

# Patriotic Legacy



**The Navajo Code Talkers and the  
Use of Native American Languages  
in Defense of America**

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## Introduction

*Were it not for the Navajos, the Marines would never have taken Iwo Jima.*

— Major Howard M. Connor, US Marines

*The Japanese always said they were positive about winning the war—until the Navajos got in.*

— Carl Gorman, Navajo Code Talker

The idea of using languages foreign to their hearers to convey secret messages during times of conflict is surely almost as ancient as war itself. In America, both before and after the formation of the Union, military leaders have prevailed upon their Native American allies to use their native languages to cloak strategic information and make it indecipherable by the enemy.

During World War I, the American military employed the services of Comanches from Southwestern Oklahoma to relay secret messages to confound German adversaries. Speaking of these Comanche soldiers in the *New York Times* of December 13, 1940, Professor W. G. Becker of the Cameron Agricultural College in Lawton, Oklahoma, remarked that:

*One would be at a telephone at the front in communication with another back at headquarters. They would relay orders in their native languages. The Germans had tapped the wires, and it must have driven them crazy.*

In another World War I project, eight members of the Choctaw Tribe from Company D, 141st Infantry, successfully transmitted many orders in their native language via field telephone.

An experiment to prepare Native Americans to do the same should the United States become involved in World War II was attempted several months before the December 7, 1941, Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor that brought America into the War. As the *New York Times* of August 31, 1941, reported, Lieutenant Colonel Glenn B. Arnold of the 32nd Division had plans to use the linguistic abilities of 17 Native American enlisted men from Michigan and Wisconsin to:

*send radio messages in "code," their own Indian dialects, in the big Louisiana war games starting Monday.*

The *Times* reported the experiment would involve nine Native Americans from a Western Wisconsin tribe, four from Northern Wisconsin, and four from Northern Michigan. The group would be trained by First Lieutenant Newton L. Chamberlain of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

World War II saw many instances of Native American soldiers from many tribes—including Chippewa, Menominee, Choctaw, Hopi, Comanche, and Creek—speaking across enemy lines in Europe, Africa, and the South Pacific in an effort to frustrate enemy cryptanalysts.

In each instance, the soldiers translated the messages they were to transmit into their own tongue and conveyed them to another native speaker at the other end of their radio connection.

The secrecy of these communications depended on the fact that no enemy listeners understood the Native American language in which the messages were couched. However, while the languages were obscure—the *New York Times* called Comanche a “strange tongue not more than 30 white men in the world can fathom”—any native speaker or advanced student of the language would find the message crystal clear.

### **A Secret Military Code Based on the Navajo Language**

Such was not the case with the true secret code based on the Navajo language Philip Johnston proposed and Navajo recruits developed in 1942. As the Canadian military had discovered in its efforts to use Native American languages to confound the Germans during World War I, those languages are limited by their lack of words equivalent to military terms.

Johnston, however, the son of a Protestant missionary who had grown up on the reservation and who spoke fluent Navajo, had a solution. He would work with Navajo recruits to use the Navajo language not as a code in itself, but as the basis for a code.

In Johnston's view, there were several excellent reasons why the Navajo language would be the ideal basis for an impenetrable code. For one thing, very few non-Navajos had much more than a rudimentary understanding of the intricate language in which meaning often depends heavily upon context and upon precise, nuanced pronunciation of subtly accented words and phrases.

In addition to its complexity and virtual incomprehensibility to non-native speakers, Navajo was in 1942 virtually an unwritten language. While the Franciscan scholar Father Berard Haile's *Manual of Navajo Grammar* had appeared in 1929, no Navajo dictionary had as yet been published.

The code Johnston envisioned would assign Navajo words and phrases as precise equivalents to the letters of the alphabet—*wol-la-chee*, or *ant*, for the letter *A*, or *dibeh-yazzie*, which means *lamb*, for *L*, for example. The Navajo Code would also contain precise equivalents to military terms, ranks, and other necessary concepts, including the months of the year. The Code would substitute Navajo for English, such as:

*gini*, or *chicken hawk*, for *dive bomber*, or  
*besh-lo*, meaning *iron fish*, for *submarine*, or  
*che-chil-be-tah-besh-legai*, or *silver oak leaf*, for *Lieutenant Colonel*

Furthermore, the Code would substitute Navajo terms depicting natural phenomena and weather for months, such as

*yas-nil-tes*, or *crusted snow*, for *January*  
*nil-chi-tsosie*, or *small wind*, for *October*, and  
*nil chi tso*, or *big wind*, for *November*

Such a code would be not only precise, Johnston argued, enabling its users to convey the intricate details of complex military messages. It would be a true code—incomprehensible to those not trained in its lexicon and use, even native speakers of the Navajo language.

In March of 1942, using the talents of several Navajo men he recruited through a Los Angeles Native American employment agency, Johnston presented a demonstration of the possibilities he envisioned for the Code at Camp Elliot in California.

The demonstration laid to rest the initial skepticism of Major General Clayton B. Vogel, the US Marine Corps Commander of Camp Elliot, and it impressed several other high ranking Marine officers, including a representative of the Marine Corps Division of Plans and Policies.

As Doris Paul reports in *The Navajo Code Talkers* (1973), the Marine brass were “amazed and delighted.” Vogel pledged to “request the Commandant to authorize such a project immediately.” The convinced general forwarded post-haste to the Marine Corps Commandant Johnston’s proposal to establish the Code Talkers (see Appendix 1 for the complete proposal), along with a letter asking that Navajos be recruited to serve as communicators.

In April 1942, Marine Corps recruiters signed up 29 Navajo men from boarding schools at Shiprock, Fort Wingate, and Fort Defiance. The group, which became the first of what would become by the end of the War more than 300 Navajo Code Talkers, comprised the initial contingent of the 382nd Platoon, US Marine Corps.

The 29 Code Talkers in the original group were:

<b>Charlie Begay</b>	<b>Roy Begay</b>	<b>Samuel Begay</b>
<b>John Benally</b>	<b>Willsie Bitsie</b>	<b>Cosey Brown</b>
<b>John Brown</b>	<b>John Chee</b>	<b>Benjamin Cleveland</b>
<b>Eugene Crawford</b>	<b>David Curley</b>	<b>Lowell Damon</b>
<b>George Dennison</b>	<b>James Dixon</b>	<b>Carl Gorman</b>
<b>Oscar Ilthma</b>	<b>Dale June</b>	<b>Alfred Leonard</b>
<b>William McCabe</b>	<b>James Manuelito</b>	<b>Chester Nez</b>
<b>Jack Nez</b>	<b>Lloyd Oliver</b>	<b>Frank Pete</b>
<b>Balmer Slowtalker</b>	<b>Nelson Thompson</b>	<b>Harry Tsosie</b>
<b>William Yazzie (aka Dean Wilson)</b>		<b>John Willie</b>

This cadre of 29 Navajo patriots created the first version of the Code, which was eventually expanded to include nearly twice as many terms as the original (see Appendix 2 for a full text of the final Code). The original nucleus of 29 men was expanded to include more than 300 Code Talkers among the more than 3600 Navajos who served in World War II.

After developing the first version of the Code, 27 members of the core group were sent to Guadalcanal to begin putting their creation into practice. Two members of the original contingent, Mr. Manuelito and Mr. Benally, were sent back to the Southwest to recruit additional Code talkers, Manuelito from the eastern side of the Navajo Reservation and Benally from the western side.

In September of 1942 Johnston, who had not participated with the original 29 in developing the initial version of the Code, was enlisted at the rank of Staff Sergeant in the US Marine Corps. In December, he was made responsible for training the first class of Navajo recruits that would learn to use the new Code.

And so began the saga of the Marine Code Talkers' use of their native Navajo language in defense of America. Their contributions to the war effort from 1942 through the end of the War in 1945 and its aftermath were among the most significant in American military history. And the complex Navajo language-based code—which remained top secret, along with the activities of the Code Talkers, for nearly 25 years after the war—has been called "the only code the enemy was never able to decipher." (Bixler, 48)

Navajo Code Talkers were in the heat of the action in both Europe and the Pacific theater of operations, participating indispensably in every significant battle in the Pacific campaign, including the siege of the island of Iwo Jima. At Iwo Jima, according to Major Howard M. Connor, 5th Marine Division Signal Officer, Code Talkers sent and received more than 900 messages without a single error. (Bixler, 79)

The siege of Iwo Jima linked forever the saga of the Code Talkers with the story of another Native American soldier, a Pima Indian named Ira Hayes. Appearing in Associated Press Photographer Joe Rosenthal's famous photograph of American soldiers raising the United States flag at the top of Mt. Suribachi on Iwo Jima, Hayes became a permanent icon in an unforgettable image that haunts our cultural memory of World War II.

A painting of Hayes on horseback juxtaposed against Rosenthal's famous image, *Ira Hayes, His Dream—His Reality*, by Joe Ruiz Grandee, became the basis for the face of the bronze medallion honoring the Navajo Code Talkers that was struck by the Franklin Mint in 1969.

Navajo Code Talker contributions did not cease with the Japanese surrender in 1945. Even after the war, Code Talkers were made responsible for conveying all messages from occupied Japan about the atomic devastation of Nagasaki as well as other conditions, including those in certain munitions factories, to San Francisco military headquarters.

Because the Code Talker program retained its top secret classification for nearly a quarter century after the war, recognition of the Navajo contribution to the allied victory was slow in coming. However, in June 1969, Code Talkers representing the First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Marine Divisions were honored at the 22nd reunion of the Fourth Marine Division in Chicago.

The Navajo veterans were featured in a parade and subsequent memorial services at Pioneer Court, honored at a luncheon at Executive House, and presented with Medal of Honor-style medallions depicting Ira Hayes against the backdrop of the Mt. Suribachi flag raising. Pictured on the cover of this publication, the bronze medallion is three inches in diameter, one-quarter inch thick, and supported by eighteen-inch rawhide thongs strung with red, white, and blue beads.

With the ceremonies in Chicago and subsequent events held that same year in Albuquerque and in Shiprock, Arizona, the Code Talkers at long last began to receive a measure of the gratitude and accolades merited by their unprecedented patriotic contributions. The decades since the founding of the Code Talkers' Association in 1971 have brought more recognition and honors. In the Summer of 1995, fifty years after the Japanese surrender, a number of Code Talkers revisited several of the Pacific sites of their wartime activities.

Scholars have begun to separate fact from fiction and document Code Talker history. Code Talker exploits and contributions have been chronicled in art, film, video tape, and poetry. Their accounts of their experiences have been taped by historians, and they have been honored at feasts, pow-wows, parades, and fairs. And their unique dual identity as Navajos and patriotic Americans has been celebrated, as exemplified by the following song composed by Code Talker Bob Craig's son, Vincent.



## Code Talker

*He's the son of the Four Directions,  
And a child of the Blessing Way,  
raised in the loving arms  
of his mother's humanity.  
Wisdom comes to him  
through the legends of long ago,  
told by a man who loved  
the wandering eyes of a little child.*

*My daddy was a Code Talker Man  
with Uncle Sam's Marines.  
He spoke on the whistling wind  
during the time of man's inhumanity.*

*He packed his bags and got on the train,  
headed for L.A.,  
off to fight a war  
that he really couldn't understand,  
goodbye to the four sacred mountains  
of his youth.  
But he shall return,  
for the medicine bag is strong.*

*A dark foreboding piece of land  
somewhere in the South Pacific,  
a place called Iwo Jima,  
destiny had brought him here.  
Many of you will die –  
Oh, that's what they told him then.  
Perhaps he thought of home  
and his people the Navajo.*

*Remember me, my four sacred mountains,  
Help me to understand the pain  
that he suffered there  
during the time of man's inhumanity.*

— Vincent Craig

The remainder of this document outlines the story of the Navajo Code Talkers and honors their patriotic legacy. It presents a brief description of the patriotic response of the Navajo Nation to the war followed by a sketch of the cultural and economic circumstances out of which the Code Talkers came when they entered military service.

The next section profiles Philip Johnston and outlines the Code Talker program approved by the US Marine Corps, followed by a description of the Code itself, an overview of procedures used to recruit and train Code Talkers for the program, and highlights of several Code Talkers' accounts of their initial military experiences.

After a brief account of Code Talker service during the Pacific campaign, including testimonials from several participants, the document presents a brief discussion of Code Talker post-war experiences and major efforts to recognize and honor their unprecedented patriotic legacy. This discussion is followed by appendices presenting the complete text of Johnston's Code Talker Program proposal, the final version of the Code, a list of the names of 376 known Code Talkers identifying current members of the Navajo Code Talkers' Association, and a bibliography of sources.

## **The Response of the Navajo Nation to World War II**

World War II was to change dramatically Navajo life. For the vast majority of the more than 3500 Navajos serving in the armed forces, their wartime experiences represented their initial encounter with both American society and foreign lands.

At the time the war was expanding to consume nearly all of Europe and beginning to spread across the Pacific, most Navajos led lives virtually indistinguishable from those they had led for hundreds of years. While few were allowed to vote, many spoke English since—ironically, given the contribution the Code Talkers would make to the war effort—many students were forbidden to speak their native language at school.

Isolated across 17.5 million acres of New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah desert, poor, and almost completely without the conveniences of electricity and running water, let alone radios and automobiles, few Navajos had ever ventured off the reservation. However, word of the conflict in Europe and the Pacific spread rapidly among members of the complex Navajo extended families.

Long before America's official entrance into the war in response to the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, the Navajo Nation had expressed its patriotic support of efforts to protect liberties and oppose subversion. More than a year and a half previous to the infamous December 7, 1941, conflagration, the Navajo Tribal Council at Window Rock had unanimously passed the following resolution, signed by both J.C. Morgan, Navajo Tribal Chairman, and Tribal Vice Chairman Howard Gorman.

## Navajo Tribal Resolution in Support of the US Government

*Whereas, the Navajo Tribal Council and the 50,000 people we represent, cannot fail to recognize the crisis now facing the world in the threat of foreign invasion and the destruction of the great liberties and benefits we enjoy on the reservation, and*

*Whereas, there exists no purer concentration of Americanism than among the First Americans, and*

*Whereas, it has become common practice to attempt national destruction through the sowing of seeds of treachery among minority groups such as ours, and*

*Whereas, we hereby serve notice than any un-American movement among our people will be resented and dealt with severely, and*

*Now, Therefore, we resolve that the Navajo Indians stand ready as they did in 1918, to aid and defend our Government and its institutions against all subversive and armed conflict and pledge our loyalty to the system which recognizes minority rights and a way of life that has placed us among the greatest people of our race.*

— June 3, 1940

On the very day the Japanese devastated Pearl Harbor, according to an article by Vernon Langille in the March 1948 issue of the Marine Corps journal *The Leatherneck*, Reservation Superintendent E.M. Fryer observed a large group of Navajo youths gathered outside his office. Members of the group—quiet, serious, carrying weapons, their personal effects wrapped in red bandanas—announced “We’re going to fight” (37). Doris Paul wrote that:

*Hours later, the youths were prevailed upon to return to their hogans and await the official call to arms that inevitably would come.*

*It is said that one tribe in New Mexico saw all of its fighting men clean and oil their rifles, pack their saddlebags and ride to Gallup, prepared to enter battle then and there.*

*After the official call to arms was issued, the Navajos appeared at their agencies, carrying old muskets and hunting rifles, asking where they could fight the enemy. Many were turned away, heartbroken and humiliated that they could not fight because they could not speak English. One writer said, "Although the 'Great White Father' has often regarded the Indians as step-children, these First Americans sprang to the front line of defense when the chips were down." (Paul, 4)*

One young Navajo summed up his and several of his fellows' motives for volunteering for military service by saying:

*I guess we decided to go to war and protect our people from other hardships . . . I would think, "I'm doing this for my people." I believed what we did was right, and it was worth it. We protected the many American people, also the unborn children, which would be the generation to come. (Johnson, 56).*

### **Philip Johnston and the Code Talker Program**

Philip Johnston was born in 1892. The son of Protestant missionaries William and Margaret Johnston, he had spend most of his childhood from the age of four growing up on the Navajo Reservation. Immersed in Navajo tradition and culture and with Navajo children as his constant and only playmates, Johnston had become one of the few non-Navajos fluent in the difficult and complicated Navajo language. He developed such linguistic expertise that, as Doris Paul wrote:

*As he grew a little older, he served as a translator for his father, other missionaries, and government agents on the reservation. At the age of nine, he accompanied his father and two Navajos to the White House where Mr. Johnston appealed to President Theodore Roosevelt for fair treatment of the Navajos and Hopis. Little Philip served as interpreter. He remembers to this day the fact that President Roosevelt ruffled his hair and greeted him with, "Hello, Philip!" (Paul, 8)*

After serving with the 319th Engineers in France for a year during World War I, Johnston had earned a civil engineering degree and had worked for the Bureau of Engineering in Los Angeles.

According to a 1970 interview with Johnston conducted for the Doris Duke Oral History Project and the University of Utah Library by John D. Sylvester, Johnston's idea for the Code was sparked by the 1941 *New York Times* article quoted in the Introduction to this document. Johnston told Sylvester the article about the plan for the Native American language during maneuvers in Louisiana suggested to him a solution for "the oldest problem in military operations—sending a message no enemy could possibly understand." Sylvester quotes Johnston saying that:

*The next day I confronted Lieutenant Colonel James E. Jones, area signal officer at Camp Elliot, seven miles north of San Diego.*

*"Colonel," I asked, "what would you think of a device that would assure you of complete secrecy when you send or receive messages on the battlefield?"*

*For a moment, the Colonel was silent. Dark circles under his eyes told their story of the strain under which he had been working. Why, he was plainly thinking, would gate guards permit a crackpot to enter this compound merely to waste my time?*

*With a deep sigh he leaned forward on his desk and answered my question. "In all the history of warfare, that has never been done. No code, no cipher is completely secure from enemy interception. We change our codes frequently for this reason."*

*"But suppose we could develop a code from an Indian language," I continued, "one that would always be used orally, by radio or telephone, and never reduced to writing that would fall into the enemies' hands."*

*"It has already been tried but with limited success. In World War I, Canadian forces attempted to use an Indian language when their telephone lines were tapped by the Germans. Trouble was that the Indians had no words in their vocabulary that were exact equivalents for military terms. For example, they could find no way of transmitting machine gun barrage. Let me remind you that any deviation whatever from the text of a message could lead to disaster. No, Mr. Johnston, I don't think your idea is practical."*

*"Ah, Colonel," I answered, "I'm afraid you're missing the whole point. My plan is not to use translations of an Indian language, but to build a code of Indian words. Let's imagine this code included such terms as 'fast shooter' to designate a machine gun, and 'iron-rain' for a barrage. Navajo personnel would be thoroughly drilled to understand and use these substitutions."*

*A thoughtful expression crept into the Colonel's face. I pressed my advantage and went on.*

*"Now just listen to some Navajo words and tell me if you honestly believe that anyone but a Navajo could understand them."*

*If I had lighted a string of firecrackers and laid them on the desk, the effect could not have been more startling. Colonel Jones sat bold upright in his chair and gazed at me in frank disbelief that such sounds could possibly issue from any vocal organ . . . .*

*Like a boxer who has his opponent reeling, I tried for a knockout.*

*"I'll repeat one of them very slowly, and you try to pronounce it."*

*After a painful and utterly futile attempt to do so, the Colonel roared with laughter. Recovering his composure he said, "Damn it, Mr. Johnston, you may have something there. I'd like very much to see some of these Navajos. Could that be arranged?"*

*Two weeks later, after searching Los Angeles for educated tribesmen, I returned with them to Camp Elliot. Colonel Jones greeted me with a broad smile.*

*"We're all ready for you, he said, "A field telephone has been installed in Headquarters building. Here are six typical messages used in operations. See what your men can do, and, ah, report to me in an hour."*

*At the appointed time we appeared at the Colonel's office and he guided us to the headquarters of Major General Clayton B. Vogel. It was a tense moment, but the General quickly put us at ease with a cordial greeting.*

*The room was swarming with high brass. Two of the Navajos were taken to another room and the test started. Fifteen minutes later, the General inspected the results.*

*"These are excellent translations," he said, "as good as might be possible from any language. There's no doubt in my mind that Navajo words could be used for code purposes. I shall request the Commandant to authorize such a project immediately." (quoted by Bixler, 44-6)*

The February 1942 proposal Johnston prepared for General Vogel was forwarded to the Marine Corps Commandant in March, along with Vogel's request that 200 Navajos be recruited as communicators.

Johnston's proposal and Vogel's request were greeted with skepticism at Marine Headquarters, but permission was granted to recruit and train an experimental 30 man group. The 29 original Code Talkers listed in the Introduction to this document began training in San Diego a short time later.

They were joined by three other Navajos, Felix Yazzie, Wilson Price, and Ross Haskie, college graduates who had previously finished boot camp training (McClain, 54). The 32 men worked on their own to develop the initial 263 item Code along the lines Johnston had suggested. Employing the unique Code they would perfect and use in combat and other throughout the remainder of the war, the Code Talkers would fulfill Johnston's prediction they would "render service in the defense of the United States—a service which will be of inestimable value."

### **The Indecipherable Navajo Code**

As the full text of the final version of the Navajo Code in Appendix 2 shows, the Code contains Navajo substitutions for the English letters, words, and phrases categorized as follows:

- Letters of the Alphabet
- Names of Military Organizations and Units
- Names of Military Officers
- Names of Countries
- Names of Airplanes
- Names of Ships
- Names of Months
- Vocabulary Words

Many of the substitutions are not only colorful, their arbitrariness and idiosyncrasy must have been maddening to enemy troops overhearing telephone and radio transmissions. For example,

- dola-alth-whoosh, or bull sleep, for bulldozer*
- woz-cheind, or squeaky voice, for February*
- cha, or beaver, for mine sweeper*
- deba-de-nih, or sheep pain, for Spain*
- debeh-li-zini, or black sheep, for squad*
- ashih-hi, or salt, for division*
- be-thin-ya-ni-che, or deer ice strict, for district*

By presenting several substitutions for each letter of the alphabet (i.e., *wol-la-chee*, or *ant*; *be-la-sana*, or *apple*; and *tse-nill*, or *axe* for the letter A), and by allowing Code Talkers transmitting messages to spell out words rather than substituting their direct Navajo equivalents (i.e., *be-la-sena*, or *apple*, *tsah*, or *needle*, and *d-ah*, or *tea*, for *ant*), the Code was quite versatile.

It also allowed individual Code Talkers to use ingenuity in response to momentary circumstances, as Code Talkers Tom Begay and Carl Gorman showed interviewer Kathryn Flynn in November 1995:

TB: *When you say "Bill," (kind of a bad name thing to say about a name), but "sick bear."*

CG: *Because "bear" is a code, "B" for "bear," but "ill" is, you know, "ill."*

The Code's inscrutability also arises from the way the meaning of Navajo words often depends on the context in which they are spoken. As Keith Little showed, discussing *potatoes* in wartime contexts can denote *grenades*:

KL: *It's like the "potato." Tom [Begay, another Code Talker] is over here, we're talkin' "potato," we're talkin' war talk.*

KF: *Uh huh.*

KL: *And you're listening, uh, social talk.*

KF: *Okay.*

KL: *So, you, when I say "potato," you say, "Well, looks like they're gonna have potatoes or something," but . . . But the real meaning, the, the real meaning over here, when we're transmittin',*

KF: *Right.*

KL: *"Potato" and "grenade."*

The complex conventions of Navajo pronunciation add a further dimension of inscrutability to the Code (Flynn, 11). As the "painful and utterly futile" efforts of Colonel Jones to reproduce several Navajo words recounted by Johnston illustrate, Navajo pronunciation is very difficult, especially for non-native speakers. In Navajo, many different tones and pitches must be used to communicate meaning.

The examples below illustrate how slight changes in the tone in which Navajo words are pronounced can produce vast changes in meaning:

*in* means *you*  
*azee'* means *medicine*  
*doo* means *not*

*ní* means *he says*  
*azéé'* means *mouth*  
*dóó'* means *and*



The tone of the way each word is uttered determines the difference in what is conveyed. These slight tonal differences make it very difficult to decipher Navajo words unless one has been raised with the language.

To further complicate matters, whether a vowel or diphthong is rendered in a rising or falling tone also affects meaning. Of course, written versions of Navajo including accent marks such as those incorporated in the above examples are somewhat easier to follow than spoken language, but no Navajo dictionary had as yet been published at the time the Code Talkers were sending their wartime messages.

Navajo also contains many hard to reproduce sounds, such as glottal stops, which are similar to the sound produced by break between the English expression *oh, oh*. For example, the Navajo word for *west* is pronounced *e'e'aah*. And the English expression *a hole* is pronounced *a'áán* in Navajo.

Some vowels (i.e., *tsinaabaask*, meaning *wagon*), are nasalized, produced by passing breath through the nose as they are pronounced. Also, there are slight differences in the way glottalized consonant sounds, which are generated by the speaker's use of mouth air rather than lung air, are produced. (Goossen, XIV)

The combination of these different sounds, the way in which the air flows through the mouth or nose, and the position of the mouth, tongue or jaw all contribute to the difficulty of speaking, not to mention understanding, the Navajo language. It is no wonder that the enemy was unable to decipher the code the Navajos created.

### The Code Talker Training Program

The first group of Navajo inductees finished their boot camp training at the Marine Recruit Depot outside San Diego on June 27, 1942. The 29 men, joined by the three other Navajo Marines who had previously finished boot camp, developed the 263 items making up the initial version of the Code. Code Talker Frank Thompson reported regarding the training and development of the Code that the recruits were instructed in:

FT: *C14, blinkers, those flags on the ship. You know, we had to read those, um, what they, um, what the, what each flag stands for. We had to learn all that, and then we sent messages, runners, and then we used telephones . . .*

*Then they had small radio. [gestures] Like that, small radio. We were doing all right! So. Then they sent us to machine gun school. Uh, 30 caliber, air-cooled, water-cooled, and 50 caliber, water-cooled and air cooled.*

*And after you, uh, get to know all the mechanism on it, dismantled, then they blindfold us, to get that thing dismantled and everything put back together in four minutes. And we did that. For us, everybody passed again.*

*Then they put us through Morse Codes school. We had a school for about, ah, I'd say about a whole week. Twenty words or better, then you pass. So everybody passed again.*

*The last one is where the Code comes in. They had a picture on the one side with airplanes. Different size airplanes. They didn't have too many airplanes in those days. They had no helicopters, or different, you know, . . . and then the ships on another, another one. All the way . . . down to aircraft carrier to destroyers. And, uh, different kind of small ships.*

*And first the instructor asks us, "Do you have names for those planes?" We said, "No, we don't have one name for one plane." That's all. "How about the ships?" We have one name, too . . . .*

*And then the guy asked us, "Okay. You guys name those. You give them names. And do the same things to the, to the ships." . . .*

*And so we named, we, uh, got together and said, "Let's name all the planes after the birds, all the birds. The way they act. The size. How they go round." So we did. So the hawks. You know how they go after their prey? So they was the dive bombers. . . .*

*We did that with all the birds. Any birds that, well, that would, according to the planes. Then we have to memorize all those, that name we gave for the plane.*

*And we did the same thing to the ships. Then we got together and said, uh, "Let's name those ships after anything that lives in the water, or above the water, on the water." So we, we start doing that. Os, uh, big fish would be the battle, battleship. Little fish will be destroyer. Or, and then bird carrier would be airplane air, air, aircraft carrier.*

KF: *Okay.*

FT: *So, we named them after, uh, the different fish.*

KF: *How did you arrive at specific names?*

FT: *. . . somebody will say, "Well, what about this one? You know? What about this one? Oh, no, let's do it this way." So everybody has to agree on it.*

In the beginning, recruiting enough qualified Navajos for the program was a bit of a problem. But Philip Johnston developed a comprehensive recruiting strategy taking into account the unique circumstances prevailing on the vast Navajo Reservation, which is larger than some states. Taking into account the high illiteracy rate on the Reservation, Johnson suggested that:

*A complete survey of all schools on the reservation, and non-reservation schools, such as those located at Fort Wingate, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, which are attended by Navajos, would disclose a list of potential enrollees for communications duty which might well prove to be among the best available. . . .*

*Then, too, those in the foregoing schools who are not more than a year below the enlistment age should be interviewed and appraised, with a view of possible enlistment after they have passed their seventeenth birthday.*

*. . . men who have been placed in Class 1A by their draft boards—could be contacted by a mobile unit and informed of the opportunity offered by the Marine Corps for special duty as Communication Personnel. Those who desire to enter the service at once could do so through their draft boards according to procedure now followed.*

*The third category, those men who have been deferred by draft boards, is now well represented in the Navajo Communications School. Although it has been the policy of the Marine Corps not to accept for enlistment applicants who are married and have more than two children, this practice was set aside in the recent recruiting of Navajos, because of the scarcity of men qualified for communication duty. . . .*

*Under the present ruling, such men could enter the service by requesting their draft boards to place them in Class 1A, and induct them at once. The mobile recruiting unit could find these men, outline to them the attractive feature of specialize service in the Marine Corps, and direct them to the proper channel for induction. (quoted by Paul, 161-2)*

After these and other successful recruiting strategies were developed, the Code Talker training program evolved into an eight-week process. Recruits spent six weeks in classroom study and practice followed by two weeks of experience in the field, including training in using and maintaining their communications equipment.

Throughout their training, the Navajos encountered—and overcame—skepticism regarding their work. One Code Talker reported that:

*In our field training, we had wires strung all over the place with guys sitting here and over there. We'd send messages, and the brass would be walking around and they would sneak over to the other end of our wires to see if the message was coming out the same as it went in. Then they'd send a runner back to see if the message sent and received were the same. They'd say, "I don't know how the hell they're doin' it." They hid us so we couldn't see each other while we were sending messages.*

*Then those intelligence men recorded some of our messages and took them back to their offices to decode. They sat around three weeks trying to break them down and couldn't do it. Of course we could break down those messages in three shakes.*

*We trained from ground to air and the messages still came out the same; and still the brass couldn't understand how we did it. (quoted by Paul, 31).*

Once they completed their eight week school, most of the Code Talkers were sent to Hawaii for final training and to practice the combat tactics and procedures the Marines would use as they fought island-by-island across the Pacific to both take and retake territory held by the Japanese.

### **Code Talkers in Battle**

Navajo Code Talkers played a broad spectrum of roles in all major activities during both the first and second phases of the Pacific campaign and after the war in both Japan and China. They served in every naval vessel class and in Signal Companies, Paramarines, Headquarters and Service, Joint Signal Assault Company (JASCO), Infantry, Engineer and Tank Battalions, Reconnaissance, Marine Air Wing Groups, Artillery, Shore Party Teams, and Raider Battalions.

Code Talkers were in the heat of battle on:

- Guadalcanal
- Tarawa
- Bougainville
- Cape Gloucester, New Britain
- Marshall Islands
- Saipan
- Tinian
- Guam
- Peleliu
- Iwo Jima
- Okinawa

Philip Johnston reported of his experience sitting in Major Connor's office listening to the bloody 26-day battle for Iwo Jima that:

*The entire operation was directed in the Navajo code, he [Connor] said. Our Corps Command Post was on a battleship from which orders went to three division command posts on the beachhead and on down to the lower echelon. I was signal officer of the Fifth Division. During the first forty-eight hours while we were landing and consolidating our shore positions, I had six Navajo radio nets operating around the clock. In that period alone, they sent and received more than eight hundred messages without an error. (quoted by Bixler, 97)*

Code Talkers performed a wide variety of vital services using the Code, including conveying messages to and from the various islands. They served as front line observers relaying information regarding troop movements, the progress of battles, gun placement, and the accuracy of bombardment.

They spotted and reported on airplane activity and helped call in and direct bombing missions. Code Talkers also transmitted secret instructions and orders and secure information regarding the periodic changes in passwords and code designations. They also performed many services unrelated to the Code.

The Navajos saved many lives, sometimes in unusual ways. Johnston met a Corporal at Camp Pendleton who reported that if it had not been for the Navajos, he would have died in the Pacific. Bixler says that:

*The Corporal was on Saipan facing the Japanese forces on the edge of a lake. During the night the enemy retreated and established a new position. The United States forces moved up to the old position of the Japanese. Immediately, shelling started from other United States forces. Frantically they called for a Code Talker who sent the message that the United States was bombarding its own men. The firing was immediately stopped. "And that is how the Navajo saved my life," explained the Corporal. (Bixler, 80)*

The Navajos not only faced stiff opposition from their Japanese adversaries, they often encountered difficulties with their own comrades. In response to a question about his most difficult experiences as a Code Talker, Keith Little and Tom Begay stated:

KL: *The hardest, ah, the hardest experience that we faced was the, ah, the commanders havin' confidence in us.*

- KF: *That was one of my other questions. I was going to ask you guys,*
- KL: *They, they was always, they was always, they, they have questions that, you know, these damn Indians, don't know, no, any good, don't know no better.*
- KF: *How long did it, did you, did each one have to go in and get their confidence, before you,*
- KL: *It took, it took, on our part, it took efficiency.*
- KF: *Yeah.*
- KL: *You had to be dedicated, you know.*
- KF: *You had to prove it.*
- KL: *You had to know your, had to know that your, your Code is a better system than the, uh, than the other code that they had, and so that the, uh, accuracy and speed,*
- KF: *Yeah.*
- TB: *We had a competition in our division, with, uh, encoding and decoding. They have a cryptographic machine. We are faster than those people, you know, they can try to decode one,*
- KF: *You could do it faster.*
- TB: *Plus our commanding officer, Major Harold Connor, he say, "If it wasn't for the Navajo, we would've never taken Iwo Jima."*

Because of their resemblance to Japanese, the Navajos sometimes encountered other soldiers who mistook them for the enemy. On Saipan, a Marine working with a Code Talker with the 1st Marine Division was unable to raise his 2nd Division counterpart. Doris Paul wrote that:

*Evidently men of the Second Marine Division (at least one particular group of the division) were not aware that Indians were among them. The corporal had left the Navajo in charge of the radio jeep while he was scrounging up some food or what-have-you. Along came some Marines and saw the Navajo in the jeep. Thinking he was a Japanese, they grabbed him, even though he tried to explain his identify (sic) as a Marine. It just didn't "go over" with his captors.*

*"So you're an American with the Fourth Marine Division, eh? O.K. . . . who is the Commandant of the Marine Corps?" The answer should have been, "General Vandergrift," but the Navajo, misinterpreting the question, gave the name of his commanding officer, Captain Watson. With this, they tossed him behind barbed wire. When the corporal returned he had some explaining to do before the Navajo was released. (Paul, 89).*

Code Talker William McCabe reported a similar experience on Guadalcanal while he was waiting for his transport ship:

*But something went wrong and we had to wait there about four or five days before we could board the ship. And we hadn't been eating for a day, day and a half, something like that. And to do this, to eat we'd have to set up our mess hall all over again. We already broke the thing down . . . already packed. And we couldn't eat with the Army . . . they didn't want no Marines out there.*

*So I went to the chow dump, and I was sneaking around back there and open up can, open up boxes. These guys that went with me took what they want. You know, they just took a can of meat or can of fruit or vegetable or something . . . what they want they took off and went off. But I got choosy, I wanted to get me a can of orange juice. Damn right. I wanted an orange juice. So then that, I got lost among the big chow dump and I got caught back there.*

*All of a sudden somebody say, "Halt," and I kept walking. "Hey, you! Halt, or I'm gonna shoot!" And I thought somebody was playing a joke on me. I turn around and there was a big rifle all cocked and ready to shoot. And so, "What are you doing here?"*

*I said, tell him, "I'm just from my outfit. I was coming here to get something to eat." And he said, "I think you're a Jap. Just come with me."*

McCabe was finally identified and released, but afterwards, he reported, the Marines ordered one of the white Marines to serve as his bodyguard. McCabe said that:

*Everywhere I went he went, everywhere I went he was there. I went down to the toilet, he was there. I went down to take a bath, he was down there. He was everywhere. He'd go to sleep and I'd start walking and he'd say "Where are you going?"*

*"I don't give a damn. You just come follow me." And he had to follow me . . . he had to follow me everywhere I went. He tried to tell me to stay in one place, but I'd just roam all over.*

*"He goes again. There he goes again. Damn Chief, why don't you sit still, stay put? My legs are hurting."*

*And then we went on ship. It was in the Australian paper when we got there. Somebody put it in the newspaper. (quoted by Bixler, 81-2)*

While the Navajos' resemblance to the Japanese sometimes caused them problems with their fellow soldiers, several Code Talkers reported incidents in which they were able to obtain tactical advantage over their enemies by pretending to be Japanese.

The Navajo Code proved very frustrating to the Japanese, as the testimony of Joe Kieyoomia shows. A survivor of the Bataan Death March held as a Prisoner of War by the Japanese from April 9, 1942 to September 4, 1945, Kieyoomia was mistaken for Japanese. He reported that:

*One evening . . . I was brought to the commander's quarters for questioning, and they asked me again, for the hundredth time, if I was an American. I told them I was an American Indian, but that only made them angry.*

*"You are American Japanese! Why are you fighting against your own people?" the commander shouted.*

*The interpreter, a guy named Goon, understood that I was American Indian, but the interrogator didn't. When I refused to confess that I was Japanese, the interrogator hit me with a club, broke my ribs and then my wrist. When I refused to confess again, they dragged me back to the barracks and threw me in a cell.*

*We had a British doctor named Whitfield who examined me, . . . but all he could do was bind my ribs and give me aspirin. Later that night the pain was so intense they took me to the infirmary. It wasn't much better there. They laid me flat on the floor with only a thin straw mat under me and checked me every four hours.*

*Sometime later that month, Goon must have figured out that the talkers on the radio who couldn't be identified must be Indians . . . . They were having a tough time deciphering the code, and they finally figured that I might be able to help them. When they first made me listen to the broadcasts, I couldn't believe what I was hearing. It sounded like Navajo, just not anything that made sense to me. I understood my language, but I could not figure out the code they were using. That made the interrogators very angry!*

*They stripped off all my clothes and threw me out on the parade ground to coax me into cooperating. It was very cold out there, and my feet began to freeze to the ground. They left me out there about half an hour, then clubbed me back into the radio room.*



*My feet were bleeding from being torn from the ground, but I still couldn't help them. They were trying to keep me alive to get something out of me.*

*I liked hearing the Navajo language: it gave me hope. It told me that American forces were getting close, and I felt like I would be liberated the next day. If it hadn't been for the code talkers, I would have been put before a firing squad." (quoted by McClain, 120-1).*

The Navajo Code Talkers suffered only eleven verified fatalities during the Pacific campaign (McClain, 105). During the Pacific campaign, the Code itself was modified in response to circumstances and expanded to include 508 Navajo terms.

According to Lieutenant General Seizo Arusue, Japanese Chief of Intelligence for World War II, the Japanese were able to decipher the code system used by the American Air Force. However, as Doris Paul has reported, the General has "ruefully admitted" the Japanese were never able to decipher the Navajo Code.

American military testimonials as to the value of the Code are easy to find. Lieutenant General R. E. Cushman, Jr., remarked that:

*The Navajo code talkers, of course, prevented the enemy from understanding the messages and, therefore, were of considerable value.*

Lieutenant Colonel J. B. Berkeley, a communications officer with the 5th Amphibious Corps, asserted that the Navajos demonstrated on many occasions they could transmit complicated instructions and reports over wire or radio without a single mistake: (Paul, 98). The Chaplain of the 25th Regiment, George Strum, stated regarding the Code Talkers:

*I was in awe of how important they were to our operations and their great contributions to the success of our division and regiments. (McClain, 221)*

Marine Colonel Marlow C. Williams, who was commanding officer on Bougainville, Guam, and Iwo Jima, has said that:

*In my opinion, these talkers were invaluable throughout the assault on Guam and other campaigns prior and subsequent to this one. (Paul, 98)*

And, of course, Major Howard Connor's comment that without the Navajos the Marines would never have taken Iwo Jima was mentioned by Tom Begay in his November 1995 interview with Kathryn Flynn and serves as an epigraph to this document. High praise for speakers of a language and a Code that Vernon Langille described in the March 1948 *Leatherneck* as:

*American double-talk mixed with a sound that resembles water being poured from a jug into a bathtub. (37)*

## **Code Talkers After the War**

After serving with Army and Navy intelligence to transmit reports of the atomic bomb effects at Nagasaki back to San Francisco and after participating in Northern China in several mopping up operations, most of the Code Talkers returned stateside. When the War was over, so was the need for the Code Talkers.

Efforts by the Marine Corps and Philip Johnston to keep the Code for the future met with no success. Johnson stated that:

*Officialdom seemed to think that there would be no more wars. The code was allowed to die. (Paul, 100)*

However, the Code and the Navajos' activities were to remain an official secret for nearly 25 years.

Upon being mustered out, many of the Navajos returned to the Reservation. Many did not return. Some reinlisted. Some were never heard from again, such as several Code Talker Jimmy King knows to have stayed in Japan and several he speculated may have married their Australian sweethearts and stayed in Australia to live. (Bixler, 104)

Many returning Code Talkers who had spent so long in the heat of action took advantage of the healing benefits offered by the traditional Navajo Squaw Dance, which is performed to release haunting memories and feelings from the returning warrior so that they do not burden the warrior and those around him. Code Talker Sidney Bedoni described the Squaw Dance held for him as follows:

*I took all my clothes off and then went into the hogan. Leave my clothes out there, my uniform . . . . Get all washed up and everything. See, all that stuff that's on you, they think it's evil or something like that. They trying to chase them away . . . . That all my mind won't be way overseas or something like that. All my mind will come back to me when they have that squaw dance. (Bixler, 105-6)*

Albert Smith explained to interviewer Kathryn Flynn in 1995 the significance of the Squaw Dance:

AS: *Among us traditional, we are to leave the war stories be hind. No tragedies. No bloodshed. No turmoils to be brought home.*

KF: *Okay.*

AS: *To the Indian parents. To the Indian children. This is the reason. This was in the song. This was in the prayers. And, when we do this, bring the war stories, like it is now, it's piped into the homes. You have all the turmoils connected with it. You don't, we don't think about those things.*

KF: *Mm hmm. Mm hmm.*

AS: *We say, "We are heroes! We are heroes!" No such things. You're hero, you are hero by yourself. You are hero only to the other veteran. Not to the general public.*

KF: *How?*

AS: *When you contaminate them.*

KF: *Okay.*

AS: *When the mother hears about it, she feels that.*

KF: *You bet.*

AS: *And she cooks that into her food and feeds it to the young.*

Many of the Code Talkers now view their experiences as part of the beginning of the major transition of the Navajo people from isolation to fuller participation in the mainstream of modern life. Keith Little in 1995 stated that:

*So, being, ah, going from the Reservation to, to somethin' entirely different was kind of an, an experience all by itself. But you, you, you make an adjustment to it. And comin' home, gettin' out of that, you know, ah, being, ah, being an alert soldier and doin' your duty, irregardless of what kind of situation you're in, you job came first, there. You're disciplined that way. And when you come home, ah, no, nobody seems to care what, ah, what you been through, or what you have done. And the only, only thing important is that what you have to, what I have to do, what I wanted to do. Go back to school and get a little bit of education.*

The following exchange between Code Talkers Albert Smith, Tom Begay, and Keith Little and interviewer Kathryn Flynn further illustrates changes in Navajo life and the lives of Code Talkers arising from the War:

KF: *And your all going into World War II, all of the men, not just you all, but certainly the Code Talkers, coming back to the Reservation must have been a, you must've just blasted it out, in the sense of having had those experiences and coming back and being exposed, I mean, to so many things. How, how did, how did, how did the people, well, we talked about this earlier, how did they accept the things that you all probably wanted to change, or help move along? I mean, you got [Raymond] Nakai and [Peter] MacDonald [who became Chairmen of the Navajo Tribe] that became leaders and started things going. How did people react to all that change, that they wanted to bring about?*

AS: *That was the beginning of it. That was the beginning. By going out, being a participant in a world conflict, that took away from our shells. Took us out of our shells, we looked at the world. We fought in a world that was in conflict. That give us an additional stability, additional determination to succeed in whatever direction we were going for our future.*

KF: *Do you think that was all that bad?*

TB: *One of the things we thought after World War II was that, most servicemen, they want to leave the reservation. There's a better life out there. At that time, at that particular time, there were lot of jobs, better living, . . . and all that. There were a lot of people relocating to urban areas, because of our experience, . . . urban centers, Los Angeles, Denver, all these places. A lot of them were relocating. I work in that area . . . . We sent a lot of people out there. Lot of them still out there. Lot of them came back. Here's a young man [points to Carl Gorman] that went out to Los Angeles to seek his fortune.*

KF: *Did you make your fortune, sir? [Gorman does not respond].*

KL: *That was the, ah, initial beginning of the transition in social and educational training, the beginning of World War II.*

AS: *When I got out of the Marine Corps, I went back to school .*

KL: *And, ah, I believe that the Code Talkers have contributed a lot to the transition, simply because they were a little more, ah, intellectual than the ordinary Navajos. Because they had to make it.*

KF: *Mm hmm.*

KL: *They had to make it, ah, at the schools, in the training. Then had to make it in the War. They had to fight against the opposition [to the Navajo Code and the prejudice against Native Americans] in order to succeed. So, ah, these things all played a role in, ah, in the, the, transition of the Navajos.*

Because of the nearly a quarter century of secrecy surrounding the exploits of the Code Talkers, only a small portion the richly deserved official recognition has been awarded to the Navajos. Code Talker Frank Thompson has stated that about half of the Code Talkers deserved a medal for their contributions and that, in his view, several should have received the Congressional Medal of Honor. (Bixler, 116)

Today, the Code Talkers have become unofficial ambassadors for the US military, sometimes even to other Navajos, and for Native American people around the world, as the following recent exchange illustrates:

KF: *What's the most frequently asked question you all get, as a Code Talker? . . . .*

TB: *We just went to, um, Seoul, um, Korea. One of the frequent questions that those people asked was, "How come you don't have feathers?" That's not, Navajos don't wear feathers. The feathers are only used, we call on the eagle, to use his feather when somebody's killed, or sick. That's when we use them. But any other time, we don't use his feather at all. Maybe the new, innovative Indians, they do that . . . . Those of us traditional Navajo, we don't. We only use for special ceremony to heal somebody . . . . But the other thing that they ask me there, "We don't know you, and I want to touch you. I read about it. I know all about it [code talking], but I want to shake your hand." This is one of the things that we learned is that [they were interested in us, the] four of us, Code Talkers and my wife, we all went, you know, and toured that country . . . .*

AS: *Most of the lectures I do are at universities, private organizations. When I come back and talk to these young Navajos, they don't want to hear me. Most aren't interested.*

CG: *Some of the Navajos, I make a talk about the Code Talkers, how we had a rough time and all that, and then two or three years later they come back . . . . "I sure liked your talk. Could you please talk some more?" But the rest, They don't care.*

When asked why, in the face of racial discrimination at the time, they risked their lives in the War and why, despite the inadequate recognition of their contributions that followed the War, they are still proud, still wear their uniforms, still participate in ceremonies, and still serve as unpaid ambassadors around the world, Carl Gorman and Albert Smith replied:

CG: *Every time when I make my talk, sometime they'd ask me, "What, US Government treat you so bad, why don't you, know, why did you fight with them?" . . . They don't realize that this was my country. I still think this is my country. And that's what I fought for, my country. And my people.*

AS: *They ask us, "Why do you fight . . . ?" Why do we go to war, when all the racial conflicts, and how most Indians at that time were being treated. Why did we do that? It wasn't our war. This is, uh, my answer to that is, all the racial conflicts that we were having were social, having nothing to do with another country coming to take what Mother Earth had provided for us. And all the freedom that we enjoyed, our way of life that was being threatened. It has nothing to do with the racial issues. It has nothing to do with how, uh, the turmoil that was being inflicted on us in our own country. We went to protect what Mother Earth had provided for us and our freedom.*

## Conclusion

Initially, according to members of the Code Talkers Association interviewed in November 1995, these Navajo young men joined the Marines to protect their country, their people, and their freedom. Their country was basically the reservation and this nation, which had always been theirs even before the Europeans crossed the Atlantic.

While they were in the Marines, they faced opposition and prejudice both because they were Native American and because their value as Code Talkers had to be proved even though it had been authorized by the Marine Corps.

War always changes young men, and these Navajos, required to prove themselves over and over again, were challenged even more than other Americans who fought in World War II. Because of the challenges they faced and their exposure to a world much different from reservation life, they felt upon their return called to serve as instigators of change in their own Navajo culture, to create bridges between the white and Navajo worlds.

Today, many of the surviving Code Talkers are tribal elders and are once again concerned about their country and their people. They are consciously presenting themselves as examples and spokesmen working to restore a measure of traditional Navajo values and culture, as Albert Smith remarked,

*because of the sicknesses that are being piped into all our homes via television, etc.*

Fifty years after the War, many are trying to create, once again, bridges between the old and the new, trying, as Carl Gorman remarked, to help young Navajos realize that all Navajos are "born and die with our own culture."

As unofficial ambassadors from the US Military and the United States to non-Navajos around the world, they try to share what they did during World War II and explain why they did it. They say they hope to instill their patriotic commitment in all they meet to protect our land and our people, to do their part once again to save our land.

As the story of the Code Talkers of World War II presented in this document demonstrates, it is far past time for us to recognize the Navajos' contributions. Their heroic work permeated the war effort in the Pacific and saved many American lives. And the indecipherable code proposed by Philip Johnston and developed by its Navajo Marine users deserves a more exalted place in our history. Unprecedented and unique, it was the singular product of an idea whose time had come.

Now, in an age when Native American languages are written and Native American dictionaries are easily acquired, an age when computers can analyze and decipher languages and verbal codes in the twinkling of an eye, it is an idea whose time has also gone—forever. The creators and users of the Navajo Code deserve to be placed in the pantheon among our greatest warriors. They have given us a patriotic legacy meriting our warmest gratitude and deepest respect.

## Appendix 1

### Philip Johnston's Proposal to Establish the Code Talkers

(as presented to the Commanding General, Amphibious  
Corps, Pacific Fleet, Camp Elliott, San Diego, California)

#### 1. General:

The American Indian comprises a distinct racial subdivision, presumed by anthropologists to have migrated from Asia by way of the "land bridge" at Bering Strait. Dates of these migrations have not been fixed, but recent excavations have disclosed human remains in association with those of the now extinct giant sloth—an indication that earlier migrations occurred more than 20,000 years ago.

Present Indian population of the United States is 361,816 comprising 180 tribes. These are divided into distinct linguistic stocks, each of whose languages has apparently evolved from a common source. The total number of tribes in the United States, Canada, and British Columbia is 230, which represents 56 linguistic stocks. The language of a tribe belonging to one linguistic stock is completely alien to that of another stock; and in most cases variations of the tongues within a linguistic stock may be so great as to be mutually unintelligible.

All Indian languages are classified as "unwritten" because no alphabets or other symbols of purely native origin are in existence. In a few cases, these aboriginal tongues have developed alphabets adapted to the expression of the difficult consonants involved. A notable instance in point is the Navajo Dictionary compiled by the Franciscan Fathers of Saint Michaels, Arizona, who have also translated portions of the Bible, and unwritten other texts in the Navajo tongue for the use of their students. Recently, the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs has inaugurated a program of writing Navajo texts for study in reservation schools. However, a fluency in reading Navajo can be acquired only by individuals who are first highly educated in English, and who, in turn, have made a profound study of Navajo, both in its spoken and written form. An illiterate Navajo is, of course, entirely unable to read his own language.



Because of the fact that a complete understanding of words and terms comprising the various Indian languages could be had only by those whose ears had been highly trained in them, these dialects would be ideally suited to communication in various branches of our armed forces. Messages sent and received between two individuals of the same tribe could not, under any circumstances, be interpreted by the enemy; conversations by telephone or short-wave radio could be carried on without possibility of disclosure to hostile forces.

## 2. Tribes Available for Recruitment:

A logical approach to the problem of selection of suitable personnel for an Indian Signal Corps would be to consider the largest tribes in the United States. Reference to accompanying maps will show locations of each of the following:

Tribe	Population
Navajo	49,338
Sioux (in South Dakota)	20,670
Chippewa	17,443
Pima-Papago	11,915

The Pima and Papago tribes are so closely allied in language as to be mutually intelligible.

Percentage of literacy among the foregoing tribes would be in direct proportion to the length of time each has been in contact with educational facilities. The Chippewa would no doubt have the highest percentage, with the Sioux second, the Pima-Papago third, and the Navajo fourth. It should be noted, however, that a prerequisite to effective service in transmitting code messages is an excellent command of both the native tongue and of the English. In some cases, individuals of a tribe which has had long contact with white residents may have largely forgotten his native tongue.

Since only a minute percentage of the foregoing tribes are college graduates, it is unlikely that 250 members of each, between the ages 21-30, would be available for recruitment. However, a fair number have attended government and public schools, and completed twelve grades, equivalent to high school. Without doubt a large majority of these would have sufficient command of both their native tongues and of English to qualify for service in the signal corps. It is also probable some individuals with even

less schooling, by reason of constant use of the English language, might be qualified for signal corps service. This matter could readily be ascertained by giving each applicant an examination to show his fluency in both tongues.

### **3. Recruitment of Navajo Indians:**

This tribe is selected as an example of a possible plan for recruitment because of the writer's intimate knowledge of its reservation, the people, and their language. Most of the factors discussed would apply to the other three tribes in varying degrees.

With an area of 25,000 square miles, and an approximate population of 50,000, the Navajo reservation is one of the most sparsely populated sections of the United States. It is traversed by unimproved roads and trails; and many of its outlying portions are accessible only on horseback. Culturally and linguistically, the Navajo has been autonomous, and apart from surrounding white population. But in recent years, an increasing number of Navajo children have attended schools established by the government on this reservation, where they have received grammar school instruction; and a large percentage of these students have graduated from other schools of higher grades located at points remote from the reservation, where the curricula include native arts and crafts, as well as various trades and occupations taught in accredited schools throughout the United States.

Because the manner of life on the Navajo reservation provides small opportunity for educated Indians to set up a standard of living compatible with their training, a large portion of them have sought employment in government agencies and institutions, and in towns near the reservation. Therefore, an effective program to contact suitable personnel for recruitment would require publicity designed to reach every Navajo whose age and education qualifies him for service. The most important feature of such a program would be a bulletin prepared to set forth the following:

- (a) That the Navajos are in a unique position to render service in the defense of the United States—a service which will be of inestimable value.
- (b) That such a service would involve the transmission of messages in their own tongue, which is not understood by any other people in the world.

- (c) That meritorious service in such a capacity may result in advancement in the service.
- (d) That applications for enlistment are received at designated localities.

The best location for a central recruiting station would be at the Central Navajo Agency, Window Rock, Arizona, or Gallup, New Mexico. Secondary stations for contact of local applicants should be located at several points throughout the reservation, preferably at Tuba City, Arizona, and Chin Lee, Arizona, and Shiprock, New Mexico. Special efforts should also be made to contact Navajos through government school superintendents at Leupp, Fort Defiance, Kayenta, and Keams Canyon, Arizona and Crownpoint, New Mexico.

A considerable number of eligible applicants will also be found among the following categories:

- (a) Navajos attending non-reservation government schools, such as those located at Phoenix, Arizona, and Albuquerque, New Mexico.
- (b) Educated Navajos employed at the foregoing schools and in various capacities by the government.
- (c) Educated Navajos who are employed off the reservation, principally in the cities of Flagstaff, Winslow, Gallup, and Albuquerque.
- (d) Navajos who have already enlisted, or have been inducted into the armed forces, who might be transferred to the Marine Corps for special training in signal work.

#### **4. Indian Affairs Officials:**

Direct contact with the Navajo Reservation should be made through Mr. E.R. Fryer, Superintendent, Central Navajo Agency, Window Rock, Arizona. Contacts with proper authorities among the other tribes listed can be made through the Honorable John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Washington, D.C.

## Appendix 2

### The Final Version of the Navajo Code

Official Document for the Code as used by the Navajo Marines in World War II, Declassified DOD DIR 5200.9.

#### Alphabet

A.	(wol-lal-chee)	ant	O.	(a-kha)	oil
A.	(be-la-sana)	apple	O.	(tlo-chin)	onion
A.	(tse-nill)	axe	O.	(ne-ahs-jah)	owl
B.	(na-hash-chid)	badger	P.	(cla-gi-aih)	pant
B.	(shush)	bear	P.	(bi-so-dih)	pig
B.	(toish-jeh)	barrel	P.	(ne-zhoni)	pretty
C.	(moasi)	cat	Q.	(ca-yeilth)	quiver
C.	(tla-gin)	coal	R.	(gah)	rabbit
C.	(ba-goshi)	cow	R.	(dah-nes-tsa)	ram
D.	(be)	deer	R.	(ah-losz)	rice
D.	(chindi)	devil	S.	(dibeh)	sheep
D.	(lha-cha-eh)	dog	S.	(klesh)	snake
E.	(ah-jah)	ear	T.	(d-ah)	tea
E.	(dzeh)	elk	T.	(a-woh)	tooth
E.	(ah-nah)	eye	T.	(than-zie)	turkey
F.	(chuo)	ir	U.	(shi-da)	uncle
F.	(tsa-e-donin-ee)	fly	U.	(no-da-ih)	Ute
F.	(ma-e)	fox	V.	(a-keh-di-glini)	Victor
G.	(ah-tad)	girl	W.	(gloe-ih)	weasel
G.	(klizzie)	goat	X.	(al-na-as-dzoh)	cross
G.	(jeha)	gum	Y.	(tsah-as-zih)	yucca
H.	(tse-gah)	hair	Z.	(besh-do-tliz)	zinc
H.	(cha)	hat			
H.	(lin)	horse			
I.	(tkin)	ice			
I.	(yeh-hes)	itch			
I.	(a-chi)	intestine			
J.	(tkele-cho-gi)	jackass			
J.	(ah-ya-tsinne)	jaw			
J.	(yil-do-i)	jerk			
K.	(jad-ho-loni)	kettle			
K.	(ba-ah-ne-di-tinin)	key			
K.	(klizzie-yazzie)	kid			
L.	(dibeh-yazzie)	lamb			
L.	(ah-jad)	leg			
L.	(nash-doie-tso)	lion			
M.	(tsin-tliti)	match			
M.	(be-tas-tni)	mirror			
M.	(na-as-tso-si)	mouse			
N.	(tsah)	needle			
N.	(a-chin)	nose			

A. able	B. baker	C. Charlie	D. dog	E. easy	F. fox
G. George	H. how	I. item	J. jig	K. king	L. love
M. Mike	N. Nan	O. oboe	P. Peter	Q. queen	R. Roger
S. Sugar	T. tare	U. uncle	V. Victor	W. William	X. x-ray
Y. yoke	Z. zebra				

### Names of Various Organizations

Word	Navajo	Literal Translation
corps	din-neh-ih	clan
division	ashih-hi	salt
regiment	tabaha	edge water
battalion	tacheene	red soil
company	nakia	Mexican
platoon	has-clish-nih	mud
section	yo-ih	beads
squad	debeh-li-zini	black sheep

### Officers

Commanding General	bih-keh-he (G)	war chief
Major General	so-na-kih	two star
Brigadier General	so-a-la-ih	one star
Colonel	atsah-besh-le-gai	silver eagle
Lieutenant Colonel	che-chil-be-tah-besh-legai	silver oak leaf
Major	che-chil-be-tah-ola	gold oak leaf
Captain	besb-legai-na-kih	two silver bars
Lieutenant	besb-legai-a-lah-ih	one silver bar
Commanding Officer	hash-kay-gi-na-tah	war chief
Executive Officer	bih-da-hol-nehi	those in charge

### Names of Countries

Africa	zhin-ni	blackies
Alaska	beh-hga	with-winter
America	ne-he-mah	our mother
Australia	cha-yes-desi	rolled hat
Britain	toh-ta	between waters
China	ceh-yehs-besi	braided hair
France	da-gha-hi	beard
Germany	besb-be-cha-he	iron hat
Iceland	tkin-ke-yah	ice land
India	ah-le-gai	white clothes
Italy	doh-ha-chi-yali-tchi	stutter
Japan	beh-na-ali-tsosie	slant eye
Philippine	ke-yah-da-na-lhe	floating island
Russia	sil-gol-che-ih	red army
South America	sha-de-ah-ne-hi-mah	south our mother
Spain	deba-de-nih	sheep pain

Word	Navajo	Literal Translation
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### Names of Airplanes

planes	wo-tah-de-ne-ih	air force
dive bomber	giri	chicken hawk
torpedo plane	tas-chizzie	swallow
observation plane	ne-as-jah	owl
fighter plane	da-he-tih-hi	humming bird
bomber plane	jay-sho	buzzard
patrol plane	ga-gih	crow
transport	atsah	eagle

### Names of Ships

ships	toh-dineh-ih	sea force
battle ship	lo-tso	whale
aircraft	tsidi-ney-ye-hi	bird carrier
submarine	besh-lo	iron fish
mine sweeper	cha	beaver
destroyer	ca-lo	shark
transport	dineh-nay-ye-hi	man carrier
cruiser	lo-tso-yazzie	small whale
mosquito boat	tse-e	mosquito

### Names of Months

January	atsah-be-yaz	small eagle
February	woz-cheind	squeaky voice
March	tah-chill	small plant
April	tah-tso	big plant
May	tah-tsosie	small plant
June	be-ne-eh-eh-jah-tso	big planting
July	be-ne-ta-tsosie	small harvest
August	be-neen-ta-tso	big harvest
September	ghaw-jih	half
October	nil-chi-tsosie	small wind
November	nil-chi-tso	big wind
December	yas-nil-tes	crusted snow

### Vocabulary

abandon	ye-tsan	run away from
about	wol-chi-a-he-gahn	ant fight
abreast	wol-la-chee-be-yied	ant breast
accomplish	ul-so	all done
according	be-ka-ho	according to
acknowledge	hanot-dzied	acknowledge
action	ah-ha-tinh	place of action
activity	ah-ha-tinh-(y)	action ending in (y)
adequate	beh-gha	enough or sufficient
addition	ih-he-de-ndel	addition
address	yi-chin-ha-tse	address
adjacent	be-gahi	near or close by
adjust	has-tai-nel-kad	adjust

Word	Navajo	Literal Translation
advance	nas-sey	ahead
advise	na-netin	advise
aerial	be-zonz	stinger
affirmative	lanh	affirmative
after	bi-kha-di (a)	after
against	be-na-grish	against
aid	eda-ele-tsood	aid
air	nilchi	air
airdrome	nilchi-beghan	airdrome
alert	ha-ih-des-ee	alert
all	ta-a-tah (a)	all
allies	nih-hi-cho	allies
along	wolachee-snez	long ant
also	eh-do	also
alternate	na-kee-go-ne-nan-dey-he	2nd position
ambush	khac-da	ambush
ammunition	beh-eli-doh-be-cah-ali-tas-ai	all sort of ammunition
amphibious	chal	frog
and	do	and
angle	dee-cahn	slanting
annex	ih-nay-tani	addition
announce	beh-ha-o-dze	announce
anti	wol-la-chee-tsin	ant ice
anticipate	ni-jol-lih	anticipate
any	tah-ha-dah	any
appear	ye-ka-ha-ya	appear
approach	bi-chi-ol-dah	approach
approximate	to-kus-dan	approximate
are	cah-tso	big rabbit
area	haz-a-gih	area
armor	besh-ye-ha-da-di-teh	iron protector
army	lei-cha-ih-yil-knee-ih	army
arrive	il-day	arrive
artillery	be-al-doh-tso-lani	many big guns
as	ahce	as
assault	altseh-e-jah-he	first striker
assemble	de-ji-kash	bunch together
assign	bah-deh-tahn	assign
at	ah-di	at
attack	al-tah-je-jay	attack
attempt	bo-o-ne-tah (a)	try
attention	giha	attention
authenticator	hani-ba-ah-ho-zini	know about
authorize	be-bo-ho-snee	authorize
available	ta-shoz-teh-ih	available
baggage	klailh (b)	baggage
banzai	ne-tah	fool them
barge	besh-na-elt	barge
barrage	besh-ba-wa-chind	barrage
barrier	bih-cha-ni-ah	in the way
base	bih-tsee-dih	base
battery	bih-be-al-doh-tka-ih	three guns
battle	da-ah-hi-dzi-tsio	battle
bay	toh-ah hi-ghinh	bay
bazooka	ah-zhol	bazooka

Word	Navajo	Literal Translation
be	tses-nah	bee
beach	tah-bahn (b)	beach
been	tses-nah-nes-chee	bee nut
before	bih-tse-dih	before
begin	ha-hol-ziz	commence from
belong	tses-nah-snez	long bee
between	bi-tah-kiz	between
beyond	bilh-la di	down below
bivouac	ehl-nas-teh	brush shelter
bomb	a-ye-shi	eggs
booby trap	dineh-ba-whoa-blehi	man trap
borne	ye-chie-tsah	born elk
boundary	ka-yah-bi-na-has-dzoh (b)	boundary
bull dozer	dola-alth-whosh	bull sheep
bunker	tsas-ka	sandy hollow (bedlike)
but	neh-dih	but
by	be-gha	by
cable	besh-lkoh	wire rope
caliber	nahl-kihd (c)	move around
camp	to-altseh-hogan	temporary place
camouflage	di-nes-ih	hid
can	yah-di-zini	can
cannoneer	be-al-doh-tso-dey-dil-don-igi	big gun operator
capacity	be-nel-ah	capacity
capture	yis-nah	capture
carry	yo-lailh	carry
case	bit-sah	case
casualty	bih-din-ne-dey	put out of action
cause	bi-nih-nani	cause
cave	tso-ond	rock cave
ceiling	da-tel-jay	seal
cemetery	jish-cha	among devils
center	ulh-ne-ih	center
change	thla-go-a-nat-zah	change
channel	ha-talhi-yazzie	small singer
charge	ah-tah-gi-jah	charge
chemical	ta-nee	alkali
circle	nas-pas	circle
circuit	ah-heh-ha-dailh	circuit
class	alth-ah-a-teh	class
clear	yo-ah-hol-zhod	clear
cliff	tse-ye-chee	cliff
close	ul-chi-uh-nal-yah	close
cost guard	ta-bas-dsissi	shore runner
code	yil-tas	peck
colon	naki-alh-deh-da-al-zhin	two spots
column	alth-kay-ne-zih	column
combat	da-ah-hi-jih-ganh	fighting
combination	al-tkas-el	mixed
come	huc-quo	come
comma	tso-na-dahl	tail drop
commercial	nai-el-ne-hi	commercial
commit	huc-quo-la-jish	come glove
communication	ha-neh-al-enji	making talk
conceal	be-ki-asz-jole	conceal



Word	Navajo	Literal Translation
concentration	ta-la-hi-jih	one place
concussion	whe-hus-dil	concussion
condition	ah-ho-tai	how it is
conference	be-ke-ya-ti	talk over
confidential	na-nil-in	kept secret
confirm	ta-a-neh	make sure
conquer	a-keh-des-dlin	won
consider	ne-tsa-cas	think it over
consist	bilh (c)	consist
consolidate	ah-hih-hi-nil	put together
construct	ahl-neh	to make
contact	ah-hi-di-dail	come together
continue	ta-yi-teh	continue
control	nai-ghiz	control
convoy	tkal-kah-o-nel	moving on water
coordinate	beh-eh-ho-zin-na-as-dzoh	known lines
counter attack	woltah-al-ki-gi-jeh	counter act
course	coh-ji-goh	course
craft	ah-toh	nest
creek	toh-nil-tsanh	very little water
cross	al-n-as-dzoh	cross
cub	shush-yahz	cub
dash	us-dzoh	dash
dawn	ha-yeli-kahn	dawn
defense	ah-kin-cil-toh	defense
degree	nahl-kihd	degree
delay	be-sitihn	deer lay
deliver	be-bih-zihde	deer liver
demolition	ah-deel-tahi	blow up
dense	ho-dilh-cla (d)	wet
depart	da-de-yah	depart
department	hogan	department
designate	ye-khi-del-nei	designate
desperate	ah-da-ah-ho-dzah	desperate
detach	al-cha-nil	detached
detail	be-beh-sha	deer tail
detonator	ah-deel-tahi (or)	blown up
difficult	na-ne-klah	difficult
dig in	le-eh-gade	dig in
direct	ah-ji-go	direct
disembark	eh-ha-jay	get out
dispatch	la-chai-en-seis-be-jay	dog is patch
displace	hih-do-nal	move
display	be-seis-na-neh	deer is play
disposition	a-ho-tay	disposition
distribute	nah-neh	distribute
district	be-thin-ya-ni-che	deer ice strict
do	tse-le	small pup
document	beh-eh-ho-zinz (d)	document
drive	ah-nol-kahl	drive
dud	di-giss-yahzie	small dummy
dummy	di-giss-tso	big dummy
each	ta-lahi-ne-zini-go	each
echelon	who-dzah	line
edge	be-ba-hi	edge

<b>Word</b>	<b>Navajo</b>	<b>Literal Translation</b>
effective	be-delh-need	effective
effort	yea-go	with all your might
element	ah-na-nai	troop representing others
eliminate	ha-beh-to-dzil	eliminate
embark	eh-ho-jay	get on
emergency	ho-nez-cla	emergency
emplacement	la-az-nil	emplacement
encircle	ye-nas-teh (e)	encircle
encounter	bi-khanh	go against
engage	a-ha-ne-ho-ta	agreed
engine	chidi-bi-tsi-tsine (e)	engine
engineer	day-dil-jah-he	engineer
enlarge	nih-tsa-goh-al-neh	make big
enlist	bih-zih-a-da-yi-lah	enlist
entire	ta-a-tah (e)	entire
entrench	e-gad-ah-ne-lih	envelop
equipment	ya-ha-de-tahi	equipment
erect	yeh-zihn	stand up
escape	a-zeh-ha-ge-yah	escape
establish	has-tay-dzah	establish
estimate	bih-ke-tse-hod-des-kez	estimate
evacuate	ha-na	evacuate
except	neh-dih (e)	except
expect	na-wol-ne	expect
exchange	alh-nahl-yah	exchange
execute	a-do-nil	execute
explosive	ah-del-tahi (e)	explosive
expedite	shil-loh (e)	speed up
extend	ne-tdale	make wide
extreme	al-tsan-ah-bahm	each end
fail	cha-al-eind	fail
failure	yees-ghin	failure
farm	mai-be-he-ahgan	fox arm
feed	dzeh-chi-yon	feed
field	clo-dih (f)	field
fierce	toh-bah-ha-zsid (f)	afraid
file	ba-eh-chez	file
final	tah-ah-kwo-dih	that is all
flame thrower	coh-ah-ghil-tlid	flame thrower
flank	dah-di-kad	flank
flare	wo-chi	light streak
flight	ma-e-as-zloli	fox light
force	ta-na-ne-ladi	without care
form	be-cha	form
formation	be-cha-ye-lailh	formation
fortification	ah-na-sozi	cliff dwelling
fortify	ah-na-sozi-yazzie	small fortification
forward	tehi	let's go
fragmentation	besch-yazzie	small metal
frequency	ha-talhi-tso	big singer
friendly	neh-hecho-da-ne	friendly
from	bi-tsan-dehn	from
furnish	yeas-nil (f)	furnish
further	wo-nas-di	further
garrison	yah-a-da-hal-yon-ih	take care of

Word	Navajo	Literal Translation
gasoline	chidi-bi-toh	gasoline
grenade	ni-ma-si	potatoes
guard	ni-dih-sa-hi	guard
guide	nah-e-thlai	guide
hall	lhi-ta-a-ta	horse all
half track	alh-nih-jah-a-quhe	race track
halt	ta-akwai-i	halt
handle	bet-seen	handle
have	jo	have
headquarer	na-ha-tah-ba-hogan	headquarter
held	wo-tah-ta-eh-dahn-oh	held (past tense)
high	wo-tah	high
high explosive	be-al-doh-be-ca-bih-dzil-igi	powerful shell
highway	wo-tah-ho-ne-teh	high way
hold	wo-tkanh	hold
hosptial	a-zey-al-ih	place of medicine
hostile	a-nah-ne-dzin	not friendly
howitzer	be-el-don-tso-quodi	short big gun
illuminate	wo-chi (i)	light up
immediately	shil-loh (i)	immediately
impact	a-he-dis-goh	impact
important	ba-has-teh	important
improve	ho-dol-zhond	improve
include	el-tsod	include
increase	ho-nalh	increase
indicate	ba-hal-neh	tell about
infantry	ta-neh-nal-dahi	infantry
infiltrate	ye-gha-ne-jeh	went through
initial	beh-ed-de-dlid	brand
install	ehd-tnah	install
installation	nas-nil	in place
instruct	na-ne-tgin	teach
intelligence	ho-yah (i)	smart
intense	dzeel	strength
intercept	yel-na-me-jah	intercept
interfere	ah-nilh-khlai	interfere
interpret	ah-tah-ha-ne	interpret
investigate	na-ali-ka	track
involve	a-tah	involve
is	seis	seven
island	sies-keyah	seven island
isolate	bih-tsa-nel-kad	separate
jungle	woh-di-chil	jungle
kill	naz-tsaid	kill
kilocycle	nas-tsaid-a-kha-ah-yeh-ha-dilh	kill oil go around
labor	na-nish (l)	labor
land	kay-yah	land
launch	tka-ghil-zhod	launch
leader	ah-na-ghai	leader
least	be-be-yazie-ha-a-ah	lamb east
leave	dah-de-yah	he left
left	nish-cla-jih-goh	left
less	bi-oh (l)	less
level	dil-konh	level

Word	Navajo	Literal Translation
liaison	da-a-he-gi-eneh	know other's actions
limit	ba-has-ah	limit
litter	ni-das-ton (l)	scatter
locate	a-kwe-eh	spot
loss	ut-din	loss
machine gun	a-knahn-as-donih	rapid fire gun
magnetic	na-e-lahi	pick up
manage	hastni-beh-na-hai	man age
maneuver	na-na-o-nalth	moving around
map	kah-ya-nesh-chai	map
maximum	bel-dil-khon	fill to top
mechanic	chiti-a-nayl-inih	auto repairman
mechanized	chidi-da-ah-he-goni	fighting cars
medical	a-zay	medicine
megacycle	mil-ah-heh-ah-dilh	million go around
merchant ship	na-el-nehi-tsin-na-ailh	merchant ship
message	hane-al-neh	message
military	silago-keh-goh	military
millimeter	na-as-tso-si-a-ye-do-tish	double mouse
mine	ha-gade	mine
minimum	be-oh (m)	minimum
minute	ah-khay-el-kit-yazzie	little hour
mission	ai-neshodi	mission
mistake	o-zhi	miss
mopping	ha-tao-di	mopping
more	thla-na-nah	more
mortar	be-al-doh-cid-da-hi	sitting gun
motion	na-hot-nah	motion
motor	chide-be-tse-tsen	car head
native	ka-ha-teni	native
navy	tal-kah-silago	sea soldier
necessary	ye-na-zehn	want
negative	do-ya-sho-da	no good
net	na-nes-dizi	net
neutral	do-neh-lini	neutral
normal	doh-a-ta-h-dah	normal
not	ni-dah-than-zie	no turkey
notice	ne-da-tazi-thin	no turkey ice
now	kut (n)	now
number	beh-bih-ke-as-chinigih	what's written
objective	be-ne-yei	goal
observe	hal-zid	observe
obstacle	da-ho-desh-zha	obstacle
occupy	yeel-tsod	taken
of	toh-ni-tkal-lo	ocean fish
offensive	bin-kie-jinh-jih-dez-jay	offensive
once	ta-lai-di	once
only	ta-ei-tay-a-yah	only
operate	ye-nahl-nish	work at
opportunity	ash-ga-alin	opportunity
opposition	ne-he-tsah-jih-shin	opposition
or	eh-dodah-goh	either
orange	tchil-lhe-soi	orange
order	be-eh-ho-zini	order
ordinance	lei-az-jah	under ground

Word	Navajo	Literal Translation
originate	das-teh-do (o)	begin
other	la-e-cih	other
out	clo-dih (o)	out side
overlay	be-ka-has-tsoz	overlay
parenthesis	atsanh	rib
particular	a-yo-ad-do-neh	particular
party	da-sha-jah (p)	party
pay	na-eli-ya	pay
penalize	tah-ni-des-tanh	set back
percent	yal	money (all sorts)
period	da-ahl-zhin	period
periodic	da-al-zhin-thin-moasi	period ice cat
permit	gos-shi-e (p)	permit
personnel	da-ne-lei	member
photograph	beh-chi-ma-had-nil	photograph
pill box	bi-so-dih-dot-sahi-bi-tsah	sick pig box
pinned down	bil-dah-has-tanh-ya	pinned down
plane	tsidi	bird
plasma	dil-di-ghili	plasma
point	be-so-de-dez-ahe	pig point
pontoon	tkosh-jah-da-na-elt	floating barrel
position	bilh-has-ahn	position
possible	ta-ha-ah-tay	possible
post	sah-dei	post
prepare	hash-tay-ho-dit-ne	prepare
present	kut (p)	present
previous	bih-tse-dih (p)	previous
primary	altseh-nan-day-hi-gih	1st position
priority	hane-pesodi	priority
probable	da-tsi	probable
problem	na-nish-tsoh	big job
proceed	nay-nih-jih	go
progress	nah-sai (p)	progress
protect	ah-chanh	self defense
provide	yis-nil (p)	provide
purple	dinl-chi	purple
pyrotechnic	coh-na-chanh	fancy fire
question	ah-jah	ear
quick	shil-loh	quick
radar	esat-tsanh (r)	listen
raid	dezjay	raid
railhead	a-de-geh-hi	shipping point
railroad	konh-na-al-bansi-bi-thin	railroad
rallying	a-lah-na-o-glath	gathering
range	an-zah	distance
rate	gah-eh-yahn	rabbit ate
ration	na-a-jah	ration
ravine	chush-ka (r)	ravine
reach	il-day (r)	reach
ready	kut (r)	ready
rear	be-ka-denh (r)	rear
receipt	shoz-teh	receipt
recommend	che-ho-tai-tahn	recommend
reconnaissance	ha-a-cidi	inspector

Word	Navajo	Literal Translation
reconnoiter	ta-ah-ne-al-ya	make sure
record	cah-ah-nah-kloli	r-e-rope
red	li-chi	red
reef	tza-zhin	black rock
reembark	eh-na-jay	go in
refire	na-na-coh	refire
regulate	na-yel-na	regulate
reinforce	nal-dzil	reinforce
relief	aganh-tol-jay	relief
relieve	nah-jih-co-nal-ya	remove
reorganize	ha-dit-zah	reorganize
replacement	ni-na-do-nil	replacement
report	who-neh	got word
representative	tka-naz-nili	triple man
request	jo-kayed-goh	ask for
reserve	hesh-j-e	reserve
restrict	ba-ho-chinh	restrict
retire	ah-hos-teend	retire
retreat	ji-din-nes-chanh	retreat
return	na-dzah	came back
reveal	who-neh (l)	reveal
revert	na-si-yiz	turn about
revetment	ba-nas-cla (r)	corner
ridge	gah-ghil-keid	rabbit ridge
riflemen	be-al-do-hosteen	riflemen
river	toh-yil-kal	much water
robot bomb	a-ye-shi-na-tah-ih	egg fly
rocket	lesz-yil-beshi	sand boil
roll	yeh-mas	roll
round	naz-pas (r)	round
route	gah-bih-tkeen	rabbit trail
runner	nih-dzid teih	runner
sabotage	a-tkel-yah	hindered
saboteur	a-tkel-el-ini	trouble maker
sailor	cha-le-gai	white caps
salvage	na-has-glah	pick them up
sat	bih-la-sana-cid-da-hi	apple sitting
scarlet & red	lhe-chi (s&r)	red
schedule	beh-eh-ho-zini	schedule
scout	ha-a-sid-al-sizi-gih	short recon.
screen	besh-na-nes-dizi	screen
seaman	tkal-kah-dineh-ih	seaman
secret	bah-has-tkih	secret
sector	yoehi (s)	sector
secure	ye-dzhe-al-tsisi-gi	small security
seize	yeel-stod (s)	seize
select	be-tah-has-gla	took up
semicolon	da-ahl-zhin-bi-tsa-na-dahl	dot drop
set	dzeh-cid-da-hi	elk sitting
shackle	di-bah-nesh-gohz (s)	shackle
shell	ba-al-doh-be-ca	shell
shore	tah-bahn (s)	shore
short	bosh-keesh	short
side	bosh-keesh	side
sight	ye-el-tsanh	seen

Word	Navajo	Literal Translation
signal	na-eh-eh-gish	by signs
simplex	alah-ih-ne-tih	inner wire
sit	tkin-cid-da-hi	ice sitting
situate	a-ho-tay (s)	situate
smoke	lit	smoke
sniper	oh-behi	pick 'em off
space	be-tkah	between
special	e-yih-sih	main thing
speed	yo-zons	swift motion
sporadic	ah-na-ho-neil	now and then
spotter	eel-tsay-i	spotter
spray	klesh-so-dilzin	snake pray
squadron	nah-ghizi	squash
storm	ne-ol	storm
strafe	na-wo-ghi-goid	hoe
straggler	chy-ne-de-dahe	straggler
strategy	na-ha-tah (s)	strategy
stream	toh-ni-lih	running water
strength	dzhel	strength
stretch	desz-tsood	stretch
strike	nay-dal-ghal	strike
strip	ha-tih-jah	strip
stubborn	nil-ta	stubborn
subject	na-nish-yazzie	small job
submerge	tkal-cla-yi-yah	went under water
submit	a-nih-leh	send
subordinate	al-khi-nal-dzl	helping each other
succeed	yah-taygo-e-elah	make good
success	ut-zah	it is done
successful	ut-zah-ha-dez-bin	it is done well
successive	ut-zah-sid	success scar
such	yis-cleh	sox
suffer	to-ho-ne	suffer
summary	shinh-go-bah	summer mary
supplementary	tka-go-ne-nan-dey-he	3rd position
supply	nal-yeh-hi	supply
supply ship	nalga-hi-tsin-nah-ailh	supply ship
support	ba-ah-hot-gli	depend
surrender	ne-na-cha	surrender
surround	naz-pas (s)	surround
survive	yis-da-ya	survive
system	di-ba-tsa-as-zhi-bi-tsin	system
tactical	e-chihn	tactical
take	gah-tahn	take
tank	chay-da-gahi	tortoise
tank destroyer	chay-da-gahi-nail-tsaidi	tortoise killer
target	wol-doni	target
task	tazi-na-eh-dil-kid	turkey ask
team	deh-na-as-tso-si	tea mouse
terrace	ali-khi-ho-ne-oha (t)	terrace
terrain	tashi-na-hal-thin	turkey rain
territory	ka-yah (t)	territory
that	tazi-cha	turkey hat
the	cha-gee	blue-jay
their	bih	their

Word	Navajo	Literal Translation
thereafter	ta-zi-kwa-i-be-ka-di	turkey here after
these	cha-gi-o-eh	the see
they	cha-gee (y)	they
this	di	this
together	ta-bilh	together
torpedo	lo-be-ca	fish shell
total	ta-al-so (t)	total
tracer	beh-na-al-kah-hi	tracer
traffic diagram	hane-ba-na-as-dzoh	diagram stroy line
train	coh-nai-ali-bahn-si	train
transportation	a-hah-da-a-cha	transportation
trench	e-gade	trench
triple	tka-ih	triple
troop	nal-deh-hi	troop
truck	chido-tso	big auto
type	alth-ah-a-teh	type
under	bi-yah	under
unidentified	do-bay-hosen-e	unidentified
unit	da-az-jah (u)	unit
unshackle	no-da-eh-nesh-gohz	u-shackle
until	uh-quo-ho	until
vicinity	na-hos-ah-gih	there about
village	chah-ho-oh-lhan-ih	many shelter
visibilty	nay-es-tee	visibility
vital	ta-eh-ye-sy	vital
warning	bilh-he-neh (w)	warning
was	ne-teh	was
water	tkoh	water
wave	yilh-kolh	wave
weapon	beh-dah-a-hi-jih-gani	fighting weapon
well	to-ha-ha-dlay	well
when	gloe-eh-na-ah-wo-hai	weasel hen
where	gloe-ih-qui-ah	weasel here
which	gloe-ih-a-hsi-tlon	weasel tied together
will	gloe-ih-dot-sahi	sick weasel
wire	besh-tsosie	small wire
with	bilh (w)	with
within	bilh-bigih	with in
without	ta-gaid	without
wood	chiz	fire wood
wound	cah-da-khi	wound
yard	a-del-tahl	yard
zone	bih-na-has-dzoh	zone



## Appendix 3

### Known Navajo Code Talkers

The following 377 name list has been developed from information supplied by Mary (Mrs. Carl) Gorman on December 24, 1995 and from the list in Sally McClain's *The Navajo Weapon* (1994). McClain developed her list from the "Navajo Code Talker" file, Marine Corps Historical Center, Philip Johnston Collection, and the Navajo Code Talkers Association. The list should be seen as incomplete; some names have not been verified.

Names followed by an asterisk (\*) are those of current members of the Association as identified by Mary Gorman. The name of one member supplied by Mrs. Gorman, **Johnson D. Benally**, is not on McClain's list.

Akee, Dan *	Begay, Paul (KIA Okinawa)
Alfred, Johnny	Begay, Roy
Allen, Perry	Begay, Samuel Hosteen Nez
Anderson, Edward B. *	Begay, Thomas H. *
Anthony, Franklin A.	Begay, Walter
Apache, Jimmie	Begay, Walter Kescoli
Arviso, Bennie	Begay, Wilson
Ashley, Regis	Begaye, Fleming D.
Augustine, John	Begody, David Maize
Ayze, Lewis Franklin	Begody, Roger
Babiya, Don	Belinda, Wilmer *
Bahe, Henry	Belone, Harry
Bahe, Woody	Benallalie, Jimmie D.
Baldwin, Benjamin C.	Benally, Harrison Lee
Beard, Harold	Benally, Harry *
Becenti, Ned D.	Benally, Jimmie L.
Becenti, Roy Lewis	Benally, John Ashi
Bedoni, Sidney *	Benally, Samuel
Begay, Carlos	Bentone, Willie
Begay, Charley Y.	Bernard, John
Begay, Charlie H.	Betone, Lloyd
Begay, Charlie Tsosie	Bia, Andrew
Begay, George K.	Billey, Wilfred E. *
Begay, Henry	Billie, Ben
Begay, Jerry Claschee *	Billiman, Howard *
Begay, Jimmie M. *	Billison, Samuel *
Begay, Joe N.	Billy, Sam Jones
Begay, Lee H.	Bitse, Peter John
Begay, Leo B.	Bittlie, Wilsie H.
Begay, Leonard	Bitsoi, Delford Baldwin
Begay, Notah	Bizard, Jesse

Blacj, Jesse  
Blatchford, Paul H. \*  
Bluehorse, David  
Bowman, John Henry  
Bowman, Robert  
Brown, Arthur C.  
Brown, Clarence Paul  
Brown, Cosey Stanley  
Brown, John \*  
Brown, N.A.  
Brown, Tsosie Herman  
Brown, William Tully  
Buck, Wilford \*  
Burke, Bobby  
Burnie, Jose  
Burnside, Francis A.  
Burr, Sandy  
Cadman, William  
Caledito, Andrew  
Carroll, Oscar Tsosie  
Cattle Chaser, Dennis  
Cayedito, Del  
Cayedito, Ralph  
Charley, Carson Bahe \*  
Charlie, Sam  
Chase, Frederick  
Chavez, George \*  
Chee, Guy Claus  
Chee, John  
Clah, Stewart  
Clark, Jimmie  
Claw, Thomas \*  
Cleveland, Benjamin H.  
Cleveland, Billie  
Cleveland, Ned  
Cody, Leslie  
Cohoe, James Charles  
Craig, Bob Etsitty  
Crawford, Eugene Roanhorse  
Crawford, Karl Lee  
Cronemeyer, Walter  
Crosby, Billy  
Curley, David  
Curley, Rueben  
Dale, Ray

Damon, Anson Chandler  
Damon, Lowell Smith  
Davis, Tully  
Deel, Martin Dale  
Dehiya, Dan  
Dennison, George H.  
Dennison, Leo  
Dixon, James  
Dodge, Jerome Cody \*  
Dooley, Richard  
Doolie, John  
Draper, Nelson  
Draper, Teddy, Sr. \*  
Etsicity, Kee  
Etsitty, Deswood  
Evans, Harold \*  
Foghorn, Ray  
Foster, Harold \*  
Fowler, King  
Francisco, Jimmy  
Freeman, Edwin  
Gatewood, Joe Patrick  
George, William M. \*  
Gishall, Milton Miller  
Gleason, James  
Goodluck, John V. \*  
Goodman, Billie  
Gooldtooth, Emmett  
Gorman, Carl Nelson \*  
Gorman, Tom  
Gray, Harvey  
Grayson, Bill Lewis  
Greymountain, Yazzie  
Guerito, Billy Lewis  
Gustine, Tully  
Guy, Charles  
Harding, Ben William  
Harding, Jack W.  
Hardy, Tom  
Harrison, Tom  
Haskie, Ross  
Hawthorne, Roy Orville  
Haycock, Bud  
Hemstreet, Leslie  
Henry, Albert

Henry, Edmund Juan  
 Henry, Kent Carl  
 Hickman, Dan Junian  
 Holiday, Calvin  
 Holliday, Samuel T.  
 Housewood, Johnson (KIA Guam)  
 Housteen, Dennie \*  
 Howard, Ambrose  
 Hubbard, Arthur Jose  
 Hudson, Lewey  
 Hunter, Tom  
 Ilthma, Oscar B.  
 James, Benjamin  
 James, Billy  
 James, George  
 Jenson, Nevy  
 Johle, Elliott  
 John, Charlie Tsihi  
 John, Edmund  
 John, Leroy  
 Johnny, Earl  
 Johnson, Deswood Remy  
 Johnson, Francis Taylor  
 Johnson, Johnny  
 Johnson, Peter (KIA Iwo Jima)  
 Johnson, Ralph  
 Jones, Jack  
 Jones, Tom  
 Jordan, David \*  
 Jose, Teddy  
 June, Allen Dale  
 June, Floyd  
 Keams, Percy  
 Keedah, Wilson  
 Kellwood, Joseph H. \*  
 Kescoli, Alonzo  
 Ketchum, Bahe  
 Kien, William \*  
 King, Jimmy Kelly  
 Kinlahcheeny, Paul (KIA Iwo Jima)  
 Kinsel, John \*  
 Kirk, George Harlan \*  
 Kirk, Leo  
 Kiyaani, Mike \*  
 Kontz, Rex T.  
 Lapahie, Harrison  
 Largo, James  
 Leonard, Alfred  
 Leroy, John  
 Leuppe, Edward  
 Little, Keith Morrison \*  
 Lopez, Tommy K.  
 MacDonald, Peter  
 Malone, Max  
 Malone, Rex T.  
 Malone, Robert  
 Maloney, James  
 Maloney, Paul Edward  
 Manuelito, Ben Charles  
 Manuelito, Ira  
 Manuelito, James C.  
 Manuelito, Johnny R.  
 Manuelito, Peter R.  
 Marianito, Frank  
 Mark, Robert  
 Martin, Matthew  
 Martinez, Jose  
 McCabe, William  
 McCraith, Archibald  
 Mike, King Paul  
 Miles, General  
 Moffitt, Tom Clah  
 Morgan, Herbert  
 Morgan, Jack C. \*  
 Morgan, Ralph (KIA Cape Gloucester)  
 Morgan, Sam (KIA Iwo Jima)  
 Morris, Joe \*  
 Moss, George Alfred  
 Multine, Oscar Phillip  
 Murphy, Calvin H.  
 Nagurski, Adolph N.  
 Nahkai, James Thomas \*  
 Nakaidinae, Peter  
 Napa, Martin  
 Naswood, Johnson  
 Negale, Harding \*  
 Newman, Alfred K. \*  
 Nez, Arthur

Nez, Chester  
Nez, Freeland  
Nez, Howard Hosteen  
Nez, Israel Hosteen  
Nez, Jack  
Nez, Sidney  
Notah, Roy  
Notah, Willie A. (KIA Iwo Jima)  
O'Dell, Billy  
Oliver, Lloyd  
Oliver, Willard V. \*  
Ottero, Tom  
Paddock, Layton \*  
Pahe, Robert D.  
Parrish, Paul A.  
Patrick, Amos Roy  
Patterson, David E. \*  
Peaches, Alfred James \*  
Peshlakai, Sam  
Pete, Frank Denny  
Peterson, Jose  
Pinto, Gual  
Pinto, John  
Platero, Richard  
Preston, Jimmie  
Price, Joe Frederick  
Price, Wilson Henry  
Reed, Sam  
Roanhorse, Harry C.  
Sage, Andy  
Sage, Denny  
Salabiye, Jerry Edgar  
Sandoval, Merrill Leo \*  
Sandoval, Peter Paul  
Sandoval, Samuel \*  
Sandoval, Thomas  
Scott, John  
Sells, John Captain  
Shields, Freddie  
Shorty, Robert Tom  
Silversmith, Joe A.  
Silversmith, Sammy \*  
Singer, Oscar Jones  
Singer, Richard B.  
Singer, Tom (KIA Peleliu)

Skeet, Wilson Chee  
Slinky, Richard T.  
Slivers, Albert James  
Slowtalker, Balmer  
Smiley, Arcenio \*  
Smith, Albert \*  
Smith, Enock  
Smith, George \*  
Smith, Raymond R.  
Smith, Samuel Jessie \*  
Soce, George Bill  
Sorrell, Benjamin G.  
Spencer, Harry  
Tabaha, Johnnie  
Tah, Alfred  
Tah, Edward  
Talley, John  
Tallsalt, Bert  
Thomas, Edward  
Thomas, Richard  
Thompson, Claire M.  
Thompson, Everitt M.  
Thompson, Francis Tso  
Thompson, Frank T. \*  
Thompson, Nelson S.  
Todacheene, Carl Leo  
Todacheenie, Frank Carl  
Tohe, Benson  
Toledo, Bill Henry \*  
Toledo, Curtis  
Toledo, Frank  
Toledo, Preston  
Toledo, Willie  
Towne, Joseph H.  
Towne, Zane  
Tracy, Peter  
Tso, Chester Housteen  
Tso, Howard Benedict  
Tso, Paul Edward  
Tso, Samuel N. \*  
Tsoie, Harry (KIA Bougainville)  
Tsosie, Alfred (KIA Cape Gloucester)  
Tsosie, Cecil Gorman  
Tsosie, Collins D.  
Tsosie, David W.

Tsosie, Howard  
Tsosie, Kenneth  
Tsosie, Samuel \*  
Tsosie, Woody  
Upshaw, John  
Upshaw, William R.  
Vandever, Joe  
Visalia, Buster  
Wagner, Oliver  
Walley, Roberts  
Werito, John  
Whitman, Lyman Jimmie  
Willeto, Frank Chee  
Williams, Alex  
Williams, Kenneth  
Willie, George Boyd  
Willie, John W.  
Wilson, Dean \*  
Woodty, Clarence Bahe  
Yazhe, Harrison A.  
Yazza, Peter  
Yazza, Vincent \*  
Yazzie, Charlie

Yazzie, Clifton  
Yazzie, Daniel  
Yazzie, Eddie Melvin  
Yazzie, Edison Kee  
Yazzie, Felix  
Yazzie, Francis  
Yazzie, Frank Harold  
Yazzie, Harding  
Yazzie, Joe Shorty  
Yazzie, John  
Yazzie, Justine D.  
Yazzie, Lemuel Bahe  
Yazzie, Ned  
Yazzie, Pahe D.  
Yazzie, Peter  
Yazzie, Raphael D. \*  
Yazzie, Robert  
Yazzie, Sam  
Yellowhair, Leon  
Yellowhair, Stanley  
Yellowman, Howard Thomas  
Yoe, George Edward  
Zah, Henry

\* Members of Navajo Code Talkers Association as of December 24, 1995.

## Appendix 3

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**Albert Smith**

in

**Official Marine Code Talker's Uniform**

**December 1995**