yazzie (aka Dean Wilson) continued to serve in the Marine Corps through the Korean War. Rumors of the deployment of the Navajo code into the [Korean War](#) and after have never been proven. The code remained classified until 1968. The Navajo code is the only spoken military code never to have been deciphered.^[46]

During World War II, American soldiers used their native [Tlingit](#) as a code against Japanese forces. Their actions remained unknown, even after the declassification of code talkers and the publication of the Navajo code talkers. The memory of five deceased Tlingit code talkers was honored by the Alaska legislature in March 2019.^{[68][69]}

Welsh

[\[edit\]](#)

A system employing the [Welsh language](#) was used by British forces during World War II, but not to any great extent. In 1942, the Royal Air Force developed a plan to use Welsh for secret communications, but it was never implemented.^[70] Welsh was used more recently in the [Yugoslav Wars](#) for non-vital messages.^[71]

Wenzhounese

[\[edit\]](#)

China used [Wenzhounese-speaking](#) people as code talkers during the 1979 [Sino-Vietnamese War](#).^{[72][73]}

Post-war recognition

[\[edit\]](#)



Navajo code talker veteran Thomas Begay with a framed picture commemorating National Navajo Code Talkers Day

The Navajo code talkers received no recognition until 1968 when their operation was declassified.^[74] In 1982, the code talkers were given a Certificate of Recognition by US President [Ronald Reagan](#), who also named August 14, 1982 as Navajo Code Talkers Day.^{[75][76][77][78]}

On December 21, 2000, President [Bill Clinton](#) signed Public Law 106–554, 114 Statute 2763, which awarded the [Congressional Gold Medal](#) to the original 29 World War II Navajo code talkers and [Silver Medals](#) to each person who qualified as a Navajo code talker (approximately 300). In July 2001, President [George W. Bush](#) honored the code talkers by presenting the medals to four surviving original code talkers (the fifth living original code talker was unable to attend) at a ceremony held in the [Capitol Rotunda](#) in Washington, DC. Gold medals were presented to the families of the deceased 24 original code talkers.^{[79][80]}

Journalist [Patty Talahongva](#) directed and produced a documentary, *The Power of Words: Native Languages as Weapons of War*, for the [Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian](#) in 2006, bringing to light the story of Hopi code talkers. In 2011, Arizona established April 23, as an annual recognition day for the Hopi code talkers.^[8] The [Texas Medal of Valor](#) was awarded posthumously to

18 Choctaw code talkers for their World War II service on September 17, 2007, by the Adjutant General of the State of Texas.^[81]

The Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008 (Public Law 110–420) was signed into law by President [George W. Bush](#) on November 15, 2008. The act recognized every Native American code talker who served in the United States military during WWI or WWII (except the already-awarded Navajo) with a Congressional Gold Medal. The act was designed to be distinct for each tribe, with silver duplicates awarded to the individual code talkers or their next-of-kin.^[82] As of 2013, 33 tribes have been identified and been honored at a ceremony at [Emancipation Hall](#) at the US Capitol Visitor Center. One surviving code talker was present, Edmond Harjo.^[83]

On November 27, 2017, three Navajo code talkers, joined by the [President of the Navajo Nation, Russell Begaye](#), appeared with President [Donald Trump](#) in the [Oval Office](#) in an official White House ceremony. They were there to "pay tribute to the contributions of the young Native Americans recruited by the United States military to create top-secret coded messages used to communicate during World War II battles."^[84] The executive director of the [National Congress of American Indians, Jacqueline Pata](#), noted that Native Americans have "a very high level of participation in the military and veterans' service." A statement by a Navajo Nation Council Delegate and comments by Pata and Begaye, among others, objected to Trump's remarks during the event, including his use "once again ... [of] the word *Pocahontas* in a negative way towards a political adversary Elizabeth Warren who claims 'Native American heritage'."^{[84][85][86]} The National Congress of American Indians objected to Trump's use of the name [Pocahontas](#), a historical Native American figure, as a derogatory term.^[87]

See also

[\[edit\]](#)

- [Native Americans and World War II](#)
- [United States Army Indian Scouts](#)
- [Windtalkers](#), a 2002 American war film on Navajo radio operators in World War II

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