

Honoring Native American Code Talkers:

The Road to the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-420)

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INTRODUCTION

Interest in North American Indian code talkers continues to increase. In addition to numerous works about the Navajo code talkers, several publications on other groups of Native American code talkers—including the Choctaw, Comanche, Hopi, Meskwaki, Canadian Cree—and about code talkers in general have appeared.¹ The 2000 Navajo Code Talker G.I. Joe doll, the 2002 motion picture *Windtalkers*, and the Smithsonian Institution's ongoing traveling exhibit on American Indian code talkers, "Native Words, Native Warriors," have also raised public awareness of these individuals.²

This article chronicles recent tribal, state, and congressional legislative efforts to identify and recognize Native American code talkers. Although the Navajo received congressional recognition in 2001, they were not the first code talkers in either world war. More than twenty other tribes served as code talkers during World War I and World War II, yet only recently received official recognition from the US government. Over the past few years, legislative bills seeking recognition for non-Navajo Native American code talkers have been known under several related names but have failed to pass in both the House and the Senate. After several years of efforts by dedicated tribal

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delegations, state senators, state representatives, and scholars, federal legislation to recognize all non-Navajo Native American code talkers was finally achieved when House, Senate, and presidential approval were finally garnered in the 110th Congress in September and October of 2008.

Origins

Native American code talking began during World War I with the Oklahoma Choctaw in Company E of the 142nd Infantry Regiment and in the 143rd Infantry Regiment of the 36th Infantry Division. To counter German interception of American telephone lines and the shooting or capture of one out of every four message runners, Choctaws were placed at phones in several of the regiment's companies to send military messages in their Native language. Soon thereafter, special code words were developed for items that did not exist in the Choctaw language. Members of other tribes were soon used in a similar fashion. Because the Native languages were not based on European languages or mathematical progressions, the Germans were never able to understand the transmissions. The Choctaw and other groups proved instrumental in helping the American Expeditionary Force win several key battles in the Meuse-Argonne Campaign and, in their respective divisions, helping to hasten the war's end.³

World War II

As the American entrance into World War II became imminent, the use of Indian code talkers in the armed forces was remembered. The army began recruiting small groups of American Indians to train as code talkers prior to the United States' entrance into the war. During the fall of 1940, a group of seventeen Oneida and Chippewa from Michigan and Wisconsin were recruited into the 32nd Infantry Division. Seventeen Comanche from Oklahoma were recruited in December 1940 and January 1941. In early 1941, eight Meskwaki were recruited for training as Native communications operators. A February 15, 1941 news release from Omaha, Nebraska to the *New York Times* reported the group's formation, "Eight Indians from the Sac and Fox reservation near Tama, Iowa, attached to the 18th Iowa Infantry, will be trained to operate walkie-talkie and field telephones for vital communication between front lines and battalion and regimental headquarters. They will speak their own dialect, so that an enemy would be unable to understand their reports even if their messages were intercepted." Eight Hopi were recruited for code talking in the 323rd Infantry Regiment of the 81st Infantry Division of the US Army (see fig. 1).⁴



FIGURE 1. *Floyd Dan (Hopi code talker, 323rd Inf. Reg., 81st Div.) using a radio during World War II. Photo courtesy of Eugene Talas, Hopi Veterans Services.*

Following initial communications training, some of these individuals tested their Native languages in war-game maneuvers while training in the IV Corps Louisiana maneuvers in August 1941. In reading about these tests, Phillip Johnston, a civil engineer who had grown up on the Navajo Reservation and spoke some of the language, conceived of the idea that the Navajo could be used similarly.⁵ As Doris Paul, who interviewed Johnston, describes, “It all started when he saw a newspaper story one day concerning an armored division on practice maneuvers in Louisiana where they were trying out a unique idea for secret communications—attempting to establish some sort of system using several of their Indian personnel.” Johnston was seminal in persuading the Marine Corps to undertake a mock “test” of their abilities, which eventually led to their recruitment and use. Although not recruited until April 1942, the Navajo would see their first action as code talkers later that year.⁶ In 1943, a number of Hopi soldiers training near Dateland, Arizona, “went to extraordinary lengths to use Hopi words and concepts to come up with terms for battle.”⁷

A series of meetings among the three branches of the US Armed Forces (army, navy, marines) in Washington, D.C., between September 1943 and July 1944 resulted in the Air Corps and the navy deciding to forgo the use of code talkers, whose skills were not required for their communications needs,

and the army deciding not to develop any more units or expand existing units largely due to questions of security.⁸ The Marine Corps, which was probably aware of the army's code talkers due to the coverage of the Comanche and Meskwaki groups in newspapers, developed its Navajo program without assistance from the army and the navy, attempting to keep the utmost secrecy in its use of the Navajo code talkers. Alison Bernstein and colleagues provide detailed discussions and images of publicity and propaganda of Indians during World War II, including the military's more pervasive and often-stereotypical portrayal of Indians in order to emphasize patriotism and the general Indian contribution to the war effort. Although publicity involving some of the Indian units (for example, Comanche and Meskwaki) and their future role as code talkers occurred, and may have figured into the army's decision not to expand Native code-talking units, none of the codes were ever known to have been broken in either war.⁹

TYPES OF NATIVE AMERICAN CODE TALKING

During both world wars two distinct types of Native American code talking developed, which I designated as Type 1 and Type 2 Native American code talking. Although both involve the use of Native American languages for the secure transmission of military intelligence, the differentiating factor is the presence or absence of specially formulated code words within the vernacular structures of these languages. Type 1 is defined as formally developed codes or encoded vocabularies used within Native American languages. Type 2 is defined as the informal use of everyday noncoded Native American languages.¹⁰

Except for the Choctaw during World War I, Type 1 code talkers were typically recruited and trained prior to combat. Only the Choctaw during World War I and the Chippewa-Oneida, Meskwaki, Comanche, Navajo, and Hopi during World War II are known to have undertaken various degrees of formal code development. Type 2 Native American code talkers include members of all other groups known to have used their Native languages for conveying military communications. Because the background regarding how some of these small units were formed is less well-known (as well as whether they constructed formally designed codes within their languages or simply spoke in their everyday language), we must assume that, although they must have developed some special terminology for things not existing in their Native cultures, they were primarily Type 2 groups. Although a linguistic distinction, it reflects a major difference in how these small units of men were organized and trained.

In recent efforts to recognize all code talkers, one recent issue concerns attitudes toward the semantic definition of what a code talker is and who qualifies. As early as 1919, newspapers used the term *code* to describe Sioux and Choctaw Indians' use of their language as code(s) over the radio during military service. A set of correspondence from 1939 describing the Choctaws' service during World War I contains multiple uses of the term *code*. In May 1939, John Hix, author of a syndicated newspaper feature from Hollywood, California, entitled "Strange as It Seems," wrote to the War Department in Washington, D.C. He inquired, "I am told that American Indian telephone operators were used by the Allies during the World War to send important messages in 'code'—the Indians using their native language," seeking information regarding the subject for his column. The inquiry was addressed to Waley in the A. E. F. Records who noted that "the Choctaw language was used to good advantage as a code, by American Indians in the 142nd Infantry." It was discovered that the interpretation of a February 25, 1939 memorandum for the adjutant general from the assistant chief of staff, G-2, might negate the ability to share this information. Colonel A. G. D. sent a memorandum stamped "Secret" to the assistant chief of staff, G-2, stating that the "A.E.F. file No. 99-96, A.E.F., Historical Section, G.S. 120303. Memo for Chief Historical Section, G.S. from John R. Eddy, 1st Lieut. Infantry, and papers bound thereto. Subject: The American Indian. Stamped received March 15, 1919. G.H.Q., A.E.F." was classified as "secret" per a February 25, 1939 memorandum from the adjutant general. On June 2, 1939, Colonel E. R. W. McCabe sent a memorandum to the adjutant general directing that a letter containing select information regarding the use of such Indians during World War I communications be sent to Hix. On June 5, 1939, Major-General E. B. Adams issued a letter specifying that eight Choctaws in the 142nd Infantry of the 36th Division translated messages in their language as "supplementary telephone operators" beginning in the latter part of October 1918. Adams states, "This simple method of coding messages proved to be very satisfactory, and was utilized by the regiment until the cessation of hostilities."¹¹ From these sources, it is clear that the use of these languages was viewed by the military as a code, even if the term *code talker* was not yet widespread.

At least four other sources describe the use of Indian languages for military transmissions during World War I, while another source announced the recruitment of the Comanche in preparation for training in coded radio transmissions a full year before Pearl Harbor was attacked.¹² The *New York Times'* December 13, 1940 article "Comanches Again Called for Army Code Service" clearly reflects the army's classification of the Comanche as communicators during World War I and World War II. In 1941, at least five sources described the current recruitment and preparation of Natives and their

training in their respective languages for military communications.¹³ A 1943 *New York Times* article referenced the use of “Indian communications men” on Guadalcanal.¹⁴

Two weeks after the surrender of Japan, a September 18, 1945 article in the *Washington Post* referred to Navajo men who used their language in the Marine Corps as “Navajo Talkers.” The next day, an article by Marine Murray Marder in the *New York Times* referred to these men as “code talkers,” as did an additional work by Marder.¹⁵ Since that time, the term *code talker* has been used by many to refer to Indian men who used their Native languages during their US military service.¹⁶ Although the US Marine Corps may have originated the term *code talker* during World War II, the aforementioned news articles referencing the army’s use of groups of Indian men trained to use their Native language in code for military code purposes and the presence of the status of radio operator and code talker on the discharge papers or DD-214s of some of the Hopi code talkers indicate that the army recognition of these men reflects the same basic concept of what a “code talker” has come to stand for.¹⁷

Some individuals still believe that only the Navajo were code talkers and that all other Indians who communicated by phone or walkie-talkie were simply speaking in their regular everyday vernacular and thus not a code talker. An examination of what constitutes a code, the definition of a code talker, and what a code talker performed will quickly clarify this issue. The term *code* descends from the Latin *caudex* (codex, or trunk of a tree), through Middle French, to fourteenth-century Middle English in reference to a document formed originally from wooden tablets. In reference to communication, a code may be defined as a system of signals or symbols for communication or as a system of symbols (as letters or numbers) used to represent assigned and often-secret meanings.¹⁸ Concerning Type 2 code talkers, who were using existing but unknown language systems, the first definition of the word *code* is most applicable. For Type 1 code talkers, who were using unknown language systems with additional coded vocabulary, the second definition is most applicable. Thus both are forms of coded communications, distinguished largely by the presence or absence of specially coded vocabulary.

Several factors support recognition of all of these groups as code talkers. It is well documented that the Comanche, Meskwaki, and Chippewa-Oneida were recruited before the Navajo program began, and the Hopi were recruited in 1943. Clear evidence exists that the Comanche had an extensive coded vocabulary and that the Hopi devised similar coded terminology. All groups, including the Navajo, were speaking their vernacular language; what differed was the extent of the coded vocabulary and alphabetic spelling systems for

proper names that were mixed into the languages. In addition, some of the Hopi were classified as a code talker on their discharge papers.¹⁹

Also useful is a comparison of the service of Indian code talkers in the army with the Marine Corp's definition of *code talker*. The *US Marine Corps Manual of Military Occupational Specialties* defined a classification 642 "Code Talker" as someone who "transmits and received messages in a restricted language by radio and wire. Sends and received messages by means of semaphores and other visual signal devices. May perform field lineman, switchboard operator, or other communications duties."²⁰ Finally, H.R. 4544 (The Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2007) defines *code talker* "as a Native American who served in the Armed Forces during a foreign conflict and who participated in military communications using a native language." Compared with the Marine Corp's definition, all of the non-Navajo groups discussed here transmitted and received messages in a restricted language by radio and wire and, at least for the Comanche, were trained in all elements of US Army Signal Corps communications such as Morse code, semaphore, line construction, switchboard operation, and other communication duties, including mail delivery.

Table 1 illustrates the tribes, number of individuals, type of code talking, and military units of American Indian and Canadian First Nations Peoples that are known to have served as code talkers. To date, approximately 534 individuals, including 420 Navajo, are known to have served as code talkers during World War II. Although the extent of coded vocabulary is not known for some code talkers, approximately 489 individuals used Type I code talking (Choctaw, Comanche, Meskwaki, Hopi, Chippewa-Oneida, and Navajo), with the others using Type 2 forms. Other individuals using Type 2 code talking are likely but presently unknown. In earlier works, I estimated that there were probably around six hundred or less Native Americans who served as code talkers during World War II. For other tribes for whom information is lacking, at least sixteen other individuals would have had to serve as code talkers, with a minimum of two individuals per tribe. Because data is either partially or totally lacking for some groups in both world wars, there are undoubtedly more individuals of whom we are unaware. Based on these data, and classifying the Lakota, Dakota, Yankton, and Yanktonai Dakota as four separate tribal entities and the Muscogee Creek and Seminole as two, which follows existing linguistic and political groupings, this brings the total number of tribes known to have provided code talkers in either World War I or World War II to more than twenty. Of these twenty tribes, the Choctaw, Cherokee, and Comanche had code talkers in both world wars.

TABLE 1
IDENTIFICATION OF NATIVE AMERICAN AND CANADIAN
CODE TALKERS BY TRIBE, TYPE OF CODE TALKING, AND
SERVICE UNIT AS OF NOVEMBER 29, 2010

WORLD WAR I		
TRIBE	TYPE OF CODE TALKING	UNIT
Cherokee	2	? 36th Div., 142nd Inf. Reg.
Cheyenne	2	Presently unknown
Choctaw (19)	1	Co. E, 142nd Inf. Reg., 143rd Inf. Reg., 36th Div.
Comanche	2	Presently unknown
Osage	2	? 36th Div., 142nd Inf. Reg.
Yankton Sioux	2	Presently unknown
WORLD WAR II		
Assiniboiné (2+)	2	"Merrill's Marauders," 5307 Comp. Unit (Provis.) US Army, Pacific
Canadian Cree (6+)	2	American 8th Air Force, 9th Bomber Command, London
Cherokee	2	Normandy, Europe
Chippewa and Oneida (17)	2	32nd Inf. Div. (4 in 57th Fld. Art. Brig; 4 in Div. command; 9 in Prov. Antitank Batt.)
Choctaw (4+)	2	K. Co., 180th Inf. Reg., 45th Inf. Div.
Comanche (17)	1	4th Sig. Co., 4th Inf. Div.
Crow (2+)	2	Army Air Corps, Europe
Hopi (8)	1	US Army 323 Inf. Reg., 81st
Inf. Div.		
Hopi (2)	2	V Bomber Command, US Army, Pacific
Kaw (Kansa) (6)	2	Presently unknown
Kiowa (3)	2	689th Fld. Art. Batt., XX Corps
Menominee	2	Presently unknown
Meskwaki (Sac and Fox) (8)	1	18th Iowa Inf.; H. Co., 168th Inf. Reg., 34th Div.
Muscogee/Creek-Seminole (2+)	2	a. 195th Fld. Art. Batt. US VII Corps
Muscogee/Creek-Seminole (2+)	2	b. Aleutian Campaign
Navajo (420)	1	US Marine Corps, 3rd, 4th, 5th Divs.
Pawnee (2)	2	Co. C. 33rd Div. and 1st Cav. Div., 112th Reg. Combat Team, Recon. Squad, Philippines
Sioux (Lakota) (7)	2	a. 302nd Recon. Team, 1st Cav. Div., Pacific Theater
Sioux (Lakota/Dakota) (3+)	2	b. 32nd Fld. Art. HQ. Batt., 18th Reg. Combat Team, 18th Inf. Div., North Africa, Sicily, Normandy
Sioux (Lakota) (6+)	2	c. 3rd Field Artillery Batt., 2nd Cav. Div., Ardennes
Sioux (Yanktonai) (7+)	2	Co. B, 163rd Inf. Reg., 41st Inf. Div., New Guinea, Luzon, Philippines

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of individuals currently identified as having served as code talkers. (+) means that other individuals from this tribe may have served as code talkers.

RECOGNITION

Aside from some personal decorations received from the French and a few brief mentions in newspapers and biographies, primarily about the Choctaw, the US government gave no formal recognition of Indian code talkers during World War I. Although the Navajo code talkers have received public attention since their code was declassified in 1968 and received congressional recognition and gold and silver medals in 2001, all other code talkers have remained federally unrecognized. Post–World War II recognition of Native American code talkers has taken three primary forms: tribal, state, and national levels. The distribution and extent of these forms has differed greatly from tribe to tribe. Departing and returning servicemen were honored with various practices relating to traditional martial, religious, and social practices including Scalp and Victory dances, songs referencing martial themes, initiations into warrior societies, naming ceremonies, and social and religious rituals such as Navaho Enemy Way ceremonies and Native American Church meetings.²¹ These trends reflect factors of cultural continuity, adaptation, and syncretism of related, yet culturally distinct, martial systems in a consciously derived manner that were acceptable to Native Americans on their own terms. As with other Native Americans in the US military service, code talkers demonstrate how groups of individuals blended military service in a basically foreign institution while maintaining a strong sense of their own tribal ethnic and martial identity.

Tribal Efforts

On a tribal level, code talkers received homecoming celebrations according to their respective cultures. These events varied from family and fellow tribal members meeting individuals at train stations to celebratory dances and recognition before their respective tribes, such as the Comanche, who received brief verbal acknowledgment distinguishing them from other Comanche veterans at a homecoming powwow in Walters, Oklahoma, in 1946. Most individuals were recognized just as veterans and not as code talkers. For many servicemen, their homecoming, as well as their previous send-off, entailed participation in social and religious gatherings organized to honor and to bless or protect them. Native American Church meetings, Christian church prayer meetings, and Navajo Blessing Way and Enemy Way ceremonies are but a few examples of these traditions. As Tom Holm and I have shown, Indian servicemen who had such ritual forms to help reintegrate them back into their Native communities have often fared better physically and psychologically than many non-Indian veterans who were simply expected to resume civilian life upon returning home.²²

In 1968, the Navajo code was declassified. External recognition began with Anglo interest in code talking when Lee Cannon formed the idea to honor the Navajo code talkers at the 22nd Annual Reunion of the Fourth Marine Division in 1968.²³ With the subsequent formation of the Navajo Code Talkers Association came tribal and gradual national recognition. Other tribes did not seem to start seeking external recognition until the 1980s. Tribal and local non-Indian newspaper articles about the Comanche and about the Choctaw did not start appearing until the early 1980s and the mid-1980s, respectively, largely due to the smaller size and less recognition of these units.

In 1986, the Choctaw Nation held a special recognition of all Choctaw service veterans at their annual Choctaw Nation Labor Day Festival. At this event, the families of the original eight Choctaw code talkers were presented with Choctaw Nation Medals of Valour, and the Choctaw War Memorial, a large marble marker bearing the seals of the US Armed Forces and dedicated to the original Choctaw code talkers of World War I, was erected at the Choctaw Nation Tribal Grounds in Tuskahoma, Oklahoma (see figs. 2 and 3). The Choctaw Nation also has a Choctaw Code Talker Memorial Exhibit at the Choctaw Nation Museum in the Choctaw Capitol Building (two miles north of Tuskahoma) that includes a life-sized picture of some of the members on a background of the American flag and the trunk of code talker Walter Veach, which contains military-issue maps, uniform parts, and other items. In 2010, the tribe unveiled a large bronze statue outside of the Choctaw Capitol Building entitled *Red Warrior* (Tuskahomma/Tushka Homma) that used the face of code talker Joseph Oklahombi as a model for the statue.²⁴

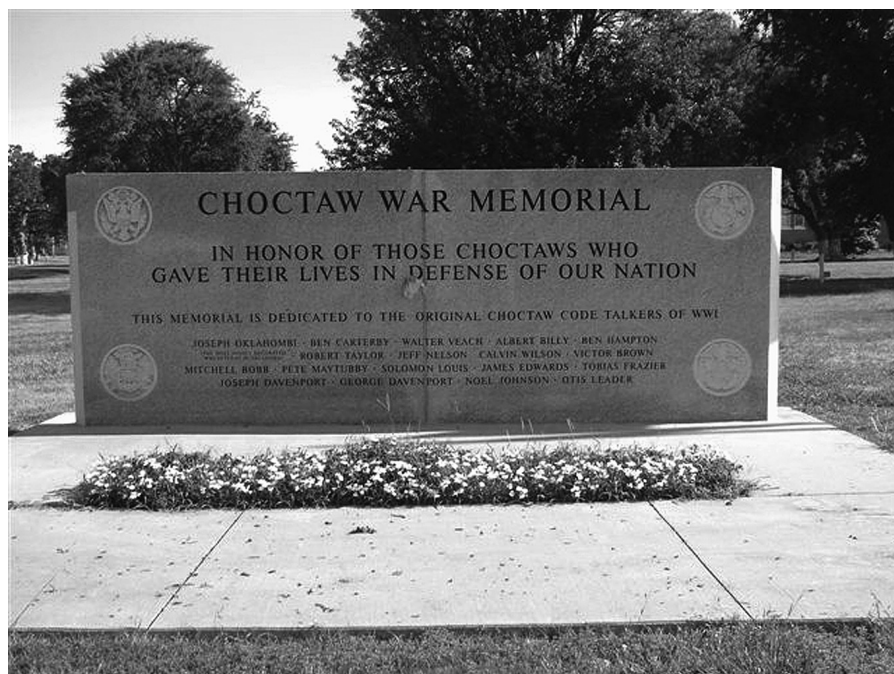
The Choctaw have also recognized Schlicht Billy, the last member of a small group of Oklahoma Choctaw that used their language in a Type 2 form of code talking during World War II. On September 16, 2007, the Texas Military Forces honored the Choctaw code talkers of World War I at the Texas Military Forces Museum at Camp Mabry. Following the presentation of eighteen Lone Star Medals of Valor—which is the second-highest decoration awarded by the Texas Military Forces and the first US medal to recognize the service of the Choctaw code talkers—to the families of the Choctaw code talkers, the Choctaw Nation's chaplain blessed the museum's code talkers exhibit.²⁵

The Comanche began recognizing their remaining code talkers during the late 1980s at their annual Comanche Homecoming and the newly developed Comanche Nation Fair. The Lakota began publicizing their code talkers in 1994.²⁶ The Meskwaki began recognizing their remaining code talkers at tribal gatherings in Tama. In contrast, the Hopi have only recently been honored with tribal certificates, as has Shirley Quinton Red Boy (Dakota), a code talker during World War II, with a certificate from the governor of Montana. After the Navajo were awarded medals in 2001, a Canadian Cree code talker



FIGURE 2. *The Choctaw Medal of Valour.*
Photo by William Meadows.

FIGURE 3. *The Choctaw War Memorial containing names of World War I Choctaw code talkers in Tuskahoma, Oklahoma. Photo courtesy of Regina Green, Choctaw Council House, Tuskahoma.*



came forward to describe his experiences as a code talker for the US Army Air Corps in Europe during World War II.

At the Comanche Tribal Complex near Lawton, Oklahoma, the names of the seventeen Comanche who trained to be or served as code talkers are included in a set of memorial markers containing the names of every Comanche veteran dating back to army scouts during the late nineteenth century. On September 26, 2003, the Comanche dedicated the bronze statue *Spirit Talker*, by sculptor Dan Pogue, at the Comanche Tribal Complex (see fig. 4). The monument is an emotionally moving bronze statue of a code talker kneeling on the ground and sending a message on a field telephone. Behind him, a vapor-like wind transforms into an elder from the past with long hair and carrying a lance who is leaning over the young soldier's back and whispering into his ear. On the west side of the statue's granite base are black-and-white pictures of the fourteen Comanche code talkers who saw combat action; on the front (south side) is a bronze plaque describing the group's experiences during World War II.

On November 11, 2009, the Hopi unveiled a bronze plaque honoring the eight Hopi code talkers who served during World War II at a special Veterans Day observance at the Hopi Veterans Memorial Center two miles east of Kykotsmovi, Arizona. The inscription on the plaque reads:



FIGURE 4. *The Comanche Code Talker Memorial at the Comanche Nation Complex in Lawton, Oklahoma. Photo by William Meadows.*

This monument is dedicated to the eight Hopi Code Talkers who served in the US Army with the famed 323rd Infantry Regiment, 81st Infantry Division, known as the “Wild Cat Division,” during World War II. The US Army selected these Hopi soldiers to develop a code using their own Hopi language to transmit secured radio communications in combat. The Hopi tribe pays tribute and recognition to the remarkable achievements of these eight Hopi code talkers whose own Hopi language confounded the Japanese and contributed to the liberation of the South Pacific islands and final victory against the military forces of the Empire of Japan in World War II. These Hopi Code Talkers’ bold wartime actions exemplifies the courage, bravery, and spirit of America’s fighting men. We honor these eight humble Hopi Code Talkers for defending and protecting our great Nation, our Hopi land and our Hopi People during World War II for truly they are America’s “Greatest Generation.”

Below the inscription, the rank, name, personal Hopi or Tewa name, clan name, and village of each man is listed.²⁷ Small replicas of the plaque were given to representatives of each member’s family, and the plaque will be included in a Hopi veterans’ “Wall of Honor” containing twelve additional plaques that list more than 670 Hopi veterans during the twentieth century (see fig. 5).²⁸



FIGURE 5. The unveiling of the Hopi Code Talkers Memorial Plaque on November 11, 2009. Photo courtesy of Eugene Talas, Hopi Veterans Services.

Hopi veterans' outreach counselor and host at the unveiling of the plaque, Clark Tenakhongva, expressed:

I felt the Veterans Day ceremony . . . honoring the Hopi Code Talkers was very moving and emotional for all who were in attendance, especially the families. Knowing that there was only one survivor, Travis Yaiva, added to the emotions because the feeling was that recognition and honoring our Hopi Code Talkers was long overdue. I know I felt honor being a Hopi and to know that it is more important to keep the Hopi language alive because of the sacrifices the Hopi Code Talkers made. The Hopi Code Talkers made a mark in history and we need to be proud of and continue to keep our culture and traditions strong by speaking Hopi.²⁹

State Efforts

State-level efforts have provided recognition for some code talkers belonging to the tribes residing in that state. Most notably, these efforts have consisted of various awards and recognitions by the states of New Mexico and Arizona for the Navajo code talkers and in a November 3, 1989 ceremony held for the three surviving Comanche code talkers of World War II and the Oklahoma Choctaw code talkers (posthumously) of World War I by the state of Oklahoma and representatives of the French government in front of the Oklahoma State Capital in Oklahoma City. The Choctaw (posthumously) and the Comanche of World War II were awarded the Chevalle du Merit (National Knight of the Order of Merit) by the French government. The Comanche Tuhwi, one of the Comanche warrior or military societies, danced to honor their veterans. Schlicht Billy (Choctaw) was also recognized at this event for his code talking and service during World War II.

In 1995, code talkers from South Dakota were also honored in the seventy-seventh legislature of the state of South Dakota with House Commemoration No. 1026. In 2002, the state of Oklahoma honored Choctaw (posthumously), Navajo, and Comanche code talkers, who were brought together at a Sovereignty Symposium in Oklahoma City in order to speak of their experiences as code talkers during the same week that the movie *Windtalkers* premiered. In 2003, the state of Iowa and Senator Thomas Harkin recognized the Meskwaki code talkers.³⁰

National Efforts

Since 1995, a growing body of national legislation has emerged aimed at identifying and recognizing various groups of Native American code talkers. In 1995, Senators Tom Daschle, Larry Pressler, Daniel Inouye, and John McCain



FIGURE 6. *Lakota Code Talkers in the Philippine Islands, ca. 1945. Photo courtesy of Andrea Page.*

introduced legislation to honor the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota code talkers of the Great Sioux Nation (see fig. 6). On May 8th of that year, S. Res. 111 was approved in the 104th Congress.³¹

In the fall of 1997, Liz Pollard of Anadarko, Oklahoma, became interested in honoring Native American code talkers. The following spring, she developed a grassroots petition seeking recognition and a Congressional Medal of Honor for all Native American code talkers for which the author, then residing in Anadarko, supplied existing information on types of code talking and the tribes, numbers, and military units in which they served. The petition was forwarded to Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (Northern Cheyenne) of Colorado and Representative Dale E. Kildee of Michigan.³² Shortly after the Navajo were honored in 2001, Ben Tahmahkera, a nephew of one of the Comanche code talkers, approached Representative Kay Granger of Texas about the possibility of honoring the Comanche and eventually all code talkers of both world wars. Although the Navajo were already well-known, this petition, and the growing support it garnered, coincided with an increasing number of news articles about other code talkers and their frequently being asked to speak at conventions and symposia where they were individually recognized. These efforts fostered the growth of legislation seeking recognition for all Native American code talkers.

In April 2000, Senator Jeff Bingaman introduced legislation to honor the Navajo code talkers for their service during World War II. The Navajo are credited with saving the lives of many American soldiers and with contributing to the successful campaigns of Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Peleliu, Saipan, Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and others. As part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2001, President William Clinton signed into law the “Honoring the Navajo Code Talkers Act” (Public Law 106-554) on December 21, 2000. This act authorized the president of the United States, on behalf of Congress, to award a Congressional Gold Medal to each of the original twenty-nine Navajo code talkers, as well as a silver medal to every other Navajo code talker.³³ The Congressional Gold Medal is not a military decoration but is the highest civilian award, determined by the majority of the US Congress, that Congress can bestow to honor a particular individual who or institution that performs an outstanding deed or act of service, and it requires congressional legislation. These medals have been awarded to various veterans, athletes, and religious and civic leaders. On July 26, 2001, the Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony was held in the Capitol Rotunda. On November 24, 2001, the Congressional Silver Medal Ceremony was held at the Window Rock, Arizona, fairgrounds. Two forms of popular media also raised awareness of the Navajo code talkers. In 2000, the G.I. Joe 2000 Delta Force Assortment Navajo code talker featuring the voice of Navajo code talker Sam Billison was released. The motion picture *Windtalkers* was released in 2002, and although the film contained significant historical inaccuracies—largely the relationship between Navajo code talkers and the assignment of Anglo-American bodyguards—and failed to capitalize on the full story of the Navajo code talkers’ experiences, it brought significant, albeit brief, public attention to the service of Native Americans as code talkers.³⁴

Legislative Efforts

Since 2001, several pieces of legislation have sought to gain state and federal recognition for other, non-Navajo Native American code talkers. On June 18, 2002, the House passed H.R. 3250 (Sioux Code Talker Recognition Act) after making some amendments. The name of the resolution was changed to the Code Talker Recognition Act (originally Sioux Code Talker Act) but would retain the portion on the Sioux code talkers as the first section of the legislation. The House bill named the code talkers specifically; the Senate version did not. On March 5, 2003, the Code Talker’s Recognition Act (S. 540) was introduced by Senator James Inhofe (Oklahoma) and others seeking equal recognition for those code talkers (Choctaw, Comanche, and Sioux) who were not recognized along with the Navajo in 2001. This act was amended

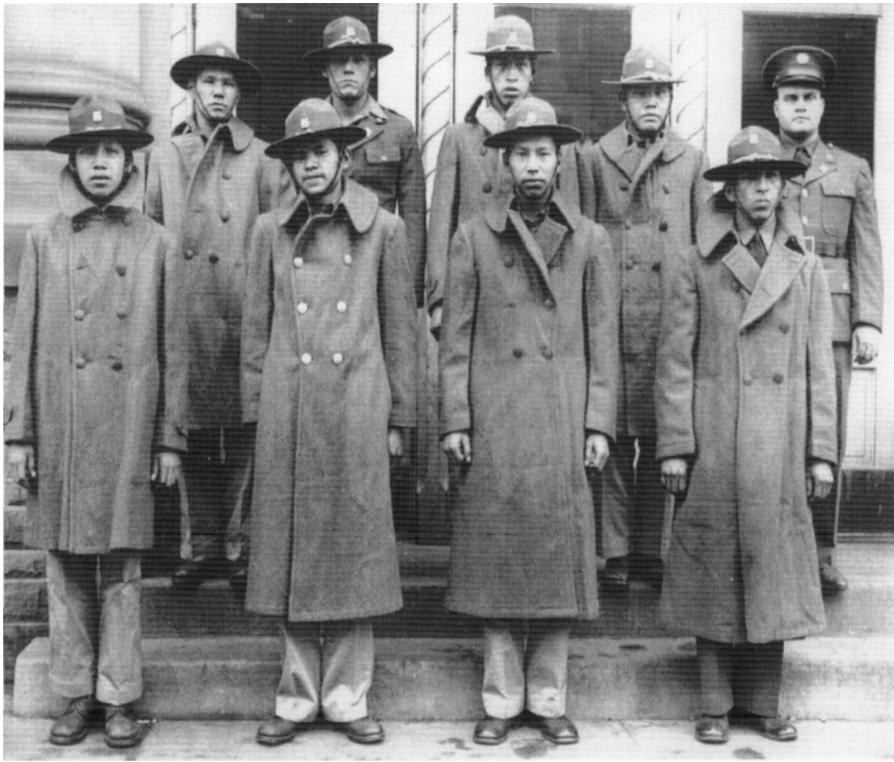


FIGURE 7. Meskwaki code talkers, Iowa, ca. 1941. Back row, from left to right: Judie Wayne Waubanasee, Dewey Roberts, Melvin Twin, Mike Wayne Waubanasee, and an unidentified Anglo officer; front row, from left to right: Dewey Youngbear, Willard Sanache, Frank Jonas Sanache, and Edward Benson. Author's collection.

by Senator Charles Grassley to include the Meskwaki (see fig. 7).³⁵ On April 7, 2004, Iowa Senate Resolution 160 of the Eightieth General Assembly was passed, giving recognition to the eight Meskwaki code talkers from Tama, including a special recognition of Frank Sanache, the last remaining member of the unit.

Two other pieces of legislation were also introduced to Congress in 2004 that sought to identify and recognize all Native American code talkers: S. 540 The Code Talkers Recognition Act and H.R. 1093. Cosponsored by Senators Harkin and Grassley of Iowa, Senator Michael D. Crapo of Idaho, and Senator Tim Johnson of South Dakota, H.R. 1093 sought Congressional Gold Medals for the eight Meskwaki code talkers from Iowa.³⁶ Cosponsored by Senators Daschle and Johnson, S. 540 was a bipartisan bill introduced by Senator Inhofe during the first session of the 108th Congress "to authorize the presentation of gold medals on behalf of the Congress to Native Americans

who served as code talkers during foreign conflicts in which the United States was involved during the 20th century in recognition of the service of those Native Americans to the United States.”³⁷ Interest stemming from this legislation necessitated a discussion regarding how to identify, gather information on, and possibly recognize all Native American code talkers.

THE 2004 SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS HEARING: THE “CONTRIBUTIONS OF NATIVE AMERICAN CODE TALKERS IN AMERICAN MILITARY HISTORY”

On July 2, 2004, Senators Daschle, Grassley, Harkin, and others requested that a hearing be convened before the Committee on Indian Affairs to compile an evidentiary record of the widely dispersed data; identify all individuals who served as code talkers, their units, and tribal affiliations; and consider the most appropriate means to honor them. On September 22, 2004, a panel of eleven individuals from the US Department of Veterans Affairs, a military historian, an anthropologist, a Lakota code talker, tribal officials, and Native American veterans met to testify at the Oversight Hearing before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on the Contributions of Native American Code Talkers in American Military History about data pertaining to the use of Native American code talkers in support of S. 540 The Code Talkers Recognition Act and H.R. 1093.³⁸ The hearing was presided over by Senator Campbell of Colorado.

Following opening statements by Senator Harkin, the panel of eleven witnesses, divided into three consecutive groups, testified. The first set of contributors included Gordon H. Mansfield, deputy secretary of veterans affairs, US Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, D.C., and Brigadier General John S. Brown, chief of military history and commander, US Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C. The second group included Clarence Wolfguts, Oglala codetalker, Wanblee South Dakota, accompanied by Donald Loudner, national commander, National American Indian Veterans Association, Mitchell, South Dakota; the Honorable John Yellowbird Steele, president, Oglala Sioux Tribal Council; and Robin Roberts, Meskwaki tribal member, Mountour, Iowa. The third group included the Honorable Gregory E. Pyle, chief, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Durant, Oklahoma; Melvin Kerchee, secretary/treasurer, veteran, Comanche Nation, Lawton, Oklahoma; Samson Keahna, Vietnam veteran; the Honorable Wayne Pushetonequa, council member, Sac and Fox tribe of the Mississippi in Tama; and the author, then assistant professor of anthropology at Southwest Missouri State University (see fig. 8).³⁹



FIGURE 8. Author testifying before the Senate Committee Hearing on the contributions of Native American code talkers in American military history in Washington, D.C., on September 23, 2004. Photo by William Meadows.

Our purpose was twofold: to introduce evidence confirming the existence of non-Navajo Native American code talkers and to consider the most appropriate means to honor their contributions. Evidence in the form of prepared statements; member lists of code talkers; photographs; news clippings; data regarding the code talkers' military units, training, and the use of their respective tribal languages in service; and testimony by Oglala Lakota code talker Clarence Wolfguts was presented.⁴⁰ Reflecting the long-overdue interest in and recognition of the code talkers' service, Meskwaki Tribal Council Chair Alex Walker remarked, "The government has never done anything for them. We look forward to having them honored for their participation in the war."⁴¹ As Senator Daschle testified, "The code talkers represent the best of this noble tradition—the best America has to give. They deserve the thanks and recognition of our grateful nation."⁴²

Although the technical nature of modern military communications has surpassed that of code talking, the contributions of Native American code talkers were effective and significant. As Brigadier-General (Ret.) John S. Brown concluded,

It is impossible to calculate how many operations were successful and how many lives were saved because of communications secured by the code talkers. It may

well be that contemporary encryption technology has carried us beyond the era in which the services of the code talkers proved most useful. However, an underlying principle remains valid: that the diversity and richness of American culture renders it far more capable than it would otherwise be of coping with the challenges of an uncertain world. Also, the unique and extraordinary record of Native American service in the Armed Forces of the United States continues unbroken, as our accumulating record of current operations attests.⁴³

Panelists repeatedly pointed out that most of the code talkers from World War II are deceased, and if any are to see federal recognition in their lifetime it must come soon. As Samson Keahna aptly described, “Bound by their honor and obligation, the Code Talkers said nothing about the essential role they played on behalf of our country. Instead, they lived humbly among us as friends, brothers, uncles and grandfathers. . . . Time is of the essence. Already we have lost too many of these great warriors. Each of these men who served as a Code Talker deserves to know that the nation they served honors their sacrifices. For those whom we have lost, we must demonstrate to their families that they have not been forgotten.”⁴⁴ Senator Campbell later published the testimony and statements submitted at the hearing.⁴⁵

RECENT LEGISLATION

In December 2001, Representative Granger introduced a bill to award the Comanche code talkers the Congressional Gold Medal during the 107th Congress. In 2002, the bill passed the House because it was combined with Representative Wes Watkins’s bill honoring the Choctaw code talkers and Representative John Thune’s bill honoring the Sioux code talkers (H.R. 3250). The bill was then referred to the Senate but died on the Senate floor. During the 108th Congress, Representative Granger reintroduced her earlier bill (H.R. 1093). As Representatives Thune and Watkins had left the House, Granger included both of their bills in introducing the Code Talker Recognition Act. In the House, the bill garnered thirty-three cosponsors but was never scheduled for a floor vote; in the Senate, Senator Inhofe’s companion bill also never left committee.⁴⁶

On May 13, 2005, the Code Talkers Recognition Act (S. 1035) was reintroduced in the 109th Congress, 1st Session, by Senator Inhofe and was cosponsored by Senator Thomas Coburn of Oklahoma, Representative Grassley and Senator Harkin of Iowa, and Senator Johnson and Representative Thune of South Dakota. This bill was developed “to authorize the presentation of commemorative medals on behalf of Congress to Native Americans who served as Code Talkers during foreign conflicts in which the United States was

involved during the 20th century in recognition of the service of those Native Americans to the United States.”⁴⁷

Working from positive identification of code talkers from the previous year’s Senate hearing, this bill listed the known eleven Sioux (Dakota and Lakota), fourteen Comanche, and eight Sac and Fox (Meskwaki) code talkers. In alphabetical order by tribe and last name this includes:

Comanche: Charles Chibitty, Haddon Codynah, Robert Holder, Forrest Kassanavoid, Ellington Mihecoby, Perry Noyebad, Clifford Otitivo, Simmons Parker, Melvin Permansu, Elgin Red Elk, Roderick “Dick” Red Elk, Larry Saupitty, Morris Sunrise, and Willie Yackeschi.⁴⁸

Meskwaki: Edward Benson, Dewey Roberts, Frank Sanache, Willard Sanache, Melvin Twin, Judie Wayne Wabaunasee, Mike Wayne Wabaunasee, and Dewey Youngbear.

Sioux: Eddie Eagle Boy, Simon Brokenleg, Iver Crow Eagle Sr., Walter C. John, John Bear King, Philip “Stoney” Le Blanc, Baptiste Pumpkinseed, Guy Rondell, Edmund St. John, Charles Whitepipe, and Clarence Wolfguts.⁴⁹

S. 1035 also included, but did not list by name, the Choctaw code talkers from World War I. At present, there are several other tribes in which small numbers of members are known to have performed code talking during military service, which cannot presently be identified.⁵⁰ The identification of these individuals was a major concern during the 2004 Senate hearing and represents an issue in which Congress and scholars must balance careful and judicious action with the concerns of other tribes involved.

For those code talkers who have not yet received congressional awards, the bill states that, “Any Native American member of the United States Armed Forces who served as a Code talker in any foreign conflict in which the United States was involved during the 20th Century shall be eligible for a commemorative medal under this section.” Determination for this status rests with (1) the secretary of Defense under the previous definition for which all individuals are required to be included in an established list of individuals eligible to receive a medal under this act within 120 days of its enactment and (2) qualifying as a member of an Indian tribe as defined in Section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (25 USC 4506). The medals struck pursuant to this act would be categorized as national medals for purposes of chapter 51 of title 31 of the US Code (S. 1035, Sec. 502, 503, 504). The bill was read twice and referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

In addition to proposed legislation, other individuals contributed their support to the effort to recognize all Native American code talkers. Adapted from Liz Pollard’s original petition, and using the author’s list of Native

American code talker units and definitions for types of code talking, the online “Petition to the Congress of the United States on Behalf of the Native American Code Talkers of World War I and World War II” was developed in order to garner additional public support.⁵¹ On November 14, 2005, the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., invited the author to visit and speak on his research about the history and role of North American Indian code talkers and the recent efforts to identify and gain federal recognition for them.⁵²

The Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service and the newly opened National Museum of the American Indian have developed fifteen traveling exhibits entitled “Native Words, Native Warriors,” which opened in 2006 (see fig. 9). Consisting of freestanding color banners with accompanying labels and text, these panels concisely tell the story of Native American code talkers, highlighting their cultural backgrounds, which made possible their unique and valuable contributions to the war effort.⁵³

In the 109th Congress, Representative Granger introduced H.R. 1093, which was the same as the bill she introduced in the 108th Congress. This bill proposed to award the Comanche, Choctaw, and Sioux code talkers Congressional Gold Medals and included a provision (Sec. 401) authorizing the president to award the same medals to any other code talkers identified by the secretary of Defense. Although the bill had 183 cosponsors, it was never

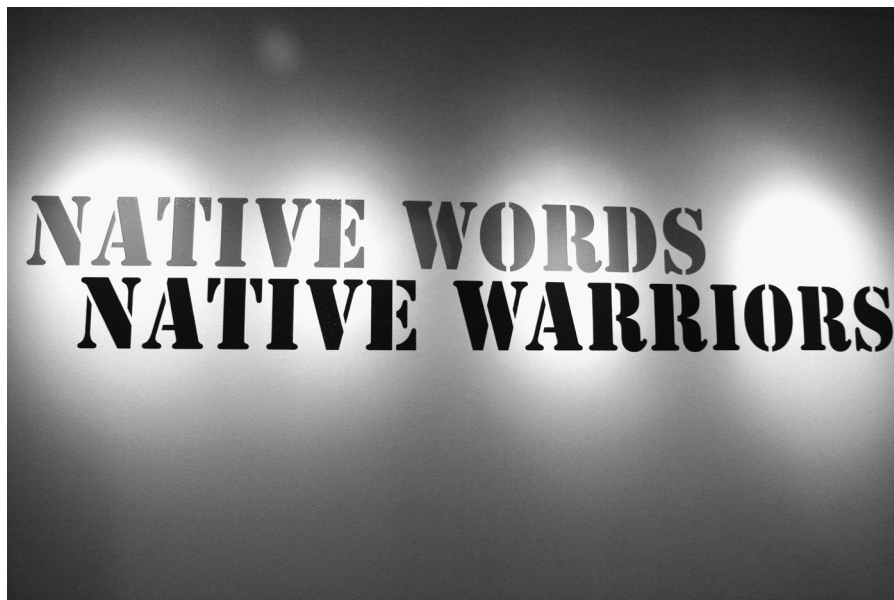


FIGURE 9. *The Smithsonian Institution's Native Word Native Warriors exhibit sign. Photo by William Meadows.*

scheduled for a floor vote in the House. Senator Inhofe drafted a companion bill rather than a gold medal bill, which passed unanimously.⁵⁴

State and federal legislation to honor various American Indian code talkers with congressional recognition has been submitted periodically since 1995 and for non-Navajo groups regularly since 2002, but although it received widespread popular support and virtually no one spoke out against the bills, they failed to produce enough votes for their passage. The bills failed due to several factors. Foremost was that the role of non-Navajo code talkers was virtually unknown. As Representative Granger explained,

Many members were familiar with the story of the Code Talkers thanks in part to the publicity that the Navajos received after being awarded their gold medals, but many members were unaware that other tribes served as Code Talkers during both World War I and II. However, once members heard the story of the Code Talkers, they supported the legislation. But it took time to educate members and their staffs with the full story of what the Code Talkers did during both World War I and II. . . . During this time I found that members who were familiar with the story of the Code Talkers were only familiar with the efforts of the Navajo Code Talkers, so sharing the story of the other Code Talkers was a very important part of getting support for the legislation.⁵⁵

In addition, there was no public economic incentive associated with the bill, which often helps legislation to pass. Nevertheless, tribal leaders stated that they would continue their efforts until recognition was gained. Some tribes sponsored tribal representatives to visit senators and representatives in Washington, D.C., often providing them with packets of documentation on their respective tribe's code talkers, including copies of *The Comanche Code Talkers of World War II*, which were distributed by the Comanche and Choctaw.⁵⁶

Other difficulties arose from the level of award being proposed. As Representative Granger described,

There are many reasons but the main one attributes to educating all of Congress with the story of the Code Talkers. Also, it took a while to identify all the Code Talkers and tribes involved in the Code Talker efforts. In addition, there is a cost associated with gold medal bills. Because of the cost associated and because a Congressional Gold Medal is one of the highest honors bestowed by Congress, there is a high threshold for getting these bills to the floor for a vote. In order for a gold medal bill to be scheduled for a floor vote in the House, the bill must have 290 cosponsors. The combination of these issues help explain why it took so long to get this bill enacted into law. . . . I never encountered any opposition to the bill once members learned the story of the Code Talkers.⁵⁷

Support for the legislation was also aided from descendants of the varied tribe's code talkers residing in many congressional districts, which helped to gain broad support from many congressional members. In addition, the Navajo code talkers bill was inserted at the last moment into an appropriations bill and was signed into law without having to go through the entire legislative process that the other groups were encountering.⁵⁸

THE 110TH CONGRESS

On December 13, 2007, Representative Dan Boren of Oklahoma introduced H.R. 4544, the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2007, to the 110th Congress. Containing compromise language that would honor Native American code talkers in an appropriate manner while being fiscally responsible, the bill "[d]irects the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the president pro tempore of the Senate to arrange for the award of gold medals to Native American code talkers of specified Indian tribes. Defines 'code talker' as a Native American who served in the Armed Forces during a foreign conflict and who participated in military communications using a native language." Concerning the number and striking of gold medals, the bill also "requires the Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense and Indian tribes, to identify code talkers eligible for a gold medal." The bill further directs that consultation with the Assiniboiné, Chippewa and Oneida, Choctaw, Comanche, Cree, Crow, Hopi, Kiowa, Menominee, Mississauga, Muscogee, Sac and Fox, and Sioux nations be conducted in order to determine the existence of code talkers and potential recipients of the award.

After working with the Financial Services Committee staff of the National Congress of American Indians, Representative Granger introduced H.R. 4462, the Code Talkers Recognition Act, on December 12, 2007. This legislation, a modified version of her earlier bill, authorized the president to present a Congressional Gold Medal on behalf of all code talkers to the Smithsonian Institution for display. It also authorized duplicate gold medals to be awarded to each of the tribal governments on behalf of their soldiers who served as code talkers and silver duplicate medals to be awarded to any surviving code talker and to the families of deceased code talkers.⁵⁹

The House of Representatives passed the bill by a voice vote on September 25, 2008, and the Senate passed the bill by unanimous consent on September 30, 2008. On October 15, 2008, President George W. Bush signed H.R. 4544, the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008, into law (Public Law 110-420).⁶⁰ The following provides a list of the bill's recent history in congressional sessions.

RECENT HISTORY OF CODE TALKER RECOGNITION BILLS

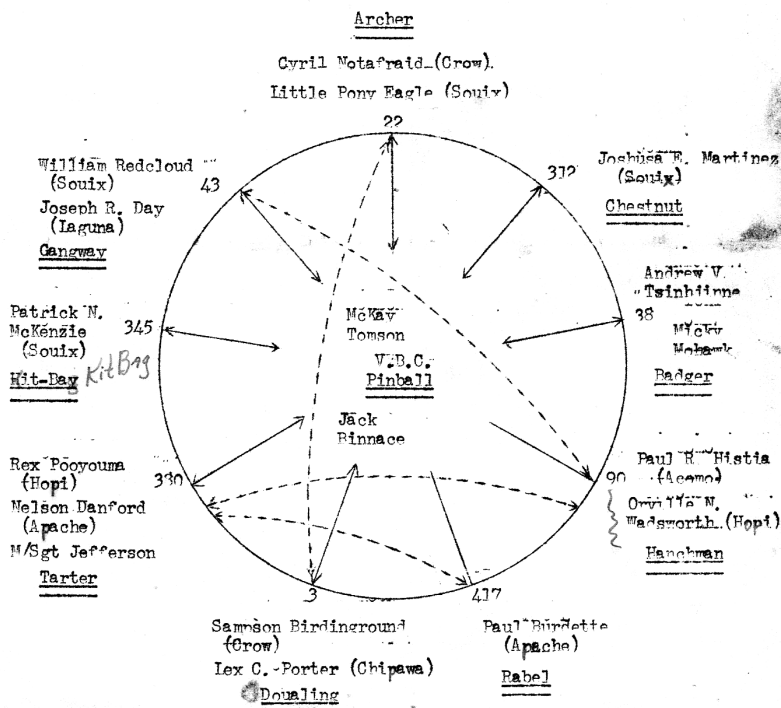
107th Congress: H.R. 3250—passed in House, referred to Senate
107th Congress—died on Senate floor
108th Congress: S. 540—died in committee
108th Congress: H.R. 1093—died in committee, 33 cosponsors
109th Congress: S. 1035—passed in Senate, unanimous
109th Congress: H.R. 4597—died in House, 183 cosponsors
110th Congress: S. 2681—passed in Senate (September 30, 2008)
110th Congress: H.R. 4462—passed in House (September 25, 2008)
H.R. 4544, the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2007
Public law No. 110-420, October 15, 2008⁶¹

ONGOING RESEARCH

Ongoing research is being conducted before these awards can be made. Although some groups such as the Choctaw during World War I and the Comanche and Meskwaki during World War II are well documented, and members have been identified due to formal recruitment prior to World War II, other less formally organized groups that were recruited in the field and that performed Type 2 code talking are harder to locate and document. In 2010, the Hopi identified two additional code talkers, Rex Pooyouma and Orville N. Wadsworth, who served in the V Bomber Command of the US Army in the Pacific Theater of World War II (see fig. 10). In addition, a recent document marked “Secret” from the V Bomber Command was found that appears to be a radio net involving sixteen members from several Indian tribes, which suggests other, as of yet unrecognized, code talkers.⁶² Also in 2010, information regarding a Kaw (Kansa) tribal member’s role in using Indian languages during World War I emerged and resulted in the recognition of Mose Bellmard in the *Congressional Record*. Information from a tribal elder regarding the use of six Kaw code talkers during World War I was also collected.⁶³

Due to their impromptu organization, small size, and the late date at hand, some Type 2 code talkers may remain unrecognized. Identification will require extensive collaboration with tribal communities and military archival research to determine troop assignments and duties, as well as whether any reference to their use of Native languages was even recorded. Three other factors complicate this process: the rapidly decreasing numbers of surviving World War II veterans with firsthand information, the small size of some groups (as small as two men), and the frequency of their communications (some single instances).⁶⁴

SECRET



SECRET

FIGURE 10. Document from V Bomber Command, Pacific Theater, World War II. Courtesy of Eugene Talas, Hopi Veterans Services. Document marked "SECRET" from the V Bomb Command, World War II, with fifteen Indians and one Anglo comprising nine groups of men. Several pairs of tribal members are linked by dotted lines. In clockwise order from the top, the men are listed by their name, tribe, what appears to be their call name, and a number, perhaps a radio frequency: 1) Cyril Notafrad (Crow) and Little Pony Eagle (Sioux), Archer, 22; 2) Joshua E. Martinez (Sioux), Chestnut, 312; 3) Andrew V. Tsinhiinne (____), Micky Mohawk (____), Badger, 38; 4) Paul R. Histia (Acama), Orville N. Wadsworth (Hopi), Hanchman, 90; 5) Paul Burdette (Apache), Rabel, 417; 6) Sampson Birdinground (Crow), Lex C. Porter (Chipewa), Doualing, 3; 7) Rex Pooyouma (Hopi), Nelson Danford (Apache), M/Sgt. Jefferson, Tarter, 330; 8) Patrick N. McKenzie (Sioux), Hit-Bay, 345; 9) William Redcloud (Sioux), Joseph R. Day (Laguna), Gangway, 43; 10) (in the circle) McCay Tomson and Jack Binnace, V. B. C. Pinball.

In January 2007, an Arizona Senate committee rejected a proposal to include the Hopi and other Native Americans in a code talker monument in Phoenix, declining to change the name of the Navajo Code Talkers Monument to the Arizona Code Talkers Monument. Two months later, an Arizona Senate Committee also voted 15 to 13 against including the Hopi code talkers in a resolution supporting the design of a Navajo code talker postage stamp by the US Postal Service. Seeking equal recognition, the Hopi have petitioned for an amendment to the Code Talker Recognition Act in order to have gold medals awarded to their code talkers instead of silver.⁶⁵ The medals are being designed, and it is hoped that they may be awarded sometime in 2011. It is unfortunate that such recognition could not have come earlier, when more of the code talkers could have received it in person. Admittedly, the voices of those now being honored are largely absent in this work, and most of the press coverage involves the voices of those honoring the code talkers. Currently, only a few non-Navajo code talkers remain, including Henry Stoneroads Sr. (Pawnee), Barney Old Coyote (Crow), and Gilbert Horn Sr. (Assiniboine).⁶⁶ During the 1990s, I was able to interview the remaining Comanche code talkers concerning their feelings of receiving tribal and state recognition as code talkers. All spoke with pride of their service, but did so modestly emphasizing that it was a group activity and that their largest regret was that most of their comrades were already gone and never received the recognition that had emerged in recent years. In 1995, Comanche code talker Charles Chibitty commented to me on the recognition they were receiving,

After that many years, some of our comrades and cousins . . . are not here to enjoy the recognition we're getting these days. . . . After all of it was over with, they finally honored us at the state capitol. But to know that I at least done something for the country, what little I did. Because there were thousands and thousands of soldiers that got killed you know. If what little we did saved some of those lives, then I'm proud I was part of it you know. Like I always say, the only regret that I have is that my comrades, my cousins, and others that was with us, is not here to enjoy things like this [videotaped studio interview] that is happening to us after all these years. That's what I want to say.⁶⁷

Likewise, Meskwaki code talker Frank Sanache emphasized the group ethos of his unit when he stated in 2002, "I don't want the medal unless everyone who went is awarded."⁶⁸

For myself, this work began primarily as a favor to Comanche code talker Forrest Kassanavoid in 1991, and as a case study with the Comanche code talkers during graduate school that was not directly related to my dissertation topic and for which I had no immediate designs for further application. Shortly thereafter, the growing efforts of tribes seeking state and federal

recognition for their code talkers began to emerge, and tribes and government officials frequently contacted me regarding my research. This led to ongoing research with other tribes, helping to educate others about the service of code talkers through invitations to speak at many locales including the Smithsonian Institution's "Native Words, Native Warrior" exhibits, and contributing to the passage of the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008. These experiences have been one of the most rewarding research experiences I have had. Most enjoyable has been meeting the family members of code talkers and seeing how much this long-overdue recognition means to them. I am honored to have had the opportunity to know some of these individuals and to play a small part in this process, although it comes at such a late date that few of the code talkers will personally experience it. This recognition also serves as a case study of the short-sightedness of monolingualism as a part of forced assimilation of other cultures and their languages, and of the willingness of Native people to share their language for the common defense despite simultaneous US government attempts to eradicate these languages.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the long-overdue honor will be an enduring source of pride for those who so deserve this recognition and their place in both Native American and American history for the many tribes and families and involved.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank several individuals who contributed to the information gathered for this research, including Forrest Kasanavoid, Roderick Red Elk, Charles Chibitty, Albert Nahquaddy Jr. (Comanche code talkers); Judy Allen and Regina Green (Choctaw); Robin Roberts (Meskwaki); Andrea Page (Hunkpapa Lakota); Henry Stoneroads Sr. (Pawnee); Major-General Hugh F. Foster (4th Infantry Division, World War II); Don Walton (302 Reconnaissance Team, World War II); and Eugene Talas, Michael Pavatea, and Tina May (Hopi). I would also like to acknowledge Representative Granger and staff member Matt Leffingwell; Senator Campbell; the members of the 2004 "Hearing before the Committee on Indian Affairs, United States Senate on the Contributions of Native American Code Talkers in American Military History"; and the three anonymous reviewers who read and made useful comments on this article.

NOTES

1. Mark Shaffer, "Forgotten Heroes: Non-Navajo Code Talkers Seeking Equal Recognition," *Arizona Republic* (Phoenix), January 6, 2001, A1, A12; William C. Meadows, *The Comanche Code Talkers of World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); William C. Meadows, "North American Indian Code Talkers: Current Developments and Research," in *Aboriginal Peoples and Military Participation: Canadian and International Perspectives*, ed. P. Whitmen Lackenbauer, R. Scott Sheffield, and Craig Leslie Mantle (Kingston, ON: Canadian Defence Academy Press), 161–214; William C. Meadows, "They had a chance to talk to one another': The Role of Incidence in Native American Code Talking," *Ethnohistory* 56, no. 2 (2009): 269–84; David Stonehouse, "Canada's Windtalkers," *Globe Review, The Globe and Mail*, June 13, 2002, R1, R5; Mary Bennett, "Meskwaki Code Talkers," *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* 84, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 154–61; Martha Davidson, "Secret Warriors," *National Museum of the American Indian* 3, no. 2 (2002): 15–19.
2. American Indian Code Talkers, The Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service and the National Museum of the American Indian, <http://www.sites.si.edu/SITESwebsite/exhibitions> (accessed August 15, 2005).
3. Meadows, *Comanche Code Talkers*, 22–26.
4. *Ibid.*, 28–29, 74–75, 108–16; "Indians Volunteer for Defense Army, To Speak Another Dialect" (Omaha, Nebraska), special to the *New York Times*, February 16, 1941, 32; "Army Indians to Foil Enemy Listeners," *New York Times*, February 18, 1941. See also, "Army Indian to Foil Enemy Listeners," *Kentucky New Era* (Hopkinsville), February 19, 1941, 8; "Original Americans," *Marshalltown Times Republican* (Marshalltown, IO), February 21, 1941; "Enemy Will Have Tough Time Decoding Messages of 168th," *Marshalltown Times Republican* (Marshalltown, IO), February 26, 1941.
5. Meadows, *Comanche Code Talkers*, 74–77. The testing of other Indian code talkers (Chippewa-Oneida) in the 1941 Louisiana War Games was also mentioned in "Indians as Code Talkers," *The Masterkey* 15, no. 6 (November 1941): 240.
6. Doris Paul, *The Navajo Code Talkers* (Pittsburg, PA: Dorrance Publishing, 1973), 8.
7. Shaffer, "Forgotten Heroes," A1, A12; Meadows, *Comanche Code Talkers*, 67–68.
8. The air corps and navy chose not to use code talkers (beyond a small group already in the navy) because neither their air operations nor ship movements demanded the use of the immediate encoding of messages in combat. Operations of these types typically involved advance planning that allowed more traditional means of communication. Kenneth W. Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 144. The Army Air Corp and the navy also expressed concerns for long-term security of Indian voice-based codes. The navy also cited dissatisfaction with the twenty-four recruits they had, using only five of them on a prolonged basis. I have always believed that these decisions prematurely inhibited the full potential of Native American code talkers during World War II. For a full discussion of these meetings see Meadows, *Comanche Code Talkers*, 40–50.
9. Alison R. Bernstein, *American Indians and World War II: Toward a New Era in Indian Affairs* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian*, 162, 169; Jere Bishop Franco, *Crossing the Pond: The Native American Effort in World War II*, vol. 7, War and the Southwest Series (Denton: University of North Texas, Press, 1999), 120–53; R. S. Sheffield, *The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the "Indian" and the Second World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004); Meadows, *Comanche Code Talkers*, 40–50; Meadows, *North American Indian Code Talkers*.
10. Meadows, *Comanche Code Talkers*.

11. John Hix, Hollywood, CA, to the War Department, Washington, DC (May 18, 1939); Mr. Waley, A. E. F. Records to a Miss Lemon (May 25, 1939); J. E. Lyle, Chief Clerk, Organizational Rec. Section to Mr. Diamond (May 25, 1939); Colonel A. G. D., Officer in Charge, World War Division, the Adjutant General's Office, Memorandum to the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, American Indian in World War (May 29, 1939); E. R. W. McCabe, Colonel, General Staff, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Memorandum to the Adjutant General, American Indians in World War (June 2, 1939); E. B. Adams, Major General, the Adjutant General to Mr. John Hix, Hollywood, CA (June 6, 1939). Documents courtesy of Ken Kirkland.

12. "Played Joke on Huns," *American Indian Magazine* 7, no. 2 (1919): 101; Captain Ben H. Chastaine, *Story of the 36th: The Experiences of the 36th Division in the World War* (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1920); Captain Lincoln A. Levine, "Amazing Code Machine that Sent Messages Safely to US Army in War Baffles Experts: Warfare Tricks that Puzzled Germans," *New York American*, November 13, 1921; "Choctaws Stopped War Wire Tappers: Germans at St. Mihiel Finally Circumvented by Indians of the US Forces," *The Sun's Rays*, *New York Sun*, February 2, 1938; "Comanches Again Called for Army Code Service," *New York Times*, December 13, 1940.

13. "Indians as Code Talkers," 240; "Original Americans"; "Enemy Will Have Tough Time Decoding Messages of 168th"; "Indians Volunteer for Defense Army"; "Indians' Code Upsets Foe: They Speed Dialect Messages by Radio in War Games," *New York Times*, August 31, 1941.

14. National Museum of the American Indian, "Use of the Term Code Talker," "Native Words, Native Warriors" exhibit, <http://www.nmai.si.edu/education/codetalkers/html/resources.html> (accessed October 25, 2007).

15. Murray Marder, "Navajo Code Talk Kept Foe Guessing: Indians with Marines, Using Rare Native Tongue, Insured Secrecy of Messages," *New York Times*, September 19, 1945; Mt. Sgt. Murray Marder, "Navajo Code Talkers," *Marine Corps Gazette*, September, 1945, 10–11.

16. National Museum of the American Indian, "Use of the Term Code Talker."

17. DD-214 stands for Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty.

18. *Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*, "code," <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/code> (accessed March 3, 2010).

19. Meadows, *Comanche Code Talkers*; Meadows, *North American Indian Code Talkers*, 188.

20. Navajo Code Talker file, Marine Corps Historical Center (Washington, DC).

21. James Dempsey, "Persistence of a Warrior Ethic among the Plains Indians," *Alberta History* 36, no. 1 (1988): 1–10; Meadows, *Comanche Code Talkers*; Meadows, *North American Indian Code Talkers*.

22. Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); William Meadows, *Kiowa, Apache, and Comanche Warrior Societies* (Austin: University of Texas Press); Meadows, *Comanche Code Talkers*.

23. Paul, *The Navajo Code Talkers*, 115–16.

24. Regina Green, Choctaw Nation Museum, to the author, October 19, 2010. The Choctaw Code Talkers Association also meets annually at the Choctaw Nation Labor Day Festival in September.

25. Later, a nineteenth Choctaw was identified as a code talker. For a summary of Billy's service record and recognition, see "Schlicht Billy" Bishinik, *Choctaw Nation Newspaper* (Durant, OK), March 2000; and Gregg Ripps, "Choctaw Code Talkers to Receive Recognition at Camp Mabry," <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/news.1892186/posts> (accessed September 5, 2007).

26. Avis Little Eagle, "World War II Lakota Code Talkers Used Language to Outwit Enemy," *Indian Country Today*, June 8, 1994; LTC Malcolm Marshall, *Proud Americans* (London: New Hampshire, 1994). See also Greg Latza Blue Stars, *A Selection of Stories from South Dakota's World War II Veterans* (Sioux Falls, SD: People Scapes Publishing, 2004), 79, for a section on Clarence

Wolf Guts, and how he and Iver Crow Eagle, Roy Bad Hand, and Benny Red Bear Sr. served as code talkers.

27. The Hopi have recently reported two more Hopi code talkers (now totaling 11), who were part of a Native American code talker communications network with the V Bomber Commander, US Army Air Forces, in the Pacific Theater. Eugene Talas, Director, Office of Hopi Veteran's Services and Safety Officer, e-mail to the author, October 8, 2010.

28. Tina May, Hopi Public Information Officer, "Hopi Code Talkers Plaque Ready for Veterans Day Dedication," *Hopi Tribal News*, November 6, 2009, <http://www.hopi-nsn.gov/News/tabid/169/EntryId/23/Hopi-Code-Talkers-Plaque-Ready-for-Veterans-Day-Dedication.aspx> (accessed December 15, 2010); "Honoring Our Veterans to Preserve Their Legacy," program flyer, Veterans Day observance, November 11, 2009, Hopi Veterans Memorial Center, Kykotsmovi, AZ.

29. Rosanda Suetopka Thayer, "Hopi Tribe Honors Hopi Code Talkers," *Navajo-Hopi Observer*, November 24, 2009, <http://www.navajohopiobserver.com> (accessed July 10, 2010).

30. "Indian Code Talkers Honored at Sovereignty Symposium," *Anadarko Daily News* (Anadarko, OK), June 11, 2002; Jane Norman, "Advocates: Honor All Code Talkers," *Des Moines Register* (Washington Bureau), September 23, 2004; Jane Norman, "Code-talkers Finally Given Medals," *Des Moines Register*, January 17, 2005; Senator Tom Daschle, Statement before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on the Contributions of Native American Code Talkers in American Military History, Washington, DC (September 22, 2004); Don Loudner, National Commander, American Indian Veterans of the United States, Statement before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on the Contributions of Native American Code Talkers in American Military History, Washington, DC (September 22, 2004).

31. Senator Daschle, Statement before the Senate Committee; Loudner, Statement before the Senate Committee.

32. Liz Pollard, "Petition to the Congress of the United States on Behalf of the Native American Code Talkers of World War I and II," Anadarko, OK (1998).

33. Senator Jeff Bingaman, "Senator Jeff Bingaman's Navajo Code Talkers Page: The Legislation," Honoring the Navajo Code Talkers (2005), http://bingaman.senate.gov/code_talkers/legislation/legislation.html (accessed December 10, 2005).

34. Meadows, *North American Indian Code Talkers*.

35. W. F. C. Courier, "Grassley Seeks Congressional Medal for Eight Meskwaki Code Talkers," http://www.wfcourier.com/news/breaking_news/article (April 30, 2004) (accessed April 10, 2007).

36. H.R. 1093 Discussion Draft, 108th Cong., 2nd Sess. (April 28, 2004).

37. Senator Tom Daschle et al., address to the Honorable Ben Nighthorse Campbell and Daniel Inouye, US Senate (July 2, 2004).

38. John Yellowbird Steele, President, Oglala Sioux tribe, Statement before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Oversight Hearing on the Contributions of Native American Code Talkers in American Military History, Washington, DC (September 22, 2004).

39. Witness List, Oversight Hearing before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on the Contributions of Native American Code Talkers in American Military History, US Senate, Committee on Indian Affairs, Washington, DC, Dirksen Senate Building, Room 562 (September 22, 2004). Missouri State University was then known as Southwest Missouri State University.

40. In 2002, Frank Sanache, the last remaining Meskwaki code talker, died at the age of 86.

41. "Last Meskwaki Code Talker Remembers," *USA Today* online, <http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2002/07/06/codetalkers.htm>, April 7, 2002 (accessed September 23, 2005).

42. Senator Daschle, Statement before the Senate Committee.

43. Brigadier General (Ret.) John S. Brown, Chief of Military History, US Army, Statement before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on the Contributions of Native American Code Talkers in American Military History, Washington, DC (September 22, 2004).

44. Samson Keahna, Statement on Behalf of the Sac and Fox tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa, in Support of S. 540 "The Code Talkers Recognition Act" to the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, Washington, DC (September 22, 2004).

45. Interestingly, some of the contributors that testified on the panel were neither notified of the publication nor given a copy.

46. Congresswoman Kay Granger and Matt Leffingwell to the author, October 20, 2010, and November 9, 2010.

47. 151 Cong. Rec. S6,102 (daily ed. June 6, 2005) (statement Sen. Inhofe).

48. Three other Comanche were trained as code talkers but were discharged prior to the 4th Div. being transferred to England in preparation for D-Day, Meadows, *Comanche Code Talkers*, 118. Charles Chibitty, the last Comanche code talker, died August 20, 2005, in Tulsa, OK. US Senate, Hearing before the Committee on Indian Affairs on Contributions of Native American Code Talkers in American Military History, 108th Cong., 2nd Sess. (September 22, 2004).

49. Garfield T. Brown (Allen, SD), Anthony Omaha Boy (St. Francis, SD), and John C. Smith (White Earth, MN) are also reported to have served as code talkers in the Headquarters Battery in the 32nd Field Artillery, 18th Regimental Combat Team. The 32nd Field Artillery supported the 18th Infantry Regiment in North Africa, Sicily, and Normandy. Andrew E. Woods to the author, May 14, 2001, First Division Museum, Wheaton, IL. Simon Brokenleg, Jeffrey Dull Knife, and other Sioux are also reported to have served as code talkers in the "All American Team" in the 3rd Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Cavalry Div., in the Ardennes Campaign. Meadows, *Comanche Code Talkers*, 79, 250n27; Malcolm Marshall, *Proud Americans* (London: New Hampshire Press, 1994).

50. Meadows, *Comanche Code Talkers*, 241–42.

51. "Petition to the Congress of the United States on Behalf of the Native American Code Talkers of World War I and World War II" (2005), <http://codetalkers.info/content/view/120> (accessed June 10, 2006).

52. William C. Meadows, "North American Indian Code Talkers: Origins, History, and Recent Developments," public speech, Library of Congress, Washington, DC (November 14, 2005).

53. Unfortunately, the interviews and material on which this exhibit is based were not accessible to the public prior to its opening. The author has spoken at the opening of some of these venues in Kansas, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Connecticut.

54. Granger and Leffingwell to the author.

55. Ibid.

56. Meadows, *Comanche Code Talkers*.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid. This bill named Assiniboiné, Cherokee, Cheyenne, Chippewa/Oneida, Choctaw, Comanche, Cree, Crow, Hopi, Kiowa, Menominee, Meskwaki, Mississauga, Muscogee, Osage, Pawnee, Sac and Fox, Seminole, and Sioux (Lakota and Dakota) as having members who served as code talkers.

60. H.R. 4544 Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2007. In the 110th Congress, identical code talker bills were introduced in each chamber. Because of this, when there were votes, each chamber voted on its bill number. Because the bills were identical, an "engrossed" bill could be sent to the president for his review and signature. Had the bills not been identical, they would have had to go to a conference committee, and then each chamber would have had to vote on a final conference report before sending legislative language to the president. Granger and Leffingwell, November 9, 2010.

61. H.R. 4544 Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2007. Granger and Leffingwell, October 20, 2010.

62. The Department of the Army confirmed Rex Pooyouma's service as a code talker. Eugene Talas, Director Office of Hopi Veteran's Services and Safety Officer, e-mail to the author (September 24, 25, and 28, 2010). Pooyouma died October 23, 2010. Hopi code talker Travis Yaiva died April 16, 2010.

63. In 2010, Ken Kirkland presented information regarding members of the Kaw (Kansa) tribe involved in the use of their language for military communications. Mose Bellmard, one of the last hereditary Kaw chiefs, attended Wentworth Military Academy, joined the army on September 15, 1915, and became a 1st lieutenant by June 18, 1916. A 1948 obituary and feature story about Bellmard describes his service in Company E, 1st Oklahoma Infantry, starting on July 30, 1918, during World War I in France.

Bellmard, head of an Indian division [unit] . . . is also credited with being the man who originated the use of Indian language in the first World War to battle the enemy's code decipherers. The Germans had been able to unravel every code file Americans could devise and intercepted their plans. Desperate, American officers appealed to Bellmard who offered the suggestion that an Indian sender and receiver be stationed at each dispatch point. Messages were then transmitted in a little-known language which has never appeared in written form. The Indian receivers in turn translated the message back into English. This method of sending highly secret messages was carried over into World War II and is still believed to defy all attempts to decode it by the enemy. Bellmard was promoted to the rank of captain for his suggestion.

Ken Kirkland, e-mail to the author, March 10, 2010; "Mose Bellmard Dies after Long Illness," *The Ponca City News*, March 28, 1948, 8; Joel Fant, "Bellmard Led Colorful Life," *The Ponca City News*, March 28, 1948. Bellmard was born February 16, 1891, and died in late March 1948. *The Kanza Newsletter* later summarized this report and added that the late Kaw elder, Houston Taylor, reported to his daughter, Naomi Wright, that Kaw tribal members and World War II veterans Tom Conn, Theodore Sumner, Harry Stubbs, Dan Test, and Jim and Henry Wynoshie had used "this method of confusing enemies trying to intercept conversation." *Kanza Newsletter* 2, no. 1 (March 2008).

Unfortunately, these accounts do not indicate whether Bellmard participated in the use of his language for military purposes or who did. Similarly, the latter account does not provide the unit and specific methods used by those individuals in World War II, although both instances appear to be Type 2 code talking. As the date of the account (1948) precedes both popular and tribal efforts to garner recognition for code talkers by decades, it appears reliable and may represent an independent origin of using Native language as a code in World War I. In addition, the fact that Bellmard was already an officer lends potential credibility that higher-ranking officers may have consulted with him or that he was in a group of officers attempting to solve the existing communications problems.

On July 12, 2010, Senator James Inhofe entered a record of Mose Bellmard's service into the *Congressional Record*. James Inhofe, "Remembering Code Talker Mose Bellmard," *Congressional Record*, Proceedings and Debates of the 111th Cong., 2nd Sess., 156, no. 102 (Monday July 12, 2010).

64. Meadows, *Comanche Code Talkers*; Meadows, *They Had a Chance to Talk to One Another*. Other potential issues have been discussed earlier in Meadows, *North American Code Talkers*.

65. Charles Chibitty to the author, February 7 and August 4, 1995; Meadows, *Comanche Code Talkers*, 207–8.

66. My thanks to Robin Roberts for Horn's identification (October 26, 2010).

67. Recently, the Navajo have launched a \$42 million fundraiser through a foundation in order to build a code talker museum and veteran's center on the Navajo Reservation. *USA Today*, November 11, 2010, A3.

68. "Last Meskwaki Code Talker Remembers," *USA Today*, July 4, 2002, <http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2002/07/06/codetalkers.htm> (accessed October 28, 2010).

69. Although not Native American, another group that has not been recognized is a group of Basque from California who were used in transmitting logistical information for Hawaii and Alaska. One Basque and two Spanish sources are known. See Xabier G. Argüello, "Egon arretaz egunari," *El Pais*, August 1, 2004; Juan Hernani, "La orden de desembarco en Guadalcanal se dió en vascuence para que no lo descubrieran los nipones," *El Diario Vasco*, December 26, 1952. It quotes *Revista General de Marina*. Bibliographic reference in Euskomedia; Mikel Rodríguez, *Los vascos y la II Guerra Mundial* (Euskonews and Media), 301; Code Talkers, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Code_talker, 2010, n. 8–10 (accessed April 10, 2010); Lydia Whirlwind Soldier, "Bilingualism vs. Monolingualism in a Non-Progressive State," *Wicazo Sa Review* 11, no. 1 (1995): 64–65, succinctly and poignantly addresses the value of the Navajo code talkers, despite American attempts to eradicate their language, and the value of multilingualism stating, "Bilingualism helped save our country during World War II."