

Une tentative pour avoir la moyenne.

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Introduction

How to send secretly a message ?

- steganography, hiding the message ;
- cryptography, transforming the message into an apparent nonsense with
the possibility to recover the message for selected persons

But also..

- translation of the message into an obscure language

Code talkers appeared in the first half of 20th century

Meeting of two conditions :

- The existence of the radio and the phone ;
- The fact that most of the cipher machines were too slow and fragile to be used for tactical field communications (as for example the SIGABA).



Figure 1 – The SIGABA

We choose to speak of the Navajo code talkers who are the best know and whose story is declassified since 1968. Moreover, according to the NY times, the Navajo code is the only spoken military code never to have been deciphered.

Plan

- relation of Navajo and the US in the late of the 19th century ;
- how Navajo code talkers have been recruited ;
- study of the Navajo code.

Navajos and US in the late of the 19th century

- The long walk
- Boarding schools

The long walk

According to the website navajocodetalkers.org, Navajo long walk is considered as one of the most important parts of Navajo history.

- deportation of approximately 8000 Navajo people by the government of the United States of America
- forced trek over 480km into the Bosque Redondo camp.
- Many began the walk exhausted and malnourished

They were never informed as to :

- where they were going ;
- why they were being relocated ;
- and how long it would take to get there.

The journey lasted 18 days, nearly 200 Navajos died of exposure to elements and starvation.

Boarding schools

At begin of the 20th century, many American Indian children were in church-operated boarding schools.

Children were forced to

- speak in english and not in their native language
- cut their hair and give up their traditional clothing ;
- give up their meaningful Native names and take English ones ;
- replace their traditional religious practices by Christianity.

They were taught that their cultures were inferior.

Boarding schools

They tell us not to speak in Navajo language. You're going to school. You're supposed to only speak English. And it was true. They did practice that and we got punished if you was caught speaking Navajo.

John Brown, Jr., Navajo Code Talker, National Museum of the American Indian interview, 2004

Navajos as code talkers : how they have been recruited

- Preliminary : the code talkers during the WWI
- Pacific war and the idea of Philip Johnston
- The demonstration

Preliminary : the code talkers during the WWI

- First use of native American code talker : Cherokee.

During Second Battle of the Somme in September 1918.

Germans tapped into telephone lines of American, break their codes, and captured runners send out to deliver messages directly. So, they have some tactical plans of enemies in their hands.

Captain Lawrence of US Army eared two Choctaw talking together in their own language.

This give him the idea to use them to build a code with 20 terms and transmit secret tactical messages in their native language.

They helped to win during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.

Pacific war and the idea of Philip Johnston

Philip Johnston



- at 9 years old, he was asked to serve as an interpreter for a Navajo delegation.
- 1942 : he proposed to the Marine Corps that Navajos and other tribes could be recruited as code talkers.

The major general Clayton Barney Vogel accepted to give this idea a try.

The demonstration

Johnston recruited four bilingual Navajos and, on February 28, they go to Camp Elliott for a demonstration.

- Two of the Navajos translated in Navajo typical military field orders and sent it by radio to their companions ;
- The companions translated the message in English.

Example,

"Enemy expected to make tank and dive bomber attack at dawn."

"Enemy tank dive bomber expected to attack this morning."

Translation was done in 20 second instead of the 30 minutes needed by machines at that time.

- After this demonstration, Clayton wrote a letter to the commandant of the Marine Corps recommending the Navajo code talkers ;
- May 1942 : 29 Navajos recruit task develop a Navajo code. Altogether, between 375 to 420 Navajos participate to the program.

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HEADQUARTERS
AMPHIBIOUS FORCE, PACIFIC FLEET.
CAMP ELLIOTT, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

March 6, 1942

From: The Commanding General.
To: The Commandant, U. S. Marine Corps.
Subject: Enlistment of Navaho Indians.
Enclosures: (A) Brochure by Mr. Philip Johnston, with maps.
(B) Messages used in demonstration.

1. Mr. Philip Johnston of Los Angeles recently offered his services to this force to demonstrate the use of Indians for the transmission of messages by telephone and voice-radio. His offer was accepted and the demonstration was held for the Commanding General and his staff.

2. The demonstration was interesting and successful. Messages were transmitted and received almost verbatim. In conducting the demonstration messages were written by a member of the staff and handed to the Indian; he would transmit the messages in his tribal dialect and the Indian on the other end would write them down in English. The text of messages as written and received are enclosed. The Indians do not have many military terms in their dialect so it was necessary to give them a few minutes, before the demonstration, to improvise words for dive-bombing, anti-tank gun, etc.

3. Mr. Johnston stated that the Navaho is the only tribe in the United States that has not been infested with German students during the past twenty years. These Germans, studying the various tribal dialects under the guise of art students, anthropologists, etc., have undoubtedly attained a good working knowledge of all tribal dialects except Navaho. For this reason the Navaho is the only tribe available offering complete security for the type of work under consideration. It is noted in Mr. Johnston's article (enclosed) that the Navaho is the largest tribe but the lowest in literacy. He stated, however, that 1,000 — if that many were needed — could be found with the necessary qualifications. It should also be noted that the Navaho tribal dialect is completely unintelligible to all other tribes and all other people, with the possible exception of as many as 28 Americans who have made a study of the dialect. This dialect is thus equivalent to a secret code to the enemy, and admirably suited for rapid, secure communication.

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<https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/code-talkers/images/letter-01.jpg>

Navajo and Navajo code

- Why the Navajo language was a good choice
- How the code works
- Some flaws of the code
- Some evolutions of the code

Why the Navajo language was a good choice ?

- The largest population of Native American so the possibility to recruit and from enough code talkers ;
- It remained mostly "unwritten".
- Except the Navajos, only a handful of American experts were able to speak language.
- Navajo has a complex grammar, different from German and Japanese
- faster than any machine at this time.
- It's difficult to distinguish the sounds for uninitiated Navajo Speakers ;
- Imposture aren't easy to make : it require to speak Navajo with a good accent.

PUT HERE a sample of the Navajo language.

How it works

Because of a lack of military terms in the Navajo language, there was the need for a code which consist in two different parts :

- Dictionary for common military words ;



NAVAJO CODES NAME OF SHIPS		
SHIPS	TOH-DINEH-IH	SEA FORCE
BATTLESHIP	LO-TSO	WHALE
AIRCRAFT	TSIDI-MOFFA-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

<https://www.cia.gov/news-information/featured-story-archive/2008-featured-story-archive/navajo-code-talkers/>

How it works

- A phonetic alphabet table

A	WOL-LA-CHEE	Ant
B	NA-HASH-CHID	Badger
C	MOASI	Cat
D	CHINDI	Devil
E	AH-JAH	Ear
F	MA-E	Fox

Figure 2 – correspondance for some letters

<https://www.cia.gov/news-information/featured-story-archive/2008-featured-story-archive/navajo-code-talkers/>

How it works

- Navajo Code Talkers memorized 17 pages of code during their training.

A code talker answered one of his officers who had asked why Navajos were able to memorize the complex code so quickly :

For us, everything is memory, it is part of our heritage. We have no written language. Our songs, our prayers, our stories, they are all handed down from grandfather to father to children and we listen, we hear, we learn to remember everything. It is part of our training.
(Power of a Navajo : Carl Gorman, the Man and His Life, by Henry and Georgia Greenberg, 1996)

Some flaws of the code

- non uniqueness of the translations on a message ;
- Navajos trained at different times and place used sometimes different words for specific military vocabulary, the solution ; was to frequently "exchange" Navajos from one division into another ;
- There was not enough code talkers and some battalions remained without the capacity to decrypt or encrypt messages ;
- Kerckhoffs's principles aren't observed.

Evolution of the code

- The original 211 vocabulary terms has been progressively expanded to 411.
- Multiple words to spell one letter.

A	WOL-LA-CHEE	Ant
A	BE-LA-SANA	Apple
A	TSE-NILL	Axe

Figure 3 – multiple correspondances for one letter

<https://www.cia.gov/news-information/featured-story-archive/2008-featured-story-archive/navajo-code-talkers/>

Conclusion :

Declassification and recognition of code talkers after the war

The program has been classified until 1968.

- In 2000, the US Congress passed legislation to honor the Navajo Code Talkers and give them special gold and silver congressional medals.
- In 2008, the Code talkers recognition act was signed into law by president George W. Bush, which recognizes every other native american code talker who served in the United States military during WWI or WWII
- In 2017, during a White House event specifically intended to honor the Navajo code talkers, Trump used the nickname "Pocahontas" to deride Elizabeth Warren, a political opponent.

Sources used

- <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/code-talkers>
- <https://navajocodetalkers.org/navajo-long-walk/>