

# An Honor Long Overdue: The 2013 Congressional Gold and Silver Medal Ceremonies in Honor of Native American Code Talkers

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Native American Code Talkers provided valuable contributions to United States military efforts in both world wars. Code talking used Native American languages to transmit military intelligence which an enemy could monitor, but not understand. After it was discovered during the First World War that Germans were able to monitor American telephone transmissions, small numbers of Eastern Band Cherokee, Choctaw, Comanche, and others were placed on field telephones to speak messages in their Native languages as a way to stymie German interception. Developed in combat late in the war, this was an impromptu experiment with no preexisting basis in Army signals intelligence. It was a great success. Native languages provided secure and accurate transmissions that were faster than existing encryption technology, giving the United States a vital military resource. Two forms of code talking emerged for military transmissions: Type 1 used specially encoded vocabularies inserted into Native American languages, while Type 2 used simply the everyday vernacular of a language that was unknown to the enemy.<sup>1</sup>

The success of Native language communicators in World War I set an important precedent in signals intelligence that was expanded during World War II. In 1940 and 1941, prior to Pearl Harbor, the Army recruited small groups of Chippewa-Oneida (seventeen men), Comanche (seventeen men), and Meskwaki (eight men) who were trained as code talkers. The formation of eight Hopi as code talkers in the 81st Infantry Division occurred in mid-1943. The Marines' recruitment of Navajo began in

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April of 1942. The larger size of the Navajo program (420 men) and more extensive documentation made the role of the Navajo better known, and subsequently they received more recognition than the smaller code-talking units of seventeen men or less. Consequently, other groups have long been viewed as somehow less important, unequal to the Navajo, and in some instances, even dismissed as having not served as code talkers by both Native Americans and non-Natives.<sup>2</sup>

During World War II, the difference in size between Army and Marine programs was the result of the Army's decision not to expand its program. Now-declassified National Security Agency documents reveal that representatives of the Army, Navy, and Marines met between September 1943 and July 1944 to discuss the feasibility of using and expanding Native American language communicators. Based largely on questions of distrust, security, and the inability of US Armed Forces personnel to monitor messages sent in Native American languages, the Army and Navy decided to keep the existing formally recruited and trained groups, but not to form others. The Marines remained largely silent on the issue.<sup>3</sup> From the start, many commanders were simply not interested and/or did not trust code talking as an effective means of communication. Marine officers were reluctant to use Navajo Code Talkers even after being notified of their purpose and deployment in the Pacific war theater, but once the Navajo had a chance to demonstrate their value, their reluctance quickly changed. Soon after, Marine units began requesting more Navajo "talkers" and the program expanded in late 1942.<sup>4</sup>

With the exception of the Navajo, then, the potential use of Native American Code Talkers was highly underutilized in World War II. Of the more than 25,000 total Native American service personnel, only 420 Navajo together with approximately 260 or more men from other tribes are known to have served as Native language communicators. Although several tribes had considerable numbers of fluent speakers in service (Kiowa, Lakota, Cheyenne, Muscogee, Anishinaabeg, Cree, Choctaw, and Comanche), their numbers did not approach the size of the Navajo. Of the non-Navajo code talker groups, the Comanche and Chippewa-Oneida, with seventeen men each, were the largest. Because only small numbers of code talkers were needed per division, as demonstrated by the Comanche and Hopi in the Army and the Navajo in the Marines, the potential for developing larger, non-Navajo code-talking units was largely a missed opportunity.<sup>5</sup>

Even the Marines maintained only approximately thirty-eight to forty code talkers per division during World War II's Pacific campaign. Commanding officers in several units used personal initiative to organize small numbers of individuals from the same tribe, or speaking mutually intelligible dialects, into Type 2 code-talking groups.<sup>6</sup> Due to the limited numbers of Native speakers in their respective units, these groups remained unofficial and small. It is important to remember that rather than sheer numbers, placement was of great importance. Moreover, as a practical matter, to gather sizable numbers of men from other tribes would have required significant recruiting efforts at home, in addition to a series of logistical problems such as identification, linguistic assessments, and the many transfers and replacements that would have been required of already-enlisted Native servicemen—men assigned to units that were dispersed and at different stages of training.

## RECOGNITION AND THE CODE TALKER RECOGNITION ACT OF 2008

After the Navajo Code program was declassified in 1968 and the Hopi recognized their remaining code talker in 1993, in 1989 France awarded the Comanche and Choctaw Code Talkers with the Knight of the National Order of Merit. US Congressional Gold and Silver Medals were awarded to the Navajo Code Talkers in 2001, followed by release of the film *Windtalkers* in 2002, and as a result other tribes began seeking equal recognition for code talkers from their respective populations.<sup>7</sup> The Navajo Code Talker Association was instrumental in lobbying for recognition of the hundreds of Navajo code talkers, but other tribes with much smaller numbers of code talkers employed different methods. Efforts for recognition came not from the code talkers themselves—who typically were highly modest and sometimes reluctant to speak about their service—but rather from relatives, tribal representatives, non-Native individuals, scholars, and state and federal government officials.

Native veterans' modesty and reluctance to speak about war and their service is documented as early as World War I.<sup>8</sup> Several factors underlie this trend. Some individuals are modest and view their service simply as fulfilling their duty, not as special or needing recognition. In addition, for many Native groups, cultural factors limit individuals from speaking about their combat experiences; speaking about one's war service or about oneself in public contexts may be considered to be inappropriate or even prohibited. While some tribes have veterans' ceremonies that include public recitations of combat experiences, another individual often will speak for the veterans being recognized. When veterans speak about combat, many focus on the humorous or lighter aspects rather than tragic ones, which force the individual to relive the events and can have negative impacts on family and community members. Among the Navajo and some Puebloan groups, veterans are required to relate their combat experiences to religious leaders as part of cleansing rituals to rid themselves of the negative effects of combat, after which they are instructed never to speak of the events again.

Prior to 2008, only the Navajo had received US government recognition for their unique and effective service as code talkers, under the Honoring the Navajo Code Talkers Act of 2000.<sup>9</sup> A lengthy grassroots movement that began in the late 1980s finally resulted in a 2004 Senate committee hearing on the contributions of Native American Code Talkers in American Military History. Subsequently, after four years of legislation and lobbying, the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008 was signed into law on October 15, 2008.<sup>10</sup> In recognizing tribes that were not covered by the Navajo Act of 2000, this act directs that one Congressional Gold Medal be struck and awarded to each tribe, as well as one Silver Medal to be awarded to each surviving Native American individual who has been identified as a code talker. The act defines a "code talker" as a "Native American who (a) served in the Armed Forces during a foreign conflict in which the United States was involved; and (b) transmitted (encoded and translated) secret coded messages for tactical military operations during World War I and World War II using their native tribal language (non-spontaneous communications). In the cases of those veterans already deceased, the Silver Medal is awarded to surviving family members.

In testimony heard at the Senate committee hearing in 2004 on the Contributions of Native American Code Talkers in the United States Armed Forces, individuals expressed great concern that recognition and awards be made expediently to ensure that the few surviving code talkers received recognition before they passed away. Unfortunately, between 2004 and 2013 several of the remaining code talkers such as Charles Chibitty (Comanche), Clarence Wolfguts and Charles Whitepipe (Lakota), Frank Sanache (Meskwaki), Franklin Shupla, Travis Yaiva, and Rex Pooyouma (Hopi), and the elder children of several World War I code talkers did pass away. However, tribal members and descendants continued their efforts to see these men honored by Congress.

At issue in these efforts was whether tribes or families would receive CGMs, or both. In 2004, Choctaw Nation Principal Chief Gregory Pyle expressed that “The Choctaw Nation feels each of the Choctaw Code Talkers should be the recipient of a specially minted medal that expresses the appreciation of the United States Government to these brave men who dedicated their skills, their languages, and their lives.”<sup>11</sup> Earlier versions of the proposed 2008 Act called for a CGM to be issued to each code talker or their family, and many descendants had hoped for this; as noted, in 2001 each of the original twenty-nine Navajo Code Talkers or their surviving families had received a CGM. Similarly, National Native American Veteran’s Association President Don Loudner (Hunkpati Dakota) supported awarding individual CGMs as had been issued for each of the original twenty-nine Navajo Code Talkers (the others received Silver Congressional Medals), asking “Why should they honor one tribe [with CGMs] and not the others?”<sup>12</sup> Members of other tribes also maintained that it would be wrong to honor all the code talkers from only one tribe with individual gold medals. That the Navajo were neither the first code talking unit, nor the only one in either world war to have a Type 1, formally encoded vocabulary, supported these views. The bill was changed to issue one gold medal per tribe and one silver medal for each surviving code talker or his descendants. According to Robert J. Dalessandro of the DOD, tribes submitted the names that they vetted as code talkers to the DOD, who had staff members verify that they served in World War I or II.<sup>13</sup> Thus verification of military service was undertaken by the Department of Defense (DOD), but determining who was a code talker was left to the respective tribes. As of June 2016, a total of 212 individuals from thirty-three tribes in eleven states have been identified as having served as code talkers.<sup>14</sup>

### *The Congressional Gold Medal*

The Congressional Gold Medal (CGM) is among the highest civilian awards in the United States, together with the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Presidential Citizens Medal. The CGM is awarded to individuals “who have performed an achievement that has an impact on American history and culture that is most likely to be recognized as a major achievement in the recipient’s field long after the achievement.” The CGM is also awarded as the “highest expression of national appreciation for distinguished achievements and contributions.”<sup>15</sup> Awarded at the discretion of Congress, the CGM requires co-sponsorship by a two-thirds or super-majority congressional

vote in both the House of Representatives and the Senate in front of their respective committees (the House Committee on Financial Services and the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs). Congress can also authorize the president to present the CGM if desired. Although Congress has approved legislation containing specific requirements for other awards and decorations, no permanent statutory provisions exist for the creation of Congressional Gold Medals.<sup>16</sup>

The first Congressional Gold Medal was awarded by the Second Continental Congress in 1776 to General George Washington. Solely military figures were awarded CGMs until after the Mexican-American War, when the scope and range of reward recipients was broadened. Since that time, the medal has been presented to former US presidents, actors, athletes, authors, entertainers, explorers, public servants, humanitarians, lifesavers, musicians, physicians, scientists, and foreign dignitaries.<sup>17</sup> The United States Mint designs Congressional Gold Medals to commemorate specific persons and achievements. No standard design exists, and each medal is unique. In the 240-year history of the CGM, more than 150 medals have been awarded to individuals or groups, including the group recipients awarded the 152<sup>nd</sup> CGM pursuant to the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008.<sup>18</sup>

In response to a proposal to create a single medal design for all code talkers covered by the 2008 Act, tribes insisted on individual tribal designs. Since 2008, many tribes have collaborated with the US Mint in designing their respective medals, through an artist from the tribe or a tribal committee. The US Treasury Department and the Mint contacted each tribe to learn what they wanted inscribed on their medals. Once chosen, designs were presented to a number of committees, including the Commission on Fine Arts and the Citizens Coin Advisory Commission. Recommendations were then presented to the individual tribes involved for review and comments. A number of artists created the designs, often including members of the Artistic Infusion Program, a group of independent designers and artists who contract with the Mint, while other artists at the Mint oversaw the actual sculpting. Each medal bears the initials of the designer and the sculptor. Great efforts were made to ensure that the symbols desired by each tribe were incorporated into the medals. The Department of Defense also carefully checked historical accuracy regarding the types of radios, rifles, uniforms, cartridge belts, and other period items associated with the soldier in each design.<sup>19</sup>

The most common design elements on the front of the medals include the tribe's name, the words "Code Talkers," and the image of a Native American soldier on a field phone and in combat; and on the back, contemporary tribal seals, traditional tribal and clan designs, and wording that lists the war they served in, "Act of Congress 2008," and English spellings of Native words denoting "Code Talkers." CGMs are considered non-portable and are intended to be displayed rather than worn, with the exception of a few miniature versions suspended from a ribbon that have been created. The US Mint frequently offers for public sale bronze, 3-inch and 1.5-inch duplicate medals and medallions.

Ruth Frazier McMillan, daughter of Choctaw Code Talker Tobias Frazier, had two dreams regarding the honoring of her tribe's code talkers; to see the Congressional Gold Medals awarded, and to see the official renaming of the fifty-five mile stretch

of Oklahoma State Highway 3 between Antlers and Broken Bow, Oklahoma as the “World War I Choctaw Code Talkers Highway.” Fourteen of the World War I Choctaw Code Talkers lived in this area and frequently walked along the highway. Many descendants still live in this area. While McMillan had lobbied for both projects, the idea to name the highway originated with her. In June of 2011 the Choctaw received the preliminary design for their gold medal.<sup>20</sup> Later that summer, McMillan expressed, “It’s a long time coming, but as long as it happens, I’ll be happy. The main reason is to let our people be proud of their history and their ethnic background . . . to broaden some minds, perhaps. Everybody needs to know what our people did.”<sup>21</sup> Despite battling liver cancer, on September 6, 2013 McMillan flew from Seattle to Oklahoma to attend the unveiling of the highway sign she had long lobbied for. Soon after returning home she passed away on October 9, just weeks before the Congressional ceremony.<sup>22</sup>

### *The Gold Medal Ceremony*

On November 20, 2013, members of the 113th United States Congress held a Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony for all thirty-three tribal nations and their individual code talkers. Invitations to the ceremony were e-mailed October 28, 2013 from the offices of House Speaker John Boehner and other officials. Tickets were nontransferable and additional guests were not permitted.<sup>23</sup> Members of all thirty-three tribes attended, but because all medal designs had not been completed by that time, only twenty-five tribes received their medals at the ceremony. The morning of November 20, I joined over forty Lakota from the Crow Creek Reservation on a large bus that read “Crow Creek Chiefs” down the side for our ride from our hotel in Arlington, Virginia to the Capitol. After being dropped off, we walked to the main entrance of the US Capitol Visitor Center on the north side of the lower level. The weather in Washington, DC was crisp and clear, with a beautiful blue sky. On providing government-issued photo identification, each invitee received an entry ticket and program and joined the line of tribal delegations waiting to enter. At 10:00 am Emancipation Hall opened for seating on a first-come, first-served basis. Emancipation Hall holds 625 people, but nearly 900 attended. In terms of medal recipients and attendees, it was one of the largest CGM presentation ceremonies ever held.

While most people wore Western dress, a wide array of Native attire could be seen across the hall. Chairman Wallace Coffee (Comanche) donned an eagle-feathered bonnet, while both the Comanche Tribal Princess and the Comanche Indian Veterans Association (CIVA) Princess wore beaded buckskin dresses and beaded crowns. Lenora Parker and her brother John Parker (Comanche) wore complete sets of Native attire, including Leonora’s special dress honoring the Comanche Code Talkers. Members of the Choctaw delegation wore Southeastern-style ribbon shirts and beaded sashes, belts, and necklaces. Basil Heath (Yanktonai) wore a beaded buckskin shirt with eagle-feathered bonnet. The White Mountain Apache Tribal Princess and another woman came in full Apache dress, while several members of the Hopi, Ho-Chunk, and other tribal delegations also donned their tribal clothing.



Military insignia also could be seen across the room. The CIVA wore matching vests, berets, shirts, and pants. Menominee, Oneida, and many other groups wore the insignia of their veterans' organizations. Numerous veterans wore the insignia of their branch of service and units, and women donned decorated dance shawls. Vann Codynah (Comanche) wore a vest bearing his tribal logo and "Comanche Code Talkers" across the back. Relatives of the Hopi Code Talkers donned buttons with pictures of their code talker relative, while some Lakota and members of other tribes carried black-and-white framed photos of their families' code talkers.

At 11:00 am proceedings began with a prelude by the United States Army Band, "Pershing's Own."<sup>24</sup> Speaker of the House John A. Boehner welcomed those in attendance. Referencing the efforts of the wives, daughters, and sons of the code talkers to bring their family member's story to recognition, Boehner noted, "Many of these families are here today, and join me in applauding their perseverance [applause and standing ovation]. Because of them, deeds that may have well been relegated to legend will now live on in memory. And heroes who for too long went unrecognized, will now be given our highest recognition."<sup>25</sup> The United States Armed Forces Color Guard presented the colors, followed by the playing of the national anthem by the United States Army Band and the United States Army Choir. Only a few code talkers were still alive, all in their late eighties or older, and for many, one of the most moving portions of the ceremony was seeing ninety-six year-old Edmund Harjo (Seminole), in a wheelchair, patriotically holding his hand over his heart during the national anthem. Harjo, who served in the 195th Field Artillery Battalion in Europe during World War II, was the only surviving non-Navajo World War II Code Talker physically able to attend the ceremony, and he quickly became a focus of attention.

The Color Guard then retired the colors; Dr. Barry Black, chaplain of the United States Senate, offered an invocation. Remarks on the resolution were then read by Representatives Tom Cole and Ron Kind, and Senators Timothy P. Johnson and James M. Inhofe. The United States Army Chorus then provided a musical selection. A second set of remarks made by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, and House Speaker John A. Boehner followed.

As each Native nation being recognized was announced, a representative came forward, forming a line in front of the proceedings.<sup>26</sup> While representatives of thirty-three Native nations were called forward, only those twenty-five whose medal designs had been completed and minted in time for the ceremony received Congressional Gold Medals.<sup>27</sup> Those who did receive gold medals at this time were the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, Cherokee Nation, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Comanche Nation, Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, Fort Peck Assiniboiné and Sioux Tribes of Montana, Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin, Hopi Tribe, Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma, Muscogee Creek Nation, Oglala Sioux Tribe, Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin, Osage Nation, Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma, Pueblo of Acoma Tribe, Sac and Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa/Meskwaki Nation, Santee Sioux Nation, Seminole Nation



**FIGURE 1.** Tribal representatives called forward to receive the Congressional Gold Medal for their respective tribe at the US Capitol. All photographs taken by the author, November 20, 2013.

**FIGURE 2.** Edmund Harjo (Seminole), age 96, with the Seminole Nation Code Talker Gold Medal at the US Capitol.







**FIGURE 3.** Governor Gregory Pyle (Choctaw), Senator Dan Boren, and members of the Choctaw delegation with the Choctaw Nation Code Talker Gold Medal.



**FIGURE 4.** Closeup of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Code Talker Congressional Gold Medal.

of Oklahoma, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Tonto Apache Tribe, White Mountain Apache Tribe, and Yankton Sioux Tribe.<sup>28</sup>

Following the presentation of the Congressional Gold Medals to tribal representatives, Admiral James A. Winnefield Jr., vice chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, offered poignant closing remarks:

During Native American Heritage Month, I have the great privilege of representing the finest military in the world in recognizing hundreds of Native Americans who wore the cloth of our nation in the distinctive way we celebrate today, and in such a courageous way, defending a country that did not always keep its word to their ancestors. . . . We can best honor these great warriors among us not just with well-deserved and long overdue recognition, but also with our own efforts to continue leveraging our nation's diversity and to forever honor our veterans.<sup>29</sup>

The program concluded with Chaplain of the House of Representatives Father Patrick J. Conroy, SJ, offering the benediction and the postlude performed by the United States Army Band. An array of cheers and shouts arose from the crowd, soon joined by the ululations of women from several tribes. Tears flowed freely from individuals who were moved by the long-overdue recognition. As reported by *The Hopi Tutuveni*, John Parker (Comanche) "choked up as he recalled his code-talker father Simmons Parker, and how he and fellow Native American soldiers spoke little about their service. . . . "They didn't really go on about it, they kept it on the down side," Parker said, but "Dad couldn't have been more proud to serve the country the way he did."<sup>30</sup> The gathering soon turned into a mass of congratulations, with individuals taking photos of their own as well as other tribal delegations with their respective medals. Individuals called family members back home on cell phones to allow them to hear and see the proceedings and to transmit pictures of the medals and celebrations.

Senator Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) later described the spirit of the ceremony well: "The ceremony was long overdue but the recognition was heartfelt. All of us are grateful for the contribution of the Meskwaki and others that used their language in service to our country. The code talkers saved lives. They used something unique to them to help preserve the United States from sworn enemies."<sup>31</sup>

### *The Silver Medal Reception*

Following the Gold Medal Ceremony, individuals proceeded south down Capitol Hill to the ground-level Potomac Atrium of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) for the Congressional Silver Medal presentations and a reception. NMAI Director Kevin Gover (Pawnee/Comanche) addressed the crowd, followed by Dennis Zotigh (Kiowa) who sang a Kiowa War Mothers Song in honor of the event. Jackie Old Coyote (Apsaalooke) then read a statement regarding four Apsaalooke tribal members who worked in two separate teams during World War II.

Ka-hay. My name is Jackie Old Coyote. I'm from the Apsaalooke Nation. Today we have a delegation of family from the four recipients of the silver medals. They're



**FIGURE 5.** *Members of the Oglala Sioux Tribe Nation receiving silver medals at the National Museum of the American Indian.*

coming up here to stand beside me while I say a brief statement on behalf of the Apsaalooke People. The recognition and honoring of our beloved warriors, today, is deeply appreciated. Most of us have long celebrated their sacrifices and contributions in our own communities. The lands that nurtured the courageous spirits of all the code talkers, represented here today, are diverse. But there is a common thread. Strength of language, strength of culture, and strength of spirit. . . . Our fathers did not consider themselves heroes. They didn't even consider themselves code talkers. They said, simply, 'We broke radio silence and we spoke to each other in Crow, like we always do.' They followed the traditions and teachings of their ancestors and they acted as the warriors they were reared to be. They said, 'When there is gunfire at the edge of the camp, we answer.' So these congressional medals that are acknowledging all the remarkable efforts of all the nations and all the code talkers, they hold our hero's lineage, but they also distinguish the unique nature of our Native American veterans, heroes and their nations, while simultaneously saying we're US Citizens. The undying spirit imbued by those heroes sustains and propels all Americans and unites us in our single homeland, the US. So I thank the Congress and especially the National Museum of the American Indian for not only hosting this celebration but for standing strong in our Nation's capital . . . and the very presence of this cherished and hard won institution also represents the strength of indigenous language, culture, and spirit. We thank you for being here today. We thank you for including the Apsaalooke Nation and warriors and we say Aho [thank you] and safe travels to you.<sup>32</sup>

Tribal delegations were then called to the Rasmuson Theater (first floor) or the Patton's Lounge (fourth floor) where each code talker received a silver medal. For each tribe a table was arranged with a poster bearing the name of the tribe, their medal design, and the actual silver medals. In order to receive them, a representative for each tribe signed for the designated number of medals for their respective group. In ten to fifteen minute intervals the tables were rearranged for the next set of tribes and the process was repeated. Each tribal contingent again took the opportunity to take photographs with the gold and silver medals and call family members back home.

A total of 212 silver medals were issued to representatives of these twenty-five tribes for later distribution to the families of each respective code talker.<sup>33</sup> Following the silver medal distribution, some toured the Smithsonian Institution's traveling exhibit "Native Words, Native Warriors" on display in the NMAI, some returned to the Potomac Atrium to visit, and others began to leave. Immediately after the ceremony the United States Mint opened their Code Talkers Recognition Congressional Medals Program, making available for public sale 3-inch bronze duplicates and 1.5 inch bronze medallions of all code talker medals.<sup>34</sup> The bronze medallions and coins were so popular that they sold out the following day. However, the Mint continues to cast them for public sale.

Pending completion of their medal designs and minting, a total of forty-eight men from the following eight Indian nations will receive their gold and duplicate silver medals directly from the United States Mint at a future date: the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, Crow Nation, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Laguna Pueblo Tribe, and Lower Brulé Sioux Tribe. As of June 2016, a few tribal medals remain to be finalized.<sup>35</sup> Appendix A lists all thirty-three tribes and 254 individuals thus far recognized under the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008 as of June 2016.<sup>36</sup>

### *The South Dakota Reception*

Because many Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota served as code talkers in both world wars, Siouan groups from North and South Dakota were invited to attend a third reception. Senators Tim Johnson and John Thune of South Dakota hosted a special Silver Medal ceremony in the Dirksen Senate Office Building to individually present the silver medals signed for earlier that afternoon at the NMAI. Beside the doors stood signs listing each tribe and individual code talker from North and South Dakota. A representative from Standing Rock Reservation, Senators Heidi Heitkamp and Tim Johnson, and Representative Kristi Noem made statements. Arvol Looking Horse (Cheyenne River Lakota), the Keeper of the Lakota Sacred Pipe, wearing a ribbon shirt and eagle-feather bonnet, then offered the blessing. Members of each Indian nation were called forward one family at a time and presented a Silver Congressional Medal for the service of their family's code talker in World War I or II. Included were families and representatives from the Cheyenne River, Crow Creek, Lower Brulé, Oglala, Sisseton-Wahpeton, Standing Rock, Yankton, Santee, and Rosebud reservations. Arvol Looking Horse presented the medals to the recipients from Cheyenne River, offering a prayer for each. One man began to cry when he received the medal for his grandfather. The widows of some code talkers were present to receive the medal; Marie Red Cloud did so for her late husband Melvin Red Cloud (Oglala Lakota).

Many of the South Dakota families expressed their appreciation for the reception hosted by the senators and representatives from their state. Andrea Page (Standing Rock Lakota), who has researched her mother's uncle John Bear King and other Lakota Code Talkers since 1994, described what the reception meant for her:

The third ceremony was impressive and, I thought, much more meaningful. Throughout the entire day, the speakers were inspiring, trying to get the message across. They described how important this ceremony was to everyone as well as the importance of the code talkers' service to our Nation. In my opinion, I think the third ceremony was more memorable because it was more intimate. The two people close to the whole experience from the beginning were [Senator] John Thune and [Senator] Tim Johnson. They were there from the presentation of the first Bill in 2001. And, even [State Representative] Kristi Noem. Each one shared more about code talking. When Noem spoke I found it difficult to take notes, so I stopped. I was so compelled to listen to her. I thought it was time, and I felt full of joy when they actually acknowledged the names of the individual code talkers. I think it made the ceremony, the day, more meaningful. I don't mean to take away from the tribal recognition. The first ceremony was emotional as well and so deserved for each tribe. When the tribal representatives stood in line, in front of the gold medals, my heart was pounding. It was so important, you know. But, growing up in such a family oriented society, to hear your relative's name and have your family name be recognized, now that was spectacular.<sup>37</sup>



**FIGURE 6.** Members of the John Bear King family (Hunkpapa Lakota) at the South Dakota Code Talkers Silver Medal Reception, Dirksen Senate Building, Washington, DC.



## *Additional Tribal Community Celebrations*

Following the November 20, 2013 ceremonies, the final distribution of silver medals varied greatly from tribe to tribe. While Section 5d of the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008 provides for the Smithsonian in Washington DC to curate the medals for the tribes upon tribal request, tribes overwhelmingly preferred to take the medals home. Because only contingents of each tribe were able to attend the Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony, many distributed silver and bronze medals after returning home, holding later, more formal presentations in their home communities from December of 2013 through 2016 as their medal designs were completed. As the gold medals are valued at approximately \$35,000 each, many tribes arranged for their own security teams or to have the US Mint deliver the medals to their respective community.

Some tribes and families distributed them later that day at the reception at the NMAI. Rather than have a ceremony at home, the Choctaw funded 123 descendants to attend the ceremony in Washington, DC. Upon receiving their silver medals at the NMAI, the Choctaw families took photos, then Chief Pyle and a Choctaw contingent immediately flew home with the gold and silver medals for security reasons. For security, and to facilitate their viewing by descendants and other tribal members, all but one of the Choctaw families have chosen to keep the silver medals on display at the tribal museum in Tushkahoma, Oklahoma. The gold medal is currently being held in a bank vault until the new Choctaw Cultural Center is completed in Durant, Oklahoma. The Choctaw tribe purchased a bronze medal for each of the twenty-three families that can be exchanged with the silver at the family's discretion, and three hundred of the 1.5-inch bronze medallions for the descendants of all their code talkers down to the great-grandchild and great-grand-niece/nephew level.<sup>38</sup>

The Comanche Nation assisted 137 descendants of code talkers to attend the Gold Medal ceremony at the US Capitol, providing a bus for tribal members from Oklahoma and flights for others. The "Comanche Bus" was unique in that it had a synthetic wrap over the exterior of the vehicle depicting larger-than-life images of the Comanche Code Talkers and information about them. During the more than 1,400-mile trip to the Capitol people took notice of the bus, stopping to visit with the Comanche on board and to take pictures of the bus at gas stations. On the road veterans saluted while passing the Comanche contingent and semi-truck drivers acknowledged them by blowing their horns. The manager of the Heartbreak Hotel in Memphis was so honored to have the Comanche stay at their facility that she arranged for sixteen members to receive free passes to tour Graceland on their return trip to Oklahoma. Forty-two other Comanche living near the Washington, DC area also attended.<sup>39</sup>

The night before the ceremony the Comanche gathered for a banquet at their Washington hotel. Four of the descendants were asked to rise and speak about the proceedings; several Comanche described this portion of the trip as the most emotionally moving. During the Silver Medal presentation at the NMAI, the Comanche tribe called all of the family members to the front of the room, where they briefly viewed the medals and took photographs. The tribe also purchased a bronze medal for each family



member of the seventeen Comanche code talkers. A tribal security contingent soon escorted the medals back to a bank vault in Oklahoma, where they were kept until their own tribal ceremony could be held. The following day the Comanche contingent visited the National Mall, including the Vietnam Wall, Lincoln Memorial, NMAI, and other sites. Later the Comanche Indian Veterans' Association and Comanche Business Committee presented a wreath to be placed on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.<sup>40</sup>

In Lawton, Oklahoma, on Friday February 21, 2014, the Comanche held a banquet entitled the "Homecoming Ceremony in Honor of the Comanche Code Talkers" at the Great Plains Coliseum. A recording of the Washington, DC gold medal ceremony was shown during the event. The tribe then distributed a silver medal to each of the seventeen Comanche Code Talkers' next-of-kin, and bronze medals to other family members. Each next-of-kin was also presented with a photo of their respective code talker relative, a code-talker vehicle tag, and for the men, a vest, and for the women, a service blanket.<sup>41</sup> After considering the Comanche Nation Museum and the Patriot Room at the Comanche Tribal Complex, a conference room with more than 400 pictures of Comanche veterans, the Comanche gold medal was placed on display in the Comanche Nation Museum in Lawton, Oklahoma. On June 6, 2014, the seventieth anniversary of D-Day, the Comanche also took a contingent of tribal members to Utah Beach in France. Led by the Comanche Indian Veterans Association, they visited, as George Red Elk described, "the sand that our dads fought on." Using funds provided by the tribe, the Comanche Indian Veterans Association had seventeen gravesite markers engraved with each code talker's name, rank, and the words "US Army World War II, Comanche Code Talker, Congressional Gold Medal 2008," and for those who also saw combat, "OK Military Hall of Fame 2011." These granite markers were placed at the grave of each Comanche Code Talker in 2014.<sup>42</sup>

In Fort Yates, North Dakota, on December 12, 2013, the Standing Rock Sioux distributed their silver medals at a formal presentation at the pavilion of the Prairie Nights Casino. A number of veterans and traditional dancers paraded in, carrying veterans' staffs and the medals for the tribe. Vietnam War veteran and tribal liaison Rick Red Eagle McLaughlin carried in the gold medal and presented it to the tribe. Following speeches and the singing of honor songs, the silver medals were presented to individual families. McLaughlin described the community's response:

They were so surprised and so overwhelmed, and they were just excited. It was great. And there were a few tears here and there, you know. It was just a humbling experience for me. It's really for the soldiers, to remember them. They're the ones that brought this home. . . . It's an honor to remember them. We finally got them remembered and it's really awesome. And the people are still talking about it.<sup>43</sup>

The following day in December, the Ho-Chunk honored seven individuals recognized as code talkers at an invitation-only event held at their tribal hotel and casino in Baraboo, Wisconsin. Vietnam veteran Andrew Thundercloud composed a song containing words in Ho-Chunk that translates into English to "The code talkers

confused the Japanese.” Thundercloud had only learned of his paternal uncle’s participation in coded communications within the past year.<sup>44</sup>

On December 14, the Santee Sioux of Nebraska posthumously honored World War II Code Talker Walter John. Members of the Crow Creek, Yankton, and Winnebago tribes also attended, and Yankton WWII veteran Elmo Eddy was also recognized.<sup>45</sup> The Meskwaki held a similar event at their annual New Year’s Sobriety Powwow on January 3, 2014, at the Meskwaki Settlement High School Gym near Tama, Iowa.<sup>46</sup>

The Hopi, who began an annual Hopi Code Talkers Recognition Day program in 2013, held a celebration at their second annual program on April 23, 2014 at the Hopi Veterans Memorial Center near Kykotsmobi, Arizona. The gold and silver medals were brought together for the community to see. Since then the gold medal, and, at the request of some families, a number of the silver medals, are being stored in a vault until a decision regarding public display is made.<sup>47</sup>

On May 31, 2014, I attended an honor dance at the American Legion Park in Poplar, Montana, on the Fort Peck Reservation, for eleven Assiniboine and thirty-eight Sioux Code Talkers. Two of the forty-nine silver medals received by the tribes had already been presented. On January 16, 2014, Tribal Chair A. T. Stafne and Dr. Ken Ryan traveled to Havre, Montana, to present one of the medals to the tribe’s only surviving code talker, Gilbert Horn (Assiniboine). According to Ryan, his uncle Gilbert Horn “was deeply honored.” The following day Stafne and Ryan traveled to a ceremony held at the Fort Belknap College at Fort Belknap Agency to present a silver medal to the granddaughter of Jimmy First Smoke, the other Assiniboine Code Talker at Fort Belknap.<sup>48</sup> Similar ceremonies continued throughout early 2014 to the present. Most recently I have spoken at the Hopi Code Talker Recognition Day in 2013, and the medal ceremonies for the pueblos of Acoma in 2014 and Laguna in 2016.

## NATIVE IMPRESSIONS OF THE GOLD MEDAL CEREMONY

The ceremony was held according to congressional dictates, not Native ones. While numerous people stated that they and their families were overwhelmingly happy to see the medals finally awarded, some in attendance expressed disappointment in the manner in which they were presented. Most notably, descendants mentioned that tribal representatives were not allowed to speak at the gold medal ceremony; individual names of the code talkers were not read aloud, with the medals simply handed to the tribal leaders with no individual or formal presentation; and the rapid way the silver medals were distributed at the NMAI seemed hurried and impersonal. As the son of one code talker expressed,

Well, I thought it was going to be more emotional than it was . . . they didn’t even give any of the [tribal] leaders a chance to talk. They just introduced them, they walked up, set them down, and when they introduced them they walked around and handed them the gold medal. It was my thought that they were going to put it over their neck and give everybody a chance to talk, but they didn’t do that. To me it was kind of a generic thing.<sup>49</sup>

It is obviously difficult to meet everyone's expectations in such a large endeavor, but much of the disappointment appears to have come from lack of information about the exact content of the November 20th ceremonies at the Capitol and the NMAI being disseminated in tribal communities. Several individuals with whom I spoke on November 20th related that they did not have a clear idea of how the ceremony would be conducted. It is likely that the presentation was planned to focus on groups because only one actual surviving code talker was able to attend, large numbers of people were involved (thirty-three tribes and 212 individuals), and similar CGM presentations to other groups had previously been conducted in this way. In 2001 President Bush had presented individual medals to four of the remaining five Navajo Code Talkers (out of the original twenty-nine), and images of that ceremony may have led some to assume that tribal leaders would receive their medals in a similar fashion.

The US Mint had offered to ship the silver medals and their decorative boxes to any tribal community desiring this service for security, and on November 19 Meskwaki Tribal Council Chairwoman Judith Bender had signed the agreement for the US Mint to hold the medals until they returned home, when they were shipped directly to the community. In what appears to have been a miscommunication between Meskwaki tribal representatives and members, some tribal members do not seem to have found out about this arrangement prior to the following day's ceremony. Some who had hoped to receive the silver medals on behalf of their now-deceased relatives were upset after attending the November 20th ceremonies because tribal representatives did not distribute the medals to the families of the eight Meskwaki code talkers.<sup>50</sup>

Theresa Mahoney, whose great-uncle Edward Benson was a Meskwaki code talker, explained, "Part of the excitement of going to the ceremony was the recognition they would receive, the recognition that comes with getting the medals presented to you and shaking someone's hand and someone saying 'congratulations.' It was disappointing that that was taken away from some family members." Daniel Waubaunasee, son of Meskwaki Code Talker Judie Wayne Waubaunasee, did not understand why the tribe flew him from Hawaii to Washington, DC for the ceremony and then did not distribute the silver medals. Melissa Youngbear felt that the tribal council usurped the recognition of the ceremony. "I felt like I was being used . . . that I was there for their glory."<sup>51</sup> The medals were received by the Meskwaki Tribal Controller on December 12, 2013, and later awarded at a tribal program in early January 2014.

## SIGNIFICANCE

In 2001 the Navajo Code Talkers were the first Native Americans to receive Congressional Gold Medals; the later Code Talker Recognition Act of 2008 and the 2013 awarding of medals gave equal recognition to *all* code talkers. This is especially important as the extent of code talking has long been unknown in both Native and non-Native communities. As awareness of code talking increased, those who served also garnered many community awards. However, no other CGMs have been issued to Native Americans and thus the CGMs for code talkers represent landmark events for Native Americans. While the CGM is by no means the only award from the dominant

culture, it is a significant one, particularly in light of the long-overlooked contributions of Native American veterans in the United States Armed Forces.<sup>52</sup> That the only CGMs thus far awarded to Native Americans were given to code-talking groups does set their military service apart from that of other Native peoples in the world wars, but it by no means diminishes other service.

The Code Talker Recognition Act of 2008 and the 2013 awarding of congressional gold and silver medals holds a wide range of meanings that includes several overarching forms of significance for Native Americans, but also for minorities in the United States generally. For tribes and individuals, the awards highlight a significant irony: their unique, highly valuable military contribution was the use of the very Native languages that governmental boarding schools had tried to eradicate for decades. The awarding of code talker CGMs suggests increasing recognition that tribes are sovereign entities with distinct cultures and contributions to American society. More broadly, recent efforts to recognize minority groups who have experienced racial inequality, and whose military service has long been overlooked and unrecognized, represent a positive step in the evolution of race relations in America.

A review of CGM awards demonstrates that they were largely bestowed on Euro-American military commanders until 1858, after which civilian contributions began to be recognized. While I cannot account for the ethnicity of every CGM recipient, only recently have minorities begun to receive the award. African-Americans and Africans have only been recognized since 1973, including Roberto Clemente (1973), Joe Louis (1982), Jessie Owens (1988), General Colin Powell (1991), Nelson Mandela (1998), The Little Rock Nine (1998), Rosa Parks (1999), Jackie Robinson (2003), Martin Luther and Coretta Scott King (2004), The Tuskegee Airmen (2006), and the Montfort Point Marines (2011). The only Asian-American recipient is the Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team (2010). Asians have also only recently received the CGM, including the fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso (2006), and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (2008). Jewish recipients include Simon Wiesenthal (1980), Elie Wiesel (1984), Rabbi Menachem M. Scheerson (1994), and Frank Sinatra (1997), a strong lifelong supporter of Jewish causes. Although some minority recipients lived to be recognized, many were posthumous awards.<sup>53</sup>

The recent trend in minority recognition also reflects increasing agendas focusing on recognizing minority rights and recognition, and the growing importance of the politics and symbolism of memorialization and commemoration in the United States.<sup>54</sup> Bestowing the CGM to code talkers coincided with the popular idea of the “Greatest Generation” and the need to recognize the rapidly diminishing number of World War II veterans, including national efforts such as the “Honor Flight” programs to take elder veterans to visit historic battle sites and the National World War II Memorial in Washington, DC. These efforts parallel popular beliefs about World War II as one that was clearer in terms of right and wrong—the last “Good War”—despite its clearly racialized and segregated aspects for African Americans and Japanese Americans.

Both government officials and tribal representatives recognized that the awarding of the CGM was a gesture aimed towards leveraging diversity and equality. Admiral James Winnefield Jr. noted that the event was a “well-deserved and long overdue

recognition, but also with our own efforts to continue leveraging our nation's diversity and to forever honor our veterans."<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Jackie Old Coyote (Crow) stated the recognition and honoring of their veterans "distinguish the unique nature of our Native American veterans, heroes, and their nations, while simultaneously saying we're US Citizens. The undying spirit imbued by those heroes sustains and propels all Americans and unites us in our single homeland, the US."<sup>56</sup>

Similar efforts to redress past racial bias are occurring. Under a congressional directive in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2002, the Army reviewed the record of every Jewish American and Hispanic American recipient of the Distinguished Service Cross, during or after World War II, for possible upgrade to the Congressional Medal of Honor. From 6,505 recipients, an eligible pool of 600 soldiers who may have been Jewish or Hispanic was found. In March 2014, twenty-four Congressional Medals of Honor were bestowed upon Hispanic, Jewish, and African American servicemen for service during World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. The awards sought "to correct potential acts of bias spanning three wars . . . to ensure that eligible recipients were not bypassed due to prejudice."<sup>57</sup> This review of minorities' service records immediately raises the question of why Native American soldiers were not included, but this is a separate inquiry beyond the scope of this paper. Perhaps more importantly, why was the US government willing to issue the CGM to several Native nations, while simultaneously failing to address outstanding grievances relating to land, health, education, housing, and sovereignty? To answer this question, I will first note that while the CGM is expensive to produce, it does not involve the treaty obligations that can often entail larger, annual fiscal expenses.

The Navajo Code Talkers did receive forms of recognition since 1968, but clearly it was their CGM in 2001—the first formal government recognition on the federal level—that prompted other tribes with code talkers to seek equal recognition, which then resulted in the 2008 legislation. Thus a major factor in getting the 2008 act passed involved educating Americans about the existence of other, non-Navajo code talkers. While the Navajo were well-documented, other tribes with smaller contingents of code talkers were not, and required considerable research and public presentations including the 2004 Senate Committee Hearing on code talkers, the persistent lobbying of tribal delegations of Choctaw, Comanche, Lakota, Meskwaki, and others between 2004 and 2008, and the dedication of Congressional leaders such as Dan Boren, Tim Johnson, John Thune, and others.<sup>58</sup>

Other factors contributing to the second CGM award also coalesced from 2000 to 2008. As discussed above, the timing of the Navajo Code Talkers Act and CGM in 2000 and 2001 was closely followed by the 2002 release of the movie *Windtalkers*, which contained serious factual flaws, but greatly increased public knowledge of the Navajos' service.<sup>59</sup> How the code talkers were honored, in terms of the types of medals and personal recognition, was a significant factor in how Native people viewed the event. In 2001, four of the original twenty-nine Navajo code talkers from the first group honored under the 2000 Act and their families were personally presented with Congressional Gold Medals, while the remainder of the Navajo code talkers and their families received Congressional Silver Medals at a later observance in Arizona. Under

the 2008 Act, Congress issued only one gold medal to each Native American nation and a silver medal for each individual code talker or surviving family. As Navajo was not the first Native American code formed during either world war, some of the other smaller groups hoped for, and one could argue deserved, similar gold medals for each of their code talkers. However, the large number of individual medals involved would have significantly raised the cost involved. The 2013 ceremony was also conducted on congressional terms, but unlike the 2001 Navajo Gold Medal ceremony, due to the need to recognize so many tribes and individuals simultaneously, the distribution of honors emphasized tribal nations, with less focus on individuals and no reading of individual names.

Native Americans have been involved in every Euro-American conflict in North America since colonial times and continue to serve in the military in significant numbers, but have not always received equal treatment. Andrew Jackson used the Cherokee to defeat the Creek Red Sticks, before betraying them with removal. Many Indian veterans, both voluntary enlistees and draftees, were not yet US citizens during World War I. Indians from Arizona, New Mexico, and parts of Utah, including returning World War II veterans and code talkers, were denied the right to vote until 1948, to use the GI bill for housing loans from banks, and the right to purchase alcoholic drinks. They also faced discrimination from segregated hotels and restaurants.<sup>60</sup>

The Native American Code Talker awards in 2001 and 2013 acknowledge a national level of contribution as well as the increased recognition of tribal groups as sovereign entities with distinct cultures, languages, and contributions. More importantly perhaps, the CGMs symbolize another step towards equality, which was a significant factor behind Native American military participation in both world wars. Although recognition of Native contributions in American culture remains unequal and long overdue, it is increasing in many areas. A major means of marking one's presence, importance, and control of the history of an area is signage. Signs and historical markers aid in the continued survival and control of knowledge with specific locales and groups. While Euro-American signage has dominated regions at the neglect of Native culture and history, Native American signage in both English and Native languages is increasing across the country.<sup>61</sup> Increasing public knowledge of the code talkers has fostered international recognition, documentary publications and films, visually striking veteran's monuments, highways named for code talkers, and signage. Code talkers represent one of Native America's most prized and honored traditions as members of their respective Native nations, as United States citizens, and as veterans.

## CONCLUSION

It was an honor long overdue. Federal recognition came almost sixty-eight years after the end of the World War II in 1945 and nearly ninety-five years for those who served in World War I. As Eugene Talas, Hopi Veteran's Services Director, expressed

I think it brought closure to everyone, all of the family members. They were really honored that that finally happened for them, for those families. Its been a long time so they were elated that it finally came to pass. . . . The silver medals, that was more



of a personal touch for them to actually receive the silver medals from a representative of the US Mint. That one went really good. The families were all happy.<sup>62</sup>

The ceremony marked the efforts of many individuals and tribes who had lobbied for recognition since the late 1980s. As Choctaw Nation Chief Gregory E. Pyle remarked,

The Code Talker Recognition Act paved the way for Congressional medals to honor American Indian Code Talkers. It has been a delayed and challenging path since the beginning of the crusade for acknowledgement. Many people worked tirelessly in an effort to educate others about the Code Talkers. They walked the halls of Congress to raise awareness and are now going to see the realization of their goal.<sup>63</sup>

The ceremony should remind us of the importance of human languages and of the earlier shortsightedness of Euro-American efforts to eradicate Native American languages and inhibit bilingualism as a part of forced assimilation through government and missionary-run Indian boarding schools. In anthropology the attempt to eradicate the culture of a group, including language, is known as *ethnocide*. The ceremony is also a reminder of the irony of these attempts. That these men persevered in retaining their Native languages during an era of forced assimilation speaks not only of their resilience, but also of their graciousness and willingness to use their languages during a time of war for the same government that tried to eradicate those languages. This act should also help to allay fears over multilingualism that has troubled American educational and political circles in recent decades. The use of code talkers is widely acknowledged to have saved many lives; indeed, some Americans would not be alive today had it not been for the use of these languages in both world wars.

From statements made by participants, the 2013 ceremonies led many individuals to reflect on the importance of their respective tribal languages. As many Native American languages continue to decline, the importance of language, as well as its unique use by the code talkers, resonates strongly in Native communities. Judith Bender, chairwoman of the Sac and Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa (Meskwaki) stated, "As we continue our efforts to preserve our Meskwaki language, today reminds us of its importance to generations past and those yet to come."<sup>64</sup> Following the ceremony Ho-Chunk Nation President Jon Greendeer similarly remarked, "I believe it strengthens our sacred language."<sup>65</sup> Hopefully the Code Talker Recognition Act of 2008 will foster further recognition of the value of language diversity for future generations.

Unfortunately, only a handful of non-Navajo code talkers lived to see their service recognized. None of the members of the formally recruited groups (Type 1) with formal codes (Comanche, Meskwaki, Chippewa-Oneida, Hopi) in World War II are living, and only a handful of others who served in smaller, *de facto*, Type 2 code talking units are living.<sup>66</sup> After attending the CGM ceremony, Edmund Harjo (Seminole) passed away four months later on March 31, 2014. Gilbert Horn (Assiniboine) passed away on March 27, 2016.

The ceremony produced a wide range of emotions for individuals: honor, pride, release, tears, closure, and for some, a coming to terms with the post-traumatic stress

that they watched their fathers struggle with over the years. Perhaps above all else, individuals expressed the wish that their code talker relatives could have been there to receive the awards. At the Gold Medal Ceremony, Vann Codynah, son of Comanche Code Talker Haddon Codynah, remarked, "It's been a long time coming. I just wish my Dad was here for this. But it's good. It's a good thing today." As we walked to the Silver Medal Reception, Andrea Page (Lakota), who has been involved in recognition efforts for the Lakota and others for nearly twenty years, smiled as she remarked, "Great things happen when you come to this city!"<sup>67</sup>

During the ceremony I thought of the rich experiences I have had working with different code talkers and their families since 1991. I was thrilled for all the families and tribes involved. For myself, the gold medal ceremony was an important marker along an ongoing journey. The ceremony represented over twenty years of work on code talkers of numerous nations, several publications, the 2004 Senate Testimony, and countless submissions of data, letters, emails, and public presentations to lobby for and promote knowledge of the code talkers, as well as my ongoing research.<sup>68</sup>

Code talking is a topic of great interest to Native Americans and non-Natives today. The long overdue congressional recognition now gives more code talkers a well-deserved chapter in Native American and American history. Although the recent recognition was long delayed, the passage of time has not diminished the significance of the service of these men, and will remain a great source of pride for those tribes and families whose members used their languages for the defense of the United States in both world wars. Long after the code talkers and their immediate relatives are gone,



**FIGURE 7.** L–R: Robin Roberts (Meskwaki), Andrea Page (Hunkpapa Lakota), Don Loudner (Hunkpati Dakota), and the author at the Silver Medal Ceremony, National Museum of the American Indian.

this event will also be an important reference point for later generations. This article has tried to capture a number of vignettes of the ceremony, its details, significance, and individual feelings through participant-observation. This history and recognition will live on as a source of enduring pride, treasured by the families of individual code talkers in particular and as a unique part of the culture and heritage of the numerous tribes involved, and for those involved this is priceless.

Section 6.2 of the Code Talker Recognition Act of 2008 permits those code talkers who have not yet been recognized to apply for congressional medals.<sup>69</sup> As mandated by the act, the Department of Defense will continue to search its records and coordinate with tribes, and if the agency identifies any additional eligible tribes or individuals, it will prepare additions to this list. The list of code talkers recognized on November 20, 2013 will likely increase (see Appendix A). As Don Loudner, president of the National Native Americans Veterans Association reflected on the gold medal ceremony, “Everybody thought it was good. They really, really were surprised at the amount of code talkers they had, because they didn’t realize that there were that many. So far we have thirty-three tribes that we have found. . . . But we know there are more than that.”<sup>70</sup> Several tribes are continuing their research on other individuals and I am currently working on additional groups in World War I and World War II that have yet to be recognized. There is still more research to be undertaken—and more men who deserve an honor long overdue.

### *Acknowledgments*

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## APPENDIX A

Author's note: This list has been adjusted from the original. It has been alphabetically reordered both by tribe and individual name of recipient's first, and then last name).

**Acoma** - WW II - Paul R. Histia.

**Apache** - WW II - Paul Burdette, Nelson Danford, Andrew V. Tsinajinnie.

**Assiniboine** (Fort Berthold Reservation) - WW II - Charles Adams, Matt D. Adams, Joseph R. Alvarez, Archie M. Cantrell, John Cantrell, Duncan Dupree, Jimmy First Smoke, Jay H. Kim, Joseph Hamilton, Gilbert Horn Sr., Jesse Mason Jr., Adam Redd, Lawrence Red Dog.

**Cherokee** - WW I - George Adair.

**Chippewa Cree Indians** - WW II - Lex C. Porter.

**Choctaw** - WW I - Albert Billy, Mitchell Bobb, Victor Brown, Ben Carterby, Benjamin Colbert, George Davenport, James Davenport, Joe Davenport, James Edwards, Tobias Frazier, Ben Hampton, Noel Johnson, Otis Leader, Taylor Lewis, Solomon Louis/Lewis, Pete Maytubby, Jeff Nelson, Joseph Oklahombi, Robert Taylor, Walter Veach, Calvin Wilson. WW II - Forrester Baker, Schlicht Billy, Andrew Perry, Davis Pickens.

**Comanche** - WW I - Calvin Atchavit, Gilbert Gilbert, Samuel Tabbytosevit, Samuel George Clark, Edward Albert Nahquaddy Sr. WW II - Charles Chibitty, Haddon Codynah, Robert Holder, Forrest Kassanavoid, Wellington Mihecoby, Edward Albert Nahquaddy Jr., Perry Noyabad, Clifford Otitivo, Simmons Parker, Melvin Permansu, Elgin Red Elk, Roderick Red Elk, Larry Saupitty, Morris Tabbyetchy (Sunrise), Anthony Tabbytite, Ralph Wahnee, Willis Yacheschi.

**Muscogee Creek Nation** - WW II - Thomas MacIntosh, Leslie Richards.

**Crow** - WW II - Barney Old Coyote, Henry Old Coyote, Samson Birdinground, Cyril Notafraid.

**Hopi** - WW II - Frank Chapella, Floyd Dann Sr., Perry Honani Sr., Warren Kooyaquaptewa, Charles Lomakema, Persaval Navenma, Rex Pooyouma, Franklin Shupla, Orville N. Wadsworth, Travis Yaiva.

**Laguna** - WW II - Joseph R. Day.

**Kiowa** - WW II - Leonard Cozad Sr., James Paddlety, John Tsatoke.

**Menominee** - WW II - David Matchopatow, William Matchopatow, John C. O'Katchicum, Dan Waupoose, Mose Wausakokamick.

**Meskwaki** (Sac and Fox) - WW II - Edward Benson, Dewey Roberts, Frank Sanache, Willard Sanache, Melvin Twin, Judy Wayne Wabaunsee, Mike Wayne Wabaunsee, Dewey Youngbear.

**Mohawk** - WW II - Mike Arquette, Joseph Barnes, Thomas Cole, Louis S. Conners, Angus B. Cook, Joe King, Louis E. King, Angus J. Laughing, Alex W. Lazore, Charles Lazore, Louis L. Oake, Alex Oakes, Alex W. Peters, Joe Harry Pike, Mitchell Sunday, Albert Tarbell, Reginald White.

**Oneida** - World War II - Rupert S. Adams, Hudson Doxtator, Rimton L. Doxtator, Lloyd Schuyler.

**Pawnee** - WW II - Frank Davis, Brument Echo Hawk, Grant Grover (Gover), Philip Gover, Enoch Jim, Chauncey Matlock, Harold Morgan, Floyd Rice, Henry C. Stoneroad.

**Ponca** - WW II - William T. Snake.

**Seminole** - WW II - Edmund Harjo, Tony M. Palmer.

**Sioux (Unspecified):** WW I and II - Willie Iron Elk; WW II - Roy Bad Hand, Simon Broken Leg, Iver Crow Eagle Sr., Jeffrey Dull Knife, Little Pony Eagle, Joshua E. Martinez, Patrick N. McKenzie, Anthony Omaha Boy, Benny Red Bear Sr. (May be same person as Benny White Bear), Benny White Bear, (May be same person as Benny Red Bear, Jr.), Charles Whitepipe.

**Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux** - WW II - Everett D. Bear, Anton Hollow, Herman Belgarde, Arthur Belgarde, Dominick Belgrade, James Black Dog Jr., Matthew E. Black Dog, Harvey Buck Elk, James J. Eder, Lloyd Half Red, William Hawk, Earl Jones, Frank Jones, Ralph N. Jones, Pat Kidder, Joseph Lambert, Richard Left Hand Thunder, Ben Little Head, Louis E. Longee, Mark Long Tree, James M. Melbourne Jr., Raymond L. Ogle, Williams G. Ogle, Archie Red Boy, Shirley Quinton Red Boy, Herman Red Elk, Jr., Gerald Red Elk, William J. Red Fox, Joseph E. Russell, Fred R. Shields, Julian Shields, Gregory B. Swift Eagle, James Turning Bear, Winfield Wilson, James T. Yellow Owl, Douglas Young Man.

**Sioux (Brulé)** - WW I - Moses Elk Horn.

**Sioux (Cheyenne River)** - WW II - Eddie Eagle Boy, Narcisse Eagle Chasing, Phillip La Blanc.

**Sioux (Crow Creek)** - WW II - Joseph O. Reddoor, Edmund St. John.

**Sioux (Oglala)** - WW II - Garfield T. Brown, Baptiste Pumpkinseed, William Redcloud.

**Sioux (Rosebud)** - WW II - Clarence Wolf Guts, Noah White Bird Sr.

**Sioux (Santee)** - WW I - Guy George Chapman; WW II - Walter John.

**Sioux (Sisseton)** - WW II - Guy Rondell.

**Sioux (Standing Rock)** - WW I - Alphonse Bear Ghost, Julius Bear Shield, Louis Big Horn Elk, Richard Blue Earth, John Brave Bull, August Brought Plenty, John Brought Plenty, Thomas Crow Necklace, Louis Crow Skin, Albert Grass, Joseph Gray Day,

Joseph Pretends Eagle, John Elk, Paul Good Iron, Thomas Gray Bull, Benjamin Gray Hawk, George Jacob Halsey, Michael Halsey, Harvey E. Lean Elk, Harry E. Lean Elk, Charles Little Chief, George Many Wounds, William Menz, David Molash, George Molash, John Red Bean, George James Red Fox, Asa Red Stone, George W. Santee, Lawrence See the Elk, George Sleeps from Home, Luke Speaks Walking, Clyde Standing Bear, James Tattooed, Alexander Traversie, George Two Bear, Joseph Two Bears, Edward Two Horses, Richard White Eagle, Paul White Lightning, Frank Young Bear, Francis Benjamin Zahn, Barney Mulhern, Raymond Ackerman, Roscoe White Eagle; WW II - John Bear King.

**Ho-Chunk** (formerly Winnebago) - WW II - Clifford Blackdeer, Howard Littlejohn, Bill Mike, Jessie Mike, Emanuel Thundercloud, Bill Whitebear, Benjamin Winneshiek.

**Sioux (Yankton)** - WW I - Daniel Ross, Rufus Ross; WW II - Barney Lambert.

**Tlingit** - WW II - Richard Bean Sr., Robert Jeff David, Harvey Jacobs, Mark Jacobs, Jr. George Lewis.

Other individuals for which specific tribal affiliation could not be confirmed: WW II - Jerald Red Elk (Sioux) (may be same person as Gerald Red Elk); John C. Smith (listed under general Sioux).

## NOTES

1. 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*, eds. P. Whitney Lackenbauer, R. Scott Sheffield, and Craig Leslie Mantle (Kingston, ON: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2007), 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, doi: 10.1215/00141801-2008-058.

2. See Doris A. Paul, *The Navajo Code Talkers* (Pittsburgh: Dorrance Publishing Co., Inc., 1973), 7; and Gary Robinson, *The Language of Victory: American Indian Code Talkers of World War I and World War II* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse LLC, 2011), 118, in which Navajo Code Talker Harold Foster states there were no other code talkers except the Navajo (shortly thereafter he met some of the Comanche and Choctaw Code Talkers in Oklahoma). During the time the Hopi were seeking recognition, several Navajo spoke out in opposition to Hopi claims of having been code talkers. Over the last twenty-five years of researching and public speaking on code talking, I have encountered numerous individuals, Native and non-Native, who were surprised to learn of code talkers other than the Navajo or strenuously deny that there were any others. An anonymous reviewer of my book manuscript *The Comanche Code Talkers* also maintained that only the Navajo had code talkers and accused me of "making up" the Comanche code talkers and others. The wealth of independent documentation countering this belief is of course significant, and as knowledge of the range of code talkers has increased much of this opposition has receded, with more Navajo now acknowledging the existence of other Native code-talking groups, with or without formal codes.

3. Meadows, *The Comanche Code Talkers*, 40–50, 67–72.



4. Paul, *The Navajo Code Talkers*, 55; Chester Nez with Judith Schiess Avila, *Code Talker: The First and Only Memoir by One of the Original Navajo Code Talkers of WWII* (New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 2011), 113, 131; Samuel T. Holiday and Robert S. McPherson, *Under the Eagle: Samuel Holiday, Navajo Code Talker* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 16.

5. Meadows, *The Comanche Code Talkers*, 56–64. Approximately 285 of the Navajo code talkers saw combat.

6. Meadows, *The Comanche Code Talkers*, 40–64; William C. Meadows, “Honoring Native American Code Talkers: The Road to the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-420),” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 35, no. 3 (2011): 3–36; Meadows, “They had a Chance to Talk to One Another”; Meadows, “North American Indian Code Talkers.”

7. John Rice and Joe Batteer, *Windtalkers*, directed by John Woo (MGM/Lion Rock Productions: 2002); DVD released October 15, 2002.

8. “Yank Indian Was Heap Big Help in Winning the War,” *Stars and Stripes* 2, no. 17 (May 30, 1919): 1, 3.

9. “Honoring the Navajo Code Talkers Act,” S. 2408, 106th Congress (1999–2000), Public Law 106–554, 114 Stat. 2763 A-311-2763A-312, approved December 12, 2000, Congressional Record vol. 187, Wednesday, December 7, 2011, H8252–H8258. The Navajo were recognized with Congressional Gold Medals for the original twenty-nine members and silver medals for 318 other members in 2001. This list also contained twenty-eight names “Listed, But Not Confirmed,” twenty-three names “Pending/Waiting for Records,” and fifteen names “Not Listed.” In 2003 the White House confirmed nine additional members for silver medals, totaling 356 Navajo Code Talkers. Jim Snyder, “White House Confirms 9 Navajo Code Talkers,” *Farmington Daily Times*, November 4, 2003, available at [https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/indigenous\\_peoples\\_literature/conversations/messages/12179](https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/indigenous_peoples_literature/conversations/messages/12179).

10. US Senate Hearing 108–693, Committee on Indian Affairs, September 22, 2004, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-108shrg.96125/pdf/CHRG-108shrg.96125.pdf>; Public Law 110-420; 122 Stat. 4774-4777; Meadows, “Honoring Native American Code Talkers.”

11. Letter Submitted by Gregory E. Pyle, Chief of the Choctaw Nation, Hearing Before the Committee on Indian Affairs, United States Senate, One Hundred Eighth Congress, Second Session, on Contributions of Native American Code Talkers in American Military History (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2004), 57–58; see also “Choctaws Seeking Medals For Code Talkers,” Leo Kelley, *Adanews.com* (Ada, OK), November 6, 2006, <http://www.theadanews.com/local/x212580029/Choctaws-seeking-medals-for-code-talkers/print>.

12. Bernie Hunhoff, “The Last Lakota Code Talker,” *South Dakota Magazine*, May–June 2007, <http://www.southdakotamagazine.com/clarence-wolf-guts>. In 2007 the Hopi Tribe made similar statements concerning the plan by the US Postal Service to issue a Navajo Code Talker postage stamp.

13. Robert Delessandro, e-mail to the author, October 24, 2013. This process presents a potential problem in that individual tribes are being allowed to essentially determine who was a code talker. At least two groups have vetted nearly all of their veterans from one war as code talkers. Upon checking individual service records I have discovered several individuals in one group whose military records as well as personal statements indicate that they were never in the war theater, and thus did not serve as code talkers.

14. Betty Birdsong, program manager, Office of Design, United States Mint, e-mails to the author, December 17, 2013, and June 22 and 24, 2016.

15. US House of Representatives, History, Art & Archives, “Congressional Gold Medal Recipients,” <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Gold-Medal/Gold-Medal-Recipients/>.

16. Matthew Eric Glassman, "Congressional Gold Medals, 1776–2014," Congressional Research Service 7-5700, RL30076, February 18, 2015, 1, 17–18, [http://www.senate.gov/CRSReports/crs-publish.cfm?pid='0E%2C\\*PL%5B%3C%230%20%20%0A](http://www.senate.gov/CRSReports/crs-publish.cfm?pid='0E%2C*PL%5B%3C%230%20%20%0A).

17. Ibid., 4; US House of Representatives, History, Art & Archives, "Congressional Gold Medal Recipients."

18. Glassman, "Congressional Gold Medals, 1776–2014," 21–36; US House of Representatives, History, Art & Archives, "Congressional Gold Medal Recipients."

19. "Switzerland County Woman Helps Honor a Group of Native-American War Heroes Known as the Code-Talkers," *Madison Courier*, December 23, 2013, <http://madisoncourier.com/Content/News/Switzerland-County/Article/Switzerland-county-woman-helps-honor-a-group-of-Native-American-war-heroes-known-as-the-CODE-TALKERS/178/287/80772>.

20. Ibid.

21. Rebecca Jacobs, "Code Talkers Have Served the Military Well—and Often Secretly: Choctaw Nation Code Talkers from World War I," *Indian Country Today*, August 8, 2011.

22. Judy Allen (Choctaw) to the author, January 16, 2014.

23. While the US government shutdown from October 1 to October 16, 2013 caused some to worry that the medal ceremony might be postponed, most persons with whom I spoke were confident that the shutdown would end well before and that the ceremony would take place. Author's fieldnotes on Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony in Honor of Native American Code Talkers, Emancipation Hall, US Capitol, Washington, DC, November 20, 2013; e-mail invitation to the author from Office of Senator John Boehner, October 28, 2013.

24. The ceremony streamed live on [www.Speaker.Gov/Live](http://www.Speaker.Gov/Live). The coverage is now available online on C-SPAN, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?316374-1/native-american-code-talkers-receive-congressional-gold-medal>.

25. Author's video recording of Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony in Honor of Native American Code Talkers, Emancipation Hall, US Capitol, Washington, DC, November 20, 2013.

26. The ceremony was unfortunately marred by an incredibly irresponsible act. As tribal representatives were being called forward in alphabetical order by tribal name, a gaffe appeared on the closed-caption screen, situated in full view of the audience and on live coverage. At the 39:40 mark in the ceremony, the closed caption screen reads, "Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. Alcoholic . . . Choctaw Nation." An inquiry of the private closed-caption company working for the Capitol was reportedly undertaken; however, to date no one has been held accountable. Michael Steel, press spokesman for House Speaker John Boehner, stated, "Closed captioning services for all major congressional events are provided by a private company that has no affiliation with the House or Senate. Unfortunately, the individual transcribing today's event apparently mis-heard the word "Choctaw." The transcription company was given a list of the tribes before the ceremony, so this should not have happened, and we will make a full inquiry." Several individuals at the event and subsequent Internet posts believe the incident was not an accident, and that to believe that "alcoholic" was mistaken for any tribal name is preposterous. Vincent Schilling, "A Tribe Named Alcoholic? Closed Caption Gaffe at Code Talker Ceremony," *Indian Country Today Media Network.com*, November 21, 2013, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/11/21/tribe-named-alcoholic-closed-caption-gaffe-code-talker-ceremony-152367>.

27. Vincent Schilling, "Watch Code Talkers Receive Congressional Gold Medals at 11," *Indian Country Today Media Network.com*, November 20, 2013, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/11/20/watch-code-talkers-receive-congressional-gold-medals-11-152340>.

28. Ceremony Program, Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony in Honor of Native American Code Talkers, Emancipation Hall, US Capitol, Washington, DC, November 20, 2013; United States Mint Coins and Medals Program, "Code Talkers Recognition Congressional Medals Program," [http://www.usmint.gov/mint\\_programs/medals/?action=codeTalkers](http://www.usmint.gov/mint_programs/medals/?action=codeTalkers).

29. Author's fieldnotes on Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony in Honor of Native American Code Talkers, Emancipation Hall, US Capitol, Washington, DC, November 20, 2013.
30. "33 More American Indian Tribes Recognized as Code Talkers," *The Hopi Tutuveni* 21, no. 23 (December 3, 2013): 6, [http://www.hopi-nsn.gov/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/12-3-2013\\_Vol21-No23.pdf](http://www.hopi-nsn.gov/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/12-3-2013_Vol21-No23.pdf).
31. John Speer, "Congressional Gold Honor [sic] Meskwaki Code Talkers: 'Long Overdue' Medals to Tribes," *Tama News-Herald/The Toledo Chronicle*, November 29, 2013, <http://www.tamatole-donews.com/page/content.detail/id/516370/Congressional-Gold-honor-Meskwaki-Code-Talkers.html?nav=5006>.
32. Jackie Old Coyote (Apsaalooke), author's fieldnotes, National Museum of the American Indian, 2013.
33. Birdsong, e-mail to the author, December 17, 2013.
34. United States Mint, "Code Talkers Recognition Congressional Medals Program" (2016), [http://www.usmint.gov/mint\\_programs/medals/?action=codeTalkers](http://www.usmint.gov/mint_programs/medals/?action=codeTalkers).
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.; Birdsong, e-mail to the author, December 17, 2013; "Enclosure: Individual Code Talkers by Tribal Affiliation," copy of January 29, 2013 memo from Department of Defense, Secretary of Defense, 1000 Defense Pentagon, Washington, DC, to Timothy F. Geithner, Secretary of the Treasury, Washington, DC, courtesy of Betty Birdsong.
37. Andrea Page (Standing Rock Lakota) to the author, December 1 and April 3, 2013.
38. Judy Allen (Choctaw) to the author, January 16, 2014, and July 5, 2016.
39. "Historical Day for Comanche Heroes," *Comanche Nation News*, special edition, December 12, 2013, 1–7, [Issuu.com/comanchenation/docs/codetalker\\_special-edition](http://Issuu.com/comanchenation/docs/codetalker_special-edition).
40. Ibid.; George Red Elk (Comanche) to the author, February 16, 2014. The group also placed a wreath at Arlington National Cemetery on the grave of fellow Comanche Wellington Permiansu, then sang the Comanche Memorial song, the Adobe Walls songs, and a Comanche Christian church hymn.
41. Lydia Meat Yellowhair (Comanche) and Mary Parker Moon (Comanche) to the author, February 23, 2014; Lanny Asepermy (Comanche) to the author, February 24, 2014.
42. George Red Elk (Comanche) to the author, February 16, 2014. The Comanche Code talkers were inducted into the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame in 2011.
43. Rick Red Eagle McLaughlin (Standing Rock Sioux) to the author, April 3, 2014.
44. Jason Stein, "Ho-Chunk Pay Tribute to Code Talkers in Special Ceremony in Baraboo," *Journal Sentinel* (Milwaukee, WI), December 13, 2013, <http://www.jsonline.com/news/wisconsin/ho-chunk-pay-tribute-to-code-talkers-in-special-ceremony-in-baraboo-b99163399z1-235824421.html>; Sandra Winneshiek (Ho-Chunk) to the author, March 10, 2014.
45. "Santee Sioux Honors Code Talker," *Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan*, December 15, 2013, [www.yankton.net/community/article\\_ed40c21e-6609-11e3-9576-0019bb2963f4.html](http://www.yankton.net/community/article_ed40c21e-6609-11e3-9576-0019bb2963f4.html).
46. Robin Roberts (Meskwaki) to the author, December 7, 2013; Jonathan Buffalo (Meskwaki) to the author, February 14, 2014.
47. Eugene Talas (Hopi) to the author, March 3, 2014, and July 5, 2016.
48. "Code Talkers Honoring Set for Memorial Day," *Fort Peck Journal*, February 14, 2014; Dr. Ken Ryan (Assiniboine) to the author, March 13, 2014.
49. Author's fieldnotes, 2013–2014.
50. James Q. Lynch, "Meskwaki Officials Had Silver Code Talker Medals Shipped for Security Reasons," *Globe Gazette* (Iowa), December 24, 2013, [http://globegazette.com/news/local/meskwaki-officials-had-silver-code-talker-medals-shipped-for-security/article\\_e0231772-109d-5da6-879c-f5b998827d44.html](http://globegazette.com/news/local/meskwaki-officials-had-silver-code-talker-medals-shipped-for-security/article_e0231772-109d-5da6-879c-f5b998827d44.html).

51. James Q. Lynch, "Code Talkers' Families to Get Medals, but Hard Feelings Remain," *Globe Gazette* (Iowa), December 4, 2013, [http://globegazette.com/news/local/code-talkers-families-to-get-medals-but-hard-feelings-remain/article\\_60ff84d1-a091-53e0-8c4e-30bcb8db1992.html](http://globegazette.com/news/local/code-talkers-families-to-get-medals-but-hard-feelings-remain/article_60ff84d1-a091-53e0-8c4e-30bcb8db1992.html).

52. Indeed, Native Americans have achieved numerous notable awards from the larger non-Native society, including the Pulitzer Prize (Scott Momaday), an Olympic Medal (Billy Mills), three Presidential Medals of Freedom, several National Heritage Fellows in the arts, official "Code Talker Days" in individual states, the induction of the Comanche, Choctaw, and Pawnee Code Talkers into the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame, and honors between individual tribes.

53. Similarly, only recently have four Native Americans received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, issued since 1963: Wilma Mankiller (Cherokee) as a foreign head of state or government (1998), Joe Medicine Crow (Crow) for military service (2009), Susan Shown Harjo (Cheyenne/Muskogee) for political and government activism (2014), and Billy Frank Jr. for activism (2015; posthumous). Billy Mills (Lakota) has been the only Native American to receive the Presidential Citizens Medal (2012), a medal issued since 1969. Presidential Medal of Freedom Recipients, US Senate, [http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/reference/two\\_column\\_table/Presidential\\_Medal\\_of\\_Freedom\\_Recipients.htm](http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/reference/two_column_table/Presidential_Medal_of_Freedom_Recipients.htm); List of Presidential Medal of Freedom recipients, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Presidential\\_Medal\\_of\\_Freedom\\_recipients](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Presidential_Medal_of_Freedom_recipients); Presidential Citizens Medal, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential\\_Citizens\\_Medal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presidential_Citizens_Medal); "President Obama Names Recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom," White House, Office of the Press Secretary, November 16, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/16/president-obamanames-recipients-presidential-medal-freedom>.

54. Ibid.

55. Author's fieldnotes, Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony in Honor of Native American Code Talkers, November 20, 2013.

56. Jackie Old Coyote (Apsaalooke), author's fieldnotes, November 20, 2013.

57. Associated Press, "Obama to Award Medal of Honor to 24 Overlooked Army Veterans," February 22, 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2014/02/22/obama-to-award-medal-honor-to-24-army-veterans.html>?

58. Meadows, "Honoring Native American Code Talkers."

59. Lawrence H. Suid, "Windtalkers Sends Wrong Message," *Naval History* 16, no. 5 (US Naval Institute, October 2002): 36–38.

60. Tom Holm, *Strong Hearts, Wounded Souls: Native American Veterans of the Vietnam War* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); Alison R. Bernstein, *American Indians and World War II: Towards a New Era in Indian Affairs* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 121–40; Sally McClain, *Navajo Weapon: The Navajo Code Talkers* (Tucson: Rio Nuevo Publishers, 1994), 229–30; Thomas Britten, *American Indians in World War I* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 10–17, 57–58; Jeré Bishop Franco, *Crossing the Pond: The Native American Effort in World War II* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1999), 88–94, 190–200; Kenneth William Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000), 112–16; Meadows, *The Comanche Code Talkers* 7–14, 175–76; Susan Applegate Krouse, *North American Indians in the Great War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Nez and Avila, *Code Talker*, 8, 107, 217–18, 231; Holiday and McPherson, *Under the Eagle*, 183–84. For sources on Native views of military service and enlistment factors see Holm, *Strong Hearts*, 19–21, 117–28, 166–67; Bernstein, *American Indians and World War II*, 40–63; Britten, *American Indians in World War I*, 51–72; Townsend, *World War II and the American Indian*, 2–3, 62, 72–80; Krouse, *North American Indians*, 17–21; and Meadows, *The Comanche Code Talkers*, 7–14, 83–90.

61. William Meadows, *Kiowa Ethnogeography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 176–77.

62. Several individuals expressed surprise that President Obama did not attend and participate in the ceremony, instead issuing Presidential Medals of Freedom that same day to Oprah Winfrey

and Bill Clinton at the White House a short distance away. While the Presidential Medal of Freedom is normally issued by the President, Congressional Gold Medals are presented at the discretion of Congress, which can include the President if desired. Some legislators and tribal representatives stated that the president was not invited to participate in this event. Author's fieldnotes, November 20, 2013.

63. "Tribes to Receive Congressional Gold Medals in Honor of Code Talkers," Choctaw Nation press release, September 30, 2013, <https://www.choctawnation.com/news-events/press-media/tribes-receive-congressional-gold-medals-honor-code-talkers>.

64. James Q. Lynch, "Meskwaki 'Code Talkers' Earn Congressional Gold Medal," *Globe Gazette* (Iowa), November 21, 2013, [http://globegazette.com/news/iowa/meskwaki-code-talkers-earn-congressional-gold-medal/article\\_86889e2c-0433-5453-82c0-5d3b468686ee.html](http://globegazette.com/news/iowa/meskwaki-code-talkers-earn-congressional-gold-medal/article_86889e2c-0433-5453-82c0-5d3b468686ee.html).

65. Cassandra Colson, "Ho-Chunk 'Code Talkers' Honored at Congressional Ceremony," *Jackson County Chronicle*, November 26, 2013, [http://lacrossetribune.com/jacksoncochronicle/news/local/ho-chunk-code-talkers-honored-at-congressional-ceremony/article\\_c2c87d42-56d8-11e3-b8a9-0019bb2963f4.html](http://lacrossetribune.com/jacksoncochronicle/news/local/ho-chunk-code-talkers-honored-at-congressional-ceremony/article_c2c87d42-56d8-11e3-b8a9-0019bb2963f4.html).

66. Meadows, "Comanche Code Talkers."

67. Vann Codynah (Comanche) and Andrea Page (Lakota) to the author, November 20, 2013.

68. Author's fieldnotes, 2013.

69. Section 6.2 of the Code Talker Recognition Act of 2008 states, "The Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of Defense and the tribes, shall . . . in the future, determine whether any Indian tribe that is not recognized as of the date of the enactment of this Act, should be eligible to receive a gold medal under this Act." However, government representatives have indicated that subsequent awards will not include a ceremony at the US Capitol. "Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008," Public Law 110-240; 122 Stat. 4774-4777, approved October 15.

70. Don Loudner (Hunkpati-Dakota) to the author, April 6, 2014.