# Secret War: The Navajo Code Talkers in World War II

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> Intelligence is an offensive weapon, one which searches out the vulnerable points in a nations [sic] armor, which attacks strong points again and again, until they, too, are made weak. The only defense against intelligence is security, and no form of security is more effective or important than communications security.[1]

Every military commander knows that intelligence is the key to advantage on the battlefield. Knowing what the enemy is doing and will do, and keeping him from knowing the same about one's own forces is what wins battles and keeps soldiers alive to fight once again. With superior intelligence, the well–informed commander can deploy his troops in a manner that multiplies their battlefield effectiveness. Near–miraculous victories such as the Battle of Midway in June 1942 are testaments to the power of intelligence.

The invention of radio and telephone in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries presented new challenges to the military in the areas of gathering and protecting intelligence. On the positive side, the new technology transmitted orders to units with a speed and accuracy unheard of in previous eras when courier, line of sight, or sound methods such as semaphores or bugle calls were used. On the negative side, since radio signals are a public medium, any receiver that has the capa-

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bility to monitor the frequency in use can intercept any message sent on that frequency. Similarly, telephone cable can be tapped. Despite these drawbacks, proper communications security is essential to conducting and winning a battle.

When the United States entered World War II against the Axis powers in December 1941, American commanders were well aware of the necessity for radio and telephone communications security. During the interwar years, there had been a tremendous advancement in the science of signals decryption. Since their operators had deciphered many of Japan's diplomatic and military codes, American military commanders were convinced of the absolute requirement for secure encryption codes.

One obvious and simplistic solution to communications security is to use a foreign or altered language for sensitive messages. While not a foolproof strategy, this method has been used many times. For example, in South Africa during the Boer War, the British occasionally made use of Latin in their communications to confound the Boers' attempts at message interception. The drawbacks to this approach are obvious: an Army would need enough fluent personnel to use the language; however, a well-known language would likely be as recognizable to the enemy. Such drawbacks are less pronounced for some dialects.

In the native languages of North American Indians, the United States and Canada had an advantage over other belligerents. By virtue of geographical specificity, non-written nature, and the relative dearth of Amerind speakers compared to English speakers, the languages of the American Indians were well suited to secret communications. The American military first attempted to use Native American languages for communications in World War I. Not until the Second World War, however, did America hone and polish the concept to create a weapon of intelligence. Applying knowledge gained from American and Canadian military experiences in the Great War, the United States Marine Corps trained a group of Navajos who developed, then refined, an application of their language as a combat code. The Navajo Code Talkers, as they were known, became one of the war's few examples of perfect communications security. They were a weapon comparable to a rifle or grenade that the corps carefully built and refined. The Marines gave the Navajo men the training and equipment to wage a secret communications war on the enemy, a war which the enemy could not, and would not, win.

As for the Navajos, they met and exceeded the Marine Corps' expectations. Through the use of their native language, secrecy, and by taking advantage of Japanese shortcomings and failures in communications intelligence collection, the Navajo Code Talkers provided Marine commanders an essential element of communications security: an unbroken

oral code they used to win the war in the Pacific. The Marine Corps used the Navajo Code from the Guadalcanal campaign in 1942 through the war's end in 1945 to send tens of thousands of messages, without a single compromised transmission.

The discussion of American Indians in World War II, and the Navajos in particular, is limited. Alison Bernstein in *American Indians in World War II* (1991) provides an excellent description of how the war affected Native Americans in general, and a good account of how they overcame decades of prejudice and patronage to join in the war effort against the Axis. According to Bernstein, once their legal status as members of independent nations was decided in the 1920s, Indians proved themselves to be far more patriotic than the general populace of the United States.[2] The Navajo were no exception.

Much more has been written on the Code Talkers. Older established works, such as Doris Paul's *The Navajo Code Talkers* (1973), and newer works, like Sally McClain's *Navajo Weapon* (1994) provide overviews of these men and their contributions to the war effort and the United States Marine Corps.[3] While Bernstein, Paul, and McClain offer fair and complete treatment of the subject, there remain other areas open to exploration. For example, the Japanese point of view and the difficulties the Marine Corps experienced in recruiting adequate numbers of Navajo men are two such issues that need further investigation.

For reasons outlined below, Japanese inquiry is difficult, if not impossible. The lack of both primary and secondary source material severely limits the scholar's ability to conduct research. In order to bring to light some of the reasons for the Code Talkers's success, I present a comparison of Japanese intelligence practices with the Code Talkers' procedures and training. The difficulty that the Marines had in enlisting an adequate number of qualified men is another rarely explored area. While Paul devotes some discussion to this topic, she does not cover other important mechanisms the Corps implemented to cope with the manpower shortage. If the problems the Marines encountered with recruiting the Navajo had not been addressed in the unorthodox ways in which they were, the program would not have had its eventual notable success. Some of the challenges that they faced, and overcame, are recounted herein.

As previously mentioned, the United States first attempted to use Native American languages during World War I. Toward the war's end, a memorandum from the commanding officer of the 142nd Infantry recognized the dangers of German eavesdropping on telephone cables. Suspecting that the Germans had tapped the cables used by the unit in their communications, the officer decided to encode and decode every message sent to ensure secrecy. The primitive encryption methods, however, took too much time for efficient tactical communication.[4]

An enterprising young Kaw (Kansa), Mose Bellmard, is credited with the idea of making use in October 1918 of the unit's company of Choctaws to guarantee secure transmissions. He reasoned that the Germans would have no knowledge of Native American languages and proposed to position one speaker on each end of a telephone line. Among the men in the company, there were twenty–six different Indian languages or dialects spoken, only four or five of which were ever written. The first message to use the Choctaw language ordered the night movement of two companies from one village to another. It was successful, taking the Germans completely by surprise. For his suggestion, Bellmard received a promotion to the rank of captain.[5]

The Canadian Army also instituted its own program of using Native American languages for communications. Elmer Jamieson, a Mohawk from the Six Nations Reservation in Ontario, tired of having his letters to his family censored by Canadian military authorities, began using his native Mohawk language in his personal correspondence. When the censors discovered they could not determine his "code," he was called in to explain it. The military authorities were apparently impressed with his method, since he was directed to set up a network with his fellow Mohawks similar to that organized by Bellmard.[6]

These first efforts in using Native American languages exposed inherent problems that the Marine Corps encountered once again almost thirty years later. Native American languages did not include military terminology, so euphemisms had to be coined for terms that were not part of the vocabulary. For example, "big gun" was used as a substitute for artillery, and "little gun shoot fast" was used for machine gun. A rudimentary training program was put into place for the 142nd Infantry, but the unit's Choctaws did not have the opportunity to thoroughly test its new system before the Armistice in November 1918.[7]

The United States Army revisited the idea in 1940, when the War Department asked the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to recommend thirty Comanches for Signal Corps work. The Army expanded the program and used it intermittently throughout World War II, but there were never more than 50 Comanches inducted into the Signal Corps for code–talking duties. According to Forrest Kassonovald, a soldier in the Army's 4th Signal Company, the code–talking duties were sporadic and did not seem significant at the time. "Most of the time, I remember being in combat, not on the phones."[8]

The Marine Corps also understood the necessity of secure communications. Knowing that the Marines would be called upon to fight the Japanese, Major General Clayton Vogel, commanding general, Amphibious Force, Pacific Fleet, wanted to have a secure communica-

tions system for his field commanders. Interested in the Army experiments, he sought permission of General Thomas Holcomb, Marine Corps Commandant, to investigate the possibility of using coded Indian languages for that purpose.[9]

Meanwhile, in Los Angeles, a civil engineer by the name of Philip Johnston became likewise intrigued by the Army's experiments with the Comanches. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, he contacted the Marine Corps area Signal Officer with a proposal to use Native American languages for secure battlefield communications. He postulated that since the Amerindian languages were not written languages, and that very few whites had ever learned them, that they would be an ideal medium for communications security. Since he had spent time as a child on the Navajo reservation, spoke some Navajo, and was familiar with their ways and culture, his recommendation was to recruit Navajos, rather than one of the other large tribes, as communications specialists in the Marine Corps.

The suggestion was interesting enough that Johnston was asked to provide a demonstration for senior Marine Corps officers. On 28 February 1942, he and four Navajo arrived at Camp Elliott, California, to conduct the test. The Navajo were given a set of sample messages to send, using their own language. After a short period to prepare equivalents for military terms that were not a part of the Navajo vocabulary, they transmitted all of the messages with no appreciable error.[10]

Vogel was quite pleased with the demonstration and recommended to Commandant Holcomb that two hundred Navajos be recruited for duty as communications technicians. Lt. Colonel Wethered Woodworth, in consultation with Bureau of Indian Affairs personnel, recommended that thirty men be recruited to test the feasibility of the plan.[11] His recommendations were approved, and in May 1942, twenty–nine Navajos arrived at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) in San Diego, California to begin boot camp.

By no means were all Marine officers convinced of the wisdom of the program. Many were concerned that they would be essentially "taking orders" from the code talker, to the detriment of their command, or that use of a "foreign" language as a combat code would unnessecarily slow the tempo of communications. Director of Recruiting, Colonel Frank Halford, was quite succinct in his concerns: "For combat directing officers to have to depend on an order which is being transmitted and received in a language unknown to any of the operating force renders it of very doubtful value as a scheme of communication."[12]

Despite the misgivings of many Marine officers, the first twenty–nine code talker recruits started boot camp in May. During their twelve weeks in the training cycle, the young Navajo men excelled in all aspects of their training, with the result that Recruit Platoon 382 was one of the best ever to complete recruit training at the MCRD. According to

Lt. Colonel George Hall, "This group has done exceptionally well at this Depot. They are very tractable, attentive and loyal. At an early date, they developed an exceptionally high Esprit de Corps. . . . This group of 29 men is still intact, none has dropped back due to sickness, disciplinary action or lack of ability. . . . This is unusual. Their progress has been highly satisfactory."[13]

While the attitude of the officers at the MCRD was uniformly positive, the impressions of the recruits themselves were more varied in nature. For the most part, the men did not find boot camp physically difficult, owing to their experience of living in the harsh Southwestern desert and the often military–style discipline enforced during their childhood in BIA schools. According to Jimmy King:

> I had gone to an Indian school that employed what was known as military discipline. They taught us how to drill, and calisthenics was one of the things that came naturally for me. . . I knew some of the commands that were given and knew how to drill tactically halfway through boot camp. In that way, I had the advantage of knowing what to do and how to do it and when.[14]

Not all of their experiences were easy, however. In one case, a sergeant was attempting to teach the men how to box. Being a peaceful people, they were not familiar with unarmed combat, and the sergeant was not satisfied with their progress. As a demonstration, he moved down the line of Navajos, punching each one of them in the face, until he came to one man who did know how to box. This man, apparently not craving the same treatment that the other recruits had received, took action in the proper military method. Knowing that the best defense is a good offense, he punched the sergeant first, ending the demonstration.[15]

After graduating from boot camp, the men were sent to Camp Elliott to begin their training in communications. The circumstances were strange for all of them, since they had not been told what their exact duties would be when they enlisted, and they learned no more about them during their time in boot camp. What they did not realize was that they would be responsible for the key portions of their own training. Since there were no Military Occupational Specialties (MOS) that corresponded to what they had been inducted for, there was no training program in place for them. They received very broad general outlines of how they should construct the code, then were left to do so.

It is important to note that there is some confusion about how the recruits originally created the code. Some sources regarding the Navajo Code Talkers—for example the Japanese daily newspaper *Mainichi Shimbun,* in an article by Shibata Kanji—have mistakenly given credit to the creation of the verbal code to Philip Johnston.[16] This is no doubt

Figure 1: First twenty–nine Code Talkers' induction at Fort Wingate, New Mexico, May 1942. Photography courtesy of Milton Snow Collection, Navajo Nation Musuem, Window Rock, Arizona.


Figure 2: Graduation of the first all Navajo Platoon, United States Marine Corps, August 1942. Photograph courtesy of Carl and Mary Gorman.

due to Johnston's statement at the first Navajo Code Talker's Association in 1971 that he had invented the code. Other evidence, however, proves that it was entirely the creation of the "First 29," with many of the men giving accounts similar to that given by Cosey Stanley Brown:

> Then, we got together and discussed how we would do it. We decided to change the name of the airplanes, ships and the English ABCs into the Navajo language. *We did the changing.* [emphasis added] For instance, we named the airplanes "dive bombers" for *ginitsoh* (sparrow hawk), because the sparrow hawk is like an airplane—it charges downward at a very fast pace . . . . We changed the English alphabet to the Navajo language, like for the letter T we used *tashii* (turkey), *tsin* (stick), and *tliish* (snake) in Navajo. We usually used the harmful animal's [sic] names that were living in our country for the alphabet. Then a name was written on a piece of paper. Some words were marked off and some were accepted. That was the way we completed our alphabet which we used against the enemy in our communications.[17]

Even the private papers of Johnston dating from the war years dispute his claim that he created the code. Despite his later statements, one of these documents makes clear reference to the fact that "signal personnel at Camp Elliott compiled this code."[18] Nevertheless, there can be no doubt where the code originated.

The training lasted about eight weeks, during which the men not only developed and refined the code, they also learned common messaging protocol, how to operate radios and run and repair communications cable, and how to send and receive Morse Code. Toward the end of their training period at Camp Elliott, they were to run into a problem for the first time that would be a recurring theme for all Code Talkers throughout the Pacific War; the security of the program would cause problems with official organizations that were not informed of their activities.

Because of the nature of their jobs, part of the training had to be carried out over live radio nets. Since radio waves are available to any who can receive that frequency, their transmissions were picked up by other parties, in one case, the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI). Since the ONI at the time had no idea about the Navajo program, they were convinced that the unknown gibberish that they were receiving on their radios was some type of covert enemy transmission.

For three weeks the ONI's best analysts worked to decode the transmission, looking for repetition, sequences or patterns with which they could wrench some meaning out of the message. Finally they went to Camp Elliott, and John Benally, one of the "First 29" was sent to San Diego. When he identified the transmission as a practice message, the ONI analysts must have been rather peeved at their inability to break it down. They abruptly shut off the recording and told Benally to leave.[19]

The first combat posting for the men of the Code Talkers was in the Solomon Islands. In August 1942, men of the First Marine Division had stormed ashore at a location called Lunga Point on a small island called Guadalcanal. They quickly captured the half–completed airfield the Japanese had been building and prepared to defend their position from the inevitable counterattacks. By the time the first Code Talkers arrived, the Marines had been ashore for over two months and had started to feel the true measure of their opponent, withstanding attack after attack from the ground, sea, and air. The Navajo arrived on the island with orders to report to the commanding general.

Since the Marines and officers on Guadalcanal had not been told of the Code Talkers any more than had ONI, they had no idea how to use these men and their specialized skills. After touring the island for some time looking for Major General Alexander Archer Vandegrift, they finally were assigned to a Signal Corps section. The lieutenant in charge instructed them to send a coded message to demonstrate why they had been sent to the island.

The transmission of a foreign language on the American frequencies caused a panic on the island. As soon as the Code Talkers sent the required message, all of the radiomen on the island called in, reporting that the Japanese had broken into the net and were using U.S. equipment. It took the lieutenant several hours to calm the tumult. Not believing that what the Code Talkers had demonstrated was not a trick, they were told to send a message using their code, while another team sent the same message using the Marine Corps Shackle code. After two minutes, the Navajo men received and signed off the order, while the Shackle team were still encoding the message.[20]

The First Marine Division needed no more convincing, nor indeed did the rest of the Corps. From that point on, the Navajo code was utilized for many routine messages, and for almost all sensitive communications. New procedures were worked out to prevent any more events such as the first tests at Guadalcanal, to let other communications technicians on a radio or telephone net know that the Navajo code was going to be used. Before any Code Talker transmission, the talkers would preface the message with a code word. For example, "Tecumseh,"

"Hiawatha," "Mukoki," "Wabigoon," and "Montezuma" were the code words used during the Iwo Jima campaign. Hearing one of these key words (in English) would alert any American radio operators that the message that followed was a Navajo Code Talker transmission.[21]

The Marines' initial uncertainty with the Navajos' language was compounded by confusion about the physical differences and similarities between the Navajos and the Japanese. With their dark skin, high cheekbones and very non–European appearances, some Code Talkers had near–fatal encounters when white Marines would find one of them in an unusual situation and mistake them as Japanese.

In one example, just before leaving Guadalcanal, William McCabe was almost executed as a spy. While waiting for transport to Australia, McCabe and a few of his fellow Marines were scrounging in the supply dump for something to eat. He was the last man to find his preferred victuals and was caught by a sentry. The sentry brought him before the provost marshal, who almost ordered him shot, but finally ordered the sentry to find McCabe's unit. In his unit area, several officers and non–commissioned officers vouched for his identity, saving him from a quick bullet. The Marine Corps, realizing the value of these men and their language, took steps to protect them. After a few of these occurrences, the Code Talkers were assigned bodyguards, who were told never to leave their sides. [22]

In many cases, they never realized that they had bodyguards. Bill Toledo, a Code Talker in the Third Marine Division, spent most of the war in the company of Dick Bonham, who was Toledo's assigned bodyguard. It was not until a reunion in 1987 that Toledo realized the specialized task that Bonham performed, besides being his foxhole partner. At one time, on Guam, Toledo was assigned to run a message to regimental headquarters when his unit's radio and telephone were knocked out. He slipped away without being noticed by Bonham, and on the way to the headquarters was nearly shot by a Japanese sniper. After delivering the message and returning to his own unit, Toledo told Bonham about the incident and was surprised by Bonham's reaction. "You know this is a very serious thing that happened. If my commander had found out, I could have gotten court–martialed!" In addition to redoubling his efforts to protect his partner, he took down the name of the sergeant who had assigned Toledo the task of running the message, presumably to report the breach of security. Bonham took his duties seriously, and kept Toledo under close scrutiny for the rest of the war.[23]

Despite the frequent misunderstandings that ensued between Anglo and Navajo Marines regarding confusion over appearance, there was very little tension, racial or otherwise, between the two ethnic groups. The Navajos had enlisted in the Marines as United States citizens, just the same as the Anglos had, and demanded and were accorded no special treatment. Unlike black units that were segregated by race, Native

Americans served with whites in integrated units from the beginning of the war. Notwithstanding the occasional bigoted white (for example the drill instructor previously mentioned), Navajos and whites generally got along.[24]

Nonetheless, both groups harbored preconceived notions about each other that sometimes caused misunderstanding. In large part because of tales of the "Wild West," Anglos perceived Navajos as being a warlike people and perhaps a bit more than human. At times the stereotyping annoyed the Navajos, but they did not always try to dissuade the whites from the error. Al Mertz, a white Marine who worked extensively with the Navajo, relates this story of a desert survival hike:

> [T]hey were rather proud of themselves for the fact that they knew how to survive out there. A lot of prickly pear [cactus] which is very common in some of the drier islands, and they got both fluids and also sustenance from them. When the Anglos had reached almost the point of exhaustion, most of the Navajos still had more than half a canteen of water left! Of course, they didn't share this knowledge until after the point of exhaustion![25]

On occasion Navajos would share this knowledge with Anglos with whom they became particularly close. Mertz also relates a story of one Navajo's facility with a rifle, describing one of them shooting a small goat with a carbine far out of its normal accuracy range and then the man's comment to the cooks as they were cooking the goat that he was their "survival crew."[26] The Navajo soldiers clearly enjoyed this particular aspect of their near–legendary status.

One of the most universal comments made by the Navajos about the caucasian Marines was the almost universal habit of referring to all of the Navajo men as "Chief" or "Geronimo." Despite the apparent slight, few of them became angry or offended by such stereotypical comments. Reactions varied, from Sam Billison's acceptance of the whites' ignorance of Indian culture, to Harold Foster's pride in their respect of his ancestors' prowess.[27]

The greatest misunderstandings stemmed from the vast cultural differences and mores that the two ethnic groups took for granted. The Navajo are not a belligerent people, historically having made war only to protect themselves. In many ways, their culture makes them particularly ill–suited for warfare, as they have a fear of death and mutilation, two common events in war. This kind of cultural background inevitably collided with the cultural bias that is inherent in military organizations, especially the Marine Corps.

Many of the practices and usages common to the Marine Corps confused and alarmed the Navajo, from the normal procedure in close order drill to start marching from the left foot (the Navajo would normally start with the right), to washing their own clothes (instead of having women do it), to the way in which drill instructors would belligerently get "in their face" and shout at them. For some, just getting accustomed to the colorful and often raw form of military speech caused many problems. They had to learn to respond in kind, so that when someone said to them, "You damned Indian!" they would not get upset but fire back with "You damned pale face!"[28]

The positive results obtained from the "First 29" convinced the Marine Corps that the Code Talker programs should be quickly expanded. Two hundred recruits had been authorized by the commandant's approval, and action was taken immediately to fill out the two-hundred man authorization. While the Corps posted most of the "First 29" to combat organizations, two of them received promotions to corporal and returned to the reservation to help recruit more Navajos for the program. John Benally and Johnny Manuelito were the men chosen to convince more Navajos to join the Marines and become Code Talkers.[29]

Benally and Manuelito faced a difficult challenge in their assignment. They had been ordered to the reservation to act as "public relations" officials for the Marine Corps, and had to promote the Code Talker program to eligible Navajos who had not already enlisted or been drafted after the Pearl Harbor attack. Their task was made more difficult in that they were limited by security injunctions to ensure they would not compromise the program. Eventually, they were allowed to make some reference to the program and its goals, but they were to avoid specifics and to make clear the confidential nature of what they were telling the prospective inductees. In many cases, however, it was not necessarily the nature of the assignment, or the allure of joining a highly motivated group such as the Marines that enticed the young men into the Corps; rather, the biggest draw was the Marines' dress blue uniform. According to Kee Etsicitty, who planned on joining the Navy, ". . . we were going to the courthouse in Gallup, New Mexico to sign up [for the Navy] there. On the way to the courthouse we saw a Marine in dress blues. . . that uniform with the brass buttons and the white gloves looked real good so we signed up with the Marine Corps."[30]

The onsite recruiting effort ended after about four months, but the drive to get more Navajos into the school at Camp Elliott continued. In fact, recruitment continued to be the single biggest problem encountered in training enough Code Talkers. Major Frank Shannon, commanding officer of the Phoenix recruiting station, spent a significant amount of time attempting to fulfill the quotas that were assigned to him by the director of the recruiting division. The guideline that was handed down

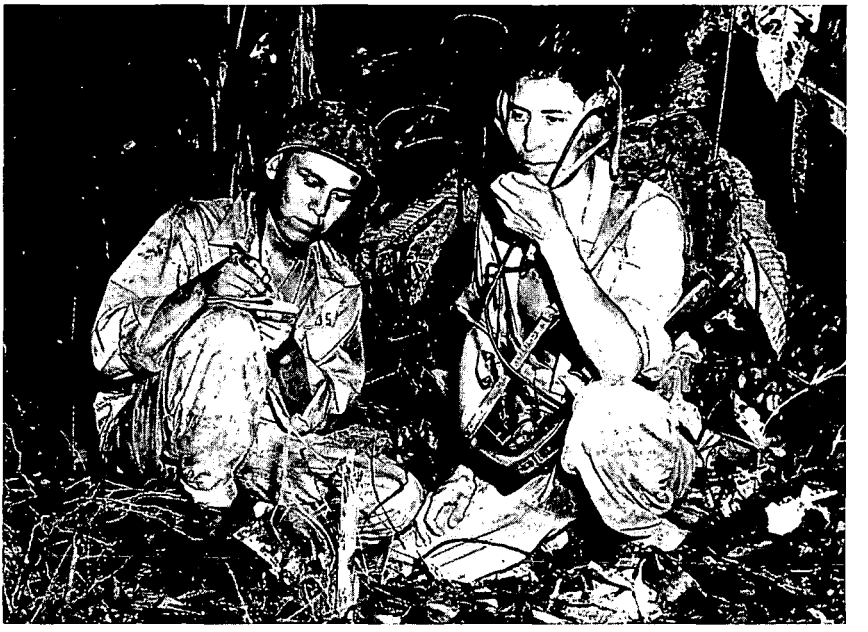

Figure 3: Corporal Joe Vandever and PFC George Kirk on Bougainville, 1943. Photograph courtesy of United States Marine Corps.

from Plans and Procedures was that there should be 442 Navajo men enlisted as Code Talkers, which would provide each of the four Marine divisions with eighty–two talkers, with adequate numbers left over for replacements and other non–divisional commands.

Problems in the procurement of required quotas arose as early as March 1943. Shannon was instructed to procure twenty–five inductees per month until the total number of billets had been filled, but was concerned that there would be very few available men after the first two hundred had been recruited. His predictions turned out to be true: there would be concern about the rate of recruitment even into June 1945, when the Corps were still twenty–two men short of their quotas.[31] The major problem recruiters faced was the limited number of men available on the reservation who were qualified for training. Besides being physically sound enough to join the Marines, they had to be fluent enough in both Navajo and English to be able to switch back and forth between the languages. There was also a "rule of thumb" that the men had to have reached at least the tenth grade, in order to guarantee that basic literacy skills had already been mastered. This stipulation was by no means a certainty on the reservation at the time, since many of the best qualified men had already enlisted or been drafted, or had moved away to work in critical war industries.

To overcome these problems, several different approaches were taken. Arrangements were made with the Army Selective Service commands to route any eligible Navajo men to the Marine Corps for training. This tactic worked well, with the Army cooperating more than was expected, even allowing the Marines to take more than their normal quotas. Other arrangements were made whereby the recruiting stations would purposely "nudge" Navajo applicants toward the Corps. In some cases this entailed a bit more than a nudge; many of the men who went to Camp Elliott reported that if there was a choice in their specialty, they were not aware of it. They were often told in no uncertain terms that since they were Navajo, they would be sent to a special program for testing. Those that failed were then allowed then to choose (as much as the Marine Corps allowed) where they would go.[32]

Keeping the code current and flexible was also a high priority. As the Navajos gained experience with the code, they began to improve its use and security. From the initial vocabulary of 211 words and phrases, the entire Navajo code talker dictionary grew to 619 terms. Many of the new words were words that had been forgotten in the initial development of the code, and substitutes were added for many of the words and letters that were used frequently. For example, the letter A had two new terms added for substitution, as did E, T, O, I, and N. This was done to further confuse any eavesdroppers and to prevent transmission patterns from being discerned, since discovering patterns and repetitions is a key to successful cryptography.[33]

Training was also necessary to further standardize the code and its use. Despite the continuous attempts to distribute any changes that were made to the code, either in the field or in the classroom, the efforts were not always successful. There were individual nuances in the way the men used the code, and since they were most often paired with another man, the team would develop a rhythm. At times, there were problems communicating between men of different divisions. According to Peter Sandoval, of the Fourth Marine Division, "if you get to start talking to someone from earlier divisions, First and Second, then you have to take it a little slower and sometimes repeat, because the methods they used earlier, have changed and improved somewhat." [34]

The field schools established for refresher training provided primary instruction as well, since some of the Navajo were not trained at Camps Elliott or Pendleton, both in California. As the recruiting division spread its net throughout the reservation and other states, an internal search occurred. Some recruits who eventually became Code Talkers had already joined the Marines and received other training when they either decided or were told that they would start the program. For them, there was an intensive field course lasting about four weeks instead of the usual eight.[35]

Figure 4: Wilsie Bitsie, Eugene Crawford, and Edmund John (left to right), three Code Talkers, relaxing at Noumea, New Caledonia, n.d. Photograph courtesy of the National Archives.

The last and most important characteristics of the Code Talkers revolved around secrecy. From the start of the Navajo code development until the end of the 1960s, the program was classified. The men themselves were told in no uncertain terms that what they were learning was secret information, and that they were to divulge what they did to no one—families, wives, or sweethearts—under duress of a court martial and possibly a firing squad. Official notification to all commands involved in the program instructed that there was to be no release of information regarding the program to the press or any other government organizations, without prior permission.

The cloak of secrecy extended to senior commanders within the Corps itself. The men who graduated from the schools in California and who were in the field were told that they did not have to explain themselves to anyone of lesser rank than a three–star, or lieutenant general. Any other commanders who asked were to be told, "Well, Mr. So and So, I hate to tell you this, but I'm not authorized to tell you what the message is about or what that man is saying over the air. And by the way, sir, what is your name?" As expected, this type of response did not endear the private or corporal to the colonel or general that they might have spoken to, but there was never any backlash against the Code Talkers for following this directive.[36]

There were two occasions during the war when the security of the program was compromised, and both occurred in the United States. In June 1943, *Arizona Highways*, a monthly periodical, published a story by James M. Stewart, the general superintendent (Navajo Indian Service) of the Navajo Reservation. The story gave a very concise outline of the Marines' efforts to convert Navajo to code for secure communications. Stewart mentioned John Benally and Johnny Manuelito by name, stating that they were on the reservation to explain the program to eligible Indians.[37]

The appearance of the *Arizona Highways* article caused a furor over the security breach. All of the people involved in the program that may have had contact with Stewart were interviewed and gave depositions about their knowledge of the article. Without exception, all involved denied accountability for the leak. Frank Shannon and Philip Johnston used their depositions to "point fingers" at one anther: Johnston stating that he did not understand why Shannon, a senior officer, would compromise the program; and Shannon noting that Johnston had been on the reservation previous to the article's publication and that he was also a writer. Benally was also interviewed and stated that he believed it possible that the information may have come from a prospective recruit who did not adequately safeguard the information. In the end, the case was closed with no disciplinary action indicated, the belief being that the letter of reprimand in each man's service jacket was adequate.[38]

In the second crisis, the cause of the breach was far easier to determine. In March 1944, a letter prepared by the legal firm Wheat and May was delivered to Army Colonel William Friedman, explaining in detail a Marine Corps program that utilized Navajo Indians to transmit coded messages in the South Pacific. The letter had been prepared at the request of Johnston, who was offering his services to the Army to provide a program similar to that of the Marine Corps. In his proposal to the Army, he outlined the capabilities of the school at Camp Pendleton, and suggested a plan of action to start an Army Code Talker program.

The Army's response was lukewarm, at best. Records show that the Wheat and May letter was circulated through several Army commands, and the reply from each command was essentially the same. The reply from Major J.M. Marzolf, chief of the cryptographic branch for the United States Army Air Forces, is indicative of the Army's opinion in general of the plan:

> Although the plan has a certain amount of merit as a "stop–gap" or an emergency system of communication, this Headquarters feels that the low–grade security afforded by such a plan would be dangerous to the operations of the AAF, whereas authorized War Department cryptographic systems offer better

> security than the recommended procedure. It is felt that there are too many "loop–holes" in the plan to justify its usage by the AAF.[39]

While the Army rejected Johnston's plan, the Marine Corps did its best to "soft pedal" the matter, by offering bland and evasive responses to queries posed by the Army during a meeting regarding Johnston's proposal to the Army at the Arlington Annex.

While Johnston's spirit of public service was laudable, his judgement was faulty. After the *Arizona Highways* incident, the Marine command structure was unlikely to forgive any further transgressions, and seemingly this was the case with Johnston. Since he had been awarded a special enlistment as a Tech Sergeant in the Marine Reserves, they had the power to discipline him as they would. While official records of his fate as a result of this event were not available, a recollection by Paul Blatchford gives some insight as to Johnston's future. Blatchford had been selected to go to the school at Camp Pendleton to be an instructor for the Code Talkers.

> So when we were going back the sergeant was telling me that they wanted to get rid of the "Old Man," the Old Man that's running the school. . . . When I got over there they introduced me to Philip Johnston and he acted like he didn't even want to talk to me. He just looked the other way and shook me off. . . . Shortly after that he disappeared from the school and I never saw him again.[40]

After the Wheat and May letter, there were no more security breaches.

Designed for communications security, the Navajo code provides various examples of the ironclad secrecy that characterized its use. Originally conceived as a tactical weapon, i.e., one that was intended for use by commanders and Marines on the battlefield, the code became known as reliable and secure enough that it saw occasional use in a more strategic role. It was, for example, used to transmit top secret information from Tokyo to the United States regarding the effects of the atomic bomb strikes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[41]

The Code Talkers were vital to transmitting messages that had to remain out of enemy hands. Many messages would almost surely invite an attack on the section of the line sending the report; for example, a report that ammunition was running low and resupply was necessary. The Japanese could easily identify the location of radio transmissions by triangulation and attack there, so keeping the message content confidential was essential. For example, Bill Toledo had a narrow escape from Japanese mortars, after enemy direction finding equipment had uncovered his location. "I had received the warning message and passed it

along to the rear units, shut off my radio and only moved about ten yards when a mortar hit the exact spot I had transmitted from. . . . We were told that the Japanese had very good tracking equipment and could pinpoint the location of radio signals and deliver a strike to that location."[42]

The Navajos were also a godsend to men who were attacking, as Harold Foster relates. During an attack on Hill 362A on Iwo Jima, three companies (units consisting of about one hundred men) were making an assault up the face of the hill. "We called for one of the jeeps that had rocket launchers on it. Giving the position was done in code, where the jeep was supposed to stop and direct the fire. . . . After they lifted the artillery we called in for the flame throwers. I didn't think about it then, but now I know how many lives I saved calling in that artillery using the code." The speed of the Navajo code prevented any delays in zeroing the artillery fire that might have meant disaster for the attacking companies. A sergeant told Foster, "Chief, you saved the company."[43]

There were other ways that the Marines were fortunate to have the Navajo on their side. In any technological war, there are times that orders will become confused, and a unit's weapons, usually artillery, may be turned on its own, commonly called friendly fire. Invariably, when troops find themselves under friendly fire, they immediately get on the radio or telephone to demand that the shelling stop. Since the enemy can easily get an English speaker on the proper radio frequencies, commanders are understandably reluctant to lift the fire for a non–coded radio message. Unfortunately, normal enciphered coding usually takes too long to save the men under fire.

For these situations the Code Talkers were peerless. In one example, Dan Akee, a Navajo who had originally joined the Corps to become a paratrooper, was part of an advancing group of Marines: "And we went too far beyond the enemy line there. And we were getting shelled from our own artillery, and from the other side we were being machine–gunned by the enemy. Right there they told me to send the message, and quick. . . . And I think it was worth the lives to choose this, Code Talker, instead of paratrooper."[44]

The power of their communications secrecy was not only limited to the Marine Corps. In early 1944, Naval Air in the South Pacific had been taking heavy losses due to Japanese interception of radio transmissions regarding American air strikes in the Solomon Islands. Desperate to reduce the hemorrhage in planes and pilots that was occuring, the Navy sought a remedy. Aware of the Code Talkers as a result of the Navajo working with Navy communications personnel during the island campaigns, Lt. Commander R.L. Hird, commander air, South Pacific, requested ten Code Talkers be assigned for temporary duty to the Navy. The Marines approved the request, and the ten men reported to work on the

radio nets in the Solomons, once again proving the value of the code. Within a short time, the number of plane losses and pilot fatalities dropped dramatically, with the latter falling from 53 percent to less than 7 percent.[45]

The contributions of the Code Talkers did not end with the war. With the suspension of hostilities between the United States and Japan, the Marines who did not have enough "points" to be rotated home were assigned to other necessary chores, such as occupation duty. Many of the Navajo did not have adequate points to be discharged, and so were sent to postwar Japan to assist in the disarmament of the Japanese nation and people. Some continued their communications duties, transmitting secret messages between Tokyo and San Francisco, as previously mentioned.

The Fourth Marine Division was sent to China after hostilities ceased, and several of the Code Talkers went along. Their duties in China were similar to those in Japan, i.e., keeping the peace, but were not limited to that role exclusively. They used the code in China as well, although not nearly to the extent that they had in action against the Japanese. According to James T. Nahkai, "Yeah, we were still Code Talkers in China . . . . We still sent messages. Not as many, maybe it was cut in half."[46]

The effectiveness of the Navajo code is unquestioned. Source after source reveals that it was never compromised. Such unqualified success leads the reader to wonder why this was so. After all, forging and using a weapon is only half of the story. The other half depends on enemy weaknesses that allow the utilization of the new weapon. The Japanese military, despite their war-making ability, possessed serious deficiencies that when matched against the Navajo code resulted in guaranteed security for Marine Corps tactical communications.

The most obvious problem the Japanese had in countering the Code Talkers was their total unfamiliarity with the Navajo language. Part of Johnston's contention in his letter to the Marine Corps in 1942 was that Navajo was a language that was well-known only to the Navajo themselves. This was true. For unknown reasons, German and Japanese anthropologists, who had studied many of the American Indian tribes and their languages in the years between the World Wars, had missed the Navajo.[47]

The nature of the Navajo language also makes it very difficult to learn to speak well if the speaker is not born to the tongue. The morphology of the language is exceedingly complex, and this difficulty is compounded by the fact that its phonology is equally intricate. Navajo is a tonal language, like Chinese, with four different tones that convey different meanings for the same word. Additionally, nasals, vowel duration, glottal stops and gutturals must all be spoken precisely to properly communicate. While the phonology is difficult, however, the real complexity of the language is in the verbs. Navajo verbs have different forms

for tenses, objects, and situations. For instance, the speaker must make a distinction between dropping a round object or dropping a cylindrical object, and whether it is done just one time or habitually. For these reasons, it is very rare for a non–Navajo to be able to speak the language fluently. Even Johnston, who spent years on the reservation as a child and young adult, was ridiculed by the trainees at the Code Talker school for his poor diction and sloppy command of the language.[48]

The question of how Japanese intelligence reacted to the appearance of an unknown, unbreakable code remains. While it would be convenient to be able to produce documented fact about their reaction, it is unfortunately impossible. On 11 August 1945, the last commander of the *Chuo tokujobu* (Central Bureau of Signal Intelligence), Major General Nishimura Toshio ordered the incineration of all secret documents. For days his underlings worked, burning all of the relevant documents of the unit. Additionally, the names of the leading intelligence officers were expunged from War Ministry listings, and most of the rest went underground to avoid arrest during the occupation.[49] Therefore, all that can be done is to reconstruct the way the Japanese ran their intelligence organ in an attempt to further explain Navajo success.

The Japanese intelligence effort suffered several disadvantages from the beginning of the war through the final surrender. Throughout the Empire, a cavalier attitude toward gathering signals or communications intelligence permeated the Japanese armed forces and diplomatic and government corps. The Army and Navy always emphasised *sakusen*, or combat operations. The best of Japan's officer corps were invariably assigned to operational combat units, to engineer and participate in great sweeping battles and honorably annihilate the enemy. Intelligence organizations received the second best, and even at times those men who were not wanted in other units. The number of men assigned to intelligence sections tells the story with startling clarity: at the beginning of the war, the Imperial Army's Chief of Staff had only seventeen staff officers in his command, and forty–nine other officers attached for general duty. Of those forty–nine, only twenty–seven were assigned to the directorate responsible for gathering intelligence on the United States, England, and the Pacific areas. The Navy's situation was similarly woeful, with only ninety–seven staff officers at the end of the war, most of whom were fresh Imperial Naval Academy graduates assigned to those billets due to the lack of ships.[50]

What intelligence effort existed had been historically tailored toward an Asian mainland war with Russia. For instance, the Kwantung Area Army was much better prepared than other Asian Armies in the realms of both signal and human intelligence, such as interrogation and espionage. Despite their advantages, even the Kwantung Army had only


Figure 5: Pencil sketch by Code Talker Teddy Draper, 1994. Photograph courtesy of Books Beyond Borders.

limited success in their code–breaking efforts. They were routinely able to break Nationalist Chinese codes, but for most of the war the Communist Chinese and Russian codes were beyond their ability to break with any meaningful regularity.[51]

An extremely insular and inefficient reporting system further handicapped the Japanese. The Army and Navy had separate intelligence commands, and real cooperation was rare. For example, if an officer in one command felt that it would be advantageous for one of his counterparts in the other service to have access to data, he would arrange it on his

own recognizance; it was not a standard operating procedure. Any reports that were forwarded were likely to be quite stale since the normal reporting period was only once every ten days for front line intelligence reports.[52]

Some authors, including Paul, contend that the Japanese were extremely skilled in breaking codes and that American communications were an "open book," to be perused at the enemy's leisure. The evidentiary record proves the opposite, however, since the Japanese clearly were not masters of code breaking. Their best performance came at Nationalist Chinese expense as previously noted, with a success rate of up to 80 percent. This was an unusually high figure when compared with their usual track record. When reviewing their efforts against United States codes, their score becomes considerably less stellar. The only code that the Japanese were able to crack consistently was the BAMS (Broadcasting Allied Merchant Shipping) code. They achieved this success through a German–supplied code key that enabled them to attain a 50 percent decode rate. By war's end, they had achieved inconsistent success with some Army Air Corps and Naval Air operational codes. The only real guarantee of consistent decoding was to capture code books with unchanged codes. In the words of Major Hori Eizo, "It certainly would have been a wonderful advantage [breaking US codes], but unfortunately it did not happen. . . . Yes, it was all done by hand. It was, for Japan, an 'abacus war.'"[53]

That is not to say that the Japanese did not know how to use United States radio transmissions to gain valuable information. Most of the data that the Japanese obtained from United States sources came from message traffic analysis and clear language transmissions. In their traffic analysis, the frequency and locations of the messages were analyzed to gain intelligence and any available call signs. With careful analysis, the Japanese were able to score some stunning intelligence coups, such as predicting the expected dates and locations of Operation Coronet (the planned invasion of Kyushu) with such accuracy that after the war United States investigators were convinced that they had access to the plans.[54]

The resourceful use of clear language transmissions cannot be overlooked and provided the *raison d'etre* for the Code Talkers. During the invasion of Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands, Japanese radiomen on a small islet called Makin, just offshore of Tarawa, demonstrated how effective this approach could be. They were able to ascertain the extent of a ship's damage, oncoming reinforcements, and the desperation of American forces battling Japanese defenders by virtue of eavesdropping on United States radio frequencies.[55] Since these were all uncoded transmissions, they allowed the Japanese commander access to information that normally he would have had to gather by other means.

After the Code Talkers appeared, there was no further worry of compromise. When Japanese forces could not break the code and with no other options, they attempted to overwhelm the radio nets with noise, whistling, singing, or any other available method. The usual Marine response to this was "Aw, get the hell off, Tojo." Since the Japanese frequently attempted these ploys, the Navajo devised a counter to the noise tactic: they would begin transmitting a dummy message in Morse Code over one frequency, and when that transmission was well along, would send the real message in Navjo code over another frequency.[56]

Denied the ability to break the code, one can assume that the Japanese turned to other sources that they habitually relied upon for information about the United States and its war effort, namely the civilian radio broadcasts and civilian newspapers. Of course, with the program being secret, and no publicity to any source being allowed (with the notable exception of the *Arizona Highways* article), no information was available from these sources. There was one other potential intelligence source for the Japanese—a Navajo prisoner of war (POW). Unfortunately for the Imperial Army, they never captured any Code Talkers.

The POW, Joe Keiyoomia, was an Army soldier who had been captured when the Japanese overran the Philippines. Keiyoomia was sent to several POW camps before ending up at a Japanese communications center in Matishuma, south of Nagasaki. While at the camp, he was forced to listen to recordings of the Code Talkers, and asked repeatedly, under torture, what the transmissions meant. Since Keiyoomia had never even heard of the program or the school at Camp Elliott, he had no idea what the messages were attempting to convey. "When they first made me listen to the broadcasts, I could not believe what I was hearing! It sounded like Navajo, just not anything that made sense to me." Despite the fact that he could recognize some of the code words, for example "planes" (air force, in the Navajo code) and "ships" (sea force), the code always eluded him. His knowledge of Navajo may have been the one thing that kept him alive, since "They were trying to keep me alive, trying to get something out of me." Without the knowledge of the code devised by the "First 29," Keiyoomia was unable to shed any more light upon the matter for the Japanese, and they remained ignorant of the secret.[57]

Notwithstanding the suffering that Keiyoomia endured in his futile attempts to break the Navajo code, perhaps the most revealing fact about the inadequacies of the Imperial Japanese intelligence apparatus is their basic disinterest in voice codes. The agonizingly long interrogation of Keiyoomia was probably only one of a few efforts to break the code. According to Nagata Junko, Japan's leading authority on the Code Talkers, just using the Navajo language, without encoding, would have been nearly as effective as the form that was used since no Japanese could

speak Navajo and little emphasis was placed on voice codes. He also believes that the Code Talkers had a negative effect on Japanese armed forces morale, and that there was little likelihood that their intelligence corps could have ever broken the code.[58]

Another expert on Japanese intelligence, Alvin Coox, states the same belief and enlarges the point. Having interviewed over four hundred Japanese military and government officials about the Pacific War and intelligence matters from the 1950s to the 1980s, Coox never encountered a single individual who mentioned the Code Talkers or their undecipherable transmissions.[59]

The end of the war brought with it the end for the necessity of the Navajo code. While there were times after the war when the code was used, such as damage reports from the atomic bomb strikes at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and occasional use of the code in China, there was generally no further need for the Code Talkers in the Marine Corps. Along with the majority of other American servicemen at the end of World War II, the Navajo were discharged as soon as they had the correct number of points, and they returned home.

Upon arrival, they faced the same difficulties with which all discharged veterans had to contend. Although the war was over, the security of the Code Talker program remained intact. Consequently, many of them suffered from nightmares and depression and were denied much of the therapeutic advantage of talking about what they did. The men were told before they left the service that they were not to discuss the program, and that all the security strictures that had restricted publicity of the program during the war remained in place. Many of them had ritual dances performed for them, such as the Squaw Dance or the Gourd Dance, that helped them to shed their demons. And regardless of what the Marine Corps told them, some such as Jimmie Gleason did as soldiers have always done, they talked to their wives about their experiences.[60]

The returning veterans also had problems returning to reservation life and the obsolete Indian policies of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and local authorities. During their service years, they had become the social equals of Anglos in the military and had all of the rights that other soldiers had—to drink when they wished, vote, and take advantage of all of the rights and privileges of a United States citizen. When they came back to the reservation, however, they had to contend with vastly reduced income, unemployment, and the old limitations on Indian civil rights. Since the nineteenth century, Indians were legally unable to acquire or consume alcohol on reservation lands or to vote in Arizona and New Mexico. Another restriction that severely impacted some of the Navajo was the inability to get grazing rights for new herds, a result of the Stock Reduction program of 1940. The program effectively prevented anyone who did not have a herd from ever attaining one.

These limitations were not to stand for long. Among the new skills and attitudes the returning veterans brought back with them was a new leadership style that they used on behalf of the tribe. Largely as a result of their new confidence and exposure in the Anglo world, the Navajo (and other Indian tribes as well) began to take steps to remedy the inequities. The Navajo brought lawsuits against the BIA and other local and federal organizations, to remove the antiquated and misguided regulations that had bedeviled the tribe for so many years. By 1948, they had the right to vote in all local, state, and federal elections. Other issues, such as land ownership and transfer, were addressed and solved. Their record of correcting the old injustices, however, reveals only mixed results. Some issues remain problematic: high unemployment, low pay, and the still extant ban on alcohol in any form on the Navajo Reservation.[61]

Many of the Code Talkers made use of their Veteran's Administration (VA) benefits to improve their education and their status. Before their enlistment in the Marine Corps, very few of them had attended college. The VA funds provided educational opportunities in ways they did not possess prior to the war. Some went on to advanced education; Sam Billison became the first Native American to receive a Doctorate of Education from Arizona State University. Along with their education came greater community responsibilities and new accomplishments in politics, education, and business.[62]

One recognition that eluded them for many years was that of their role in World War II, as Code Talkers. The men themselves had kept quiet about their duties in the war, and for twenty–four years there was no acknowledgment of them. It was not until 1969, during a reunion of the Fourth Marine Division in Chicago that the public became aware of the Code Talkers. Lee Cannon, one of the organizers who was aware of the Navajos' contribution to the war effort, suggested that the honorees for that year's function should be the Navajo veterans. The organizing committee approved his suggestion, and he set about to bring public awareness to Code Talkers. It was due in large part to Cannon's efforts to recognize these men that the secret of the Navajo code was finally revealed. Unaware that there were security restrictions, his efforts brought to light much of the information about the program that had previously been restricted. A group of Code Talkers was recognized at the reunion in Chicago and presented with specially designed medallions to commemorate their contributions. For the first time since the end of the war, they received public celebration and recognition.[63]

Shortly after the 1969 reunion, Johnston presented his Code Talker related papers to the Navajo Tribal Museum in Window Rock, Arizona. The curator of the museum showed the papers to the staff of the Doris Duke Indian Oral History project, with the recommendation that the men be interviewed for the project. With the assistance of the museum, sixty–

nine of the surviving Code Talkers were reunited on 9–10 July 1971 and formed the Navajo Code Talkers Association. After the formation of the Association, they participated in many community events, such as parades and public speaking, and by doing so further spread the story of Navajo soldiers and their activities during the war.[64]

The formation of the Association and their public activities brought the accomplishments of the Navajo Code Talkers into the public eye. Subsequently, they received official recognition on several occasions from the federal government and once from a foreign government. In 1981, the Marine Corps, in their first and only official acknowledgment, formed another "All Navajo" platoon, in recognition of the "First 29" that entered boot camp in 1942. Many of the men in the new, 1981 platoon were relatives of the original 1942 platoon. The United States Congress designated 14 August 1982 as National Navajo Code Talkers Day. In 1993 an historical exhibit was opened in the Pentagon, and in 1994 the government of the Northern Mariana Islands honored the Code Talkers.[65]

Official acknowledgment of the Navajo Code Talkers' contributions helped to ease the hurt of being ignored for twenty–four years, but did not entirely remove it. Still eager to have the Marine Corps make a stronger statement in recognition of their contributions, one of the Code Talkers, Thomas Begay, says what most, if not all, of the veterans wish for: "We have all kinds of battle scars, but I don't think we got enough recognition. We did our part, we saved lives, but hardly any of us rose above the rank of PFC. Other language specialists were Staff Sergeant, but not us. It didn't turn out to be very fair."[66]

In today's world of micro–burst transmissions, frequency agile radios, and 128–bit encryption keys, the Navajo code may seem to some observers to be hopelessly antiquated and obsolete, very much like the ice boxes of the same era. There is almost no possibility that such a code could be used today to effectively safeguard communications. At the time that it was used, however, it was not only effective, it was the best combat code that the United States Armed Forces possessed. No other ciphers in use by Allied forces could match the speed, precision, and effective security of the Navajo code.

The Navajo Code Talkers fulfilled the promise of Clayton Vogel's and Philip Johnston's ideas. The program was intended to wage a communications war on the Japanese, bring confusion and uncertainty to the enemy's commanders, and guarantee the security of American messages. Without doubt the Code Talkers accomplished this, and they became the new weapon that the Marine Corps envisioned when the program began in 1942. By bringing the advantages of specialized train-

ing and expertise against the shortcomings of the Japanese, the Code Talkers used their advantage to the greatest extent possible and ensured the success and safety of Marine Corps operations throughout the South Pacific campaigns.

The combat effectiveness of the Navajos was nothing short of exemplary. Besides being excellent general duty Marines, they successfully brought a human weapon forged through recruitment and training to bear upon the Japanese in a way in which the enemy could not respond. From the time that the first Code Talkers arrived on Gaudalcanal in October 1942 until the Japanese signed the Articles of Surrender on the USS Missouri in 1945, they gave the Marine Corps the advantage of a code that was never broken in combat, or indeed, ever broken at all.

## *NOTES*

1. "Communications Security," folder 9, box 2224, GHQ/SCAP Records of Japanese Occupation, April 1947, National Diet Library, Tokyo, Japan.

2. Alison Bernstein, *American Indians and World War II: Toward a New Era in Indian Affairs* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

3. Doris Paul, *The Navajo Code Talkers* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Dorrance Publishing Co., 1973) and Sally McClain, *Navajo Weapon* (Boulder, Colorado: Books Beyond Borders, 1994). Interested readers might also refer to the following: Nathan Aaseng, *Navajo Code Talkers* (New York: Walker and Company, 1992); Kenji Kawano, *Warriors: Navajo Code Talkers* (Flagstaff, Arizona: Northland Publishing Co., 1990); and Margaret T. Bixler, *Winds of Freedom: The Story of the Navajo Code Talkers of World War II* (Darien, Connecticut: Two Bytes Publishing Company, 1992).

4. "American Indians as Communications Linguists," 18–19, file SRH–120, record group 457, files of the National Security Agency, National Archives, College Park, Maryland (hereafter cited as AICL, NA–RG–457).

5. Joel Fant, "Bellmard Led Colorful Life," *Ponca City* [Oklahoma] *News*, 28 March 1948, 8; AICL, 18, NA–RG–457.

6. Roy Wright, "Elmer Jamieson," *Canadian Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: Hurtig Publishers, Inc., 1988), 2:1104.

7. AICL, 19, NA–RG–457.

8. "Comanches Again Called for Army Code Service," *New York Times*, 13 December 1940; Bernstein, *American Indians in World War II*, 46; Diana Nelson Jones, "Unsung Heroes," *Tulsa Tribune*, 1 March 1987.

9. McClain, *Navajo Weapon*, 23–24.

10. "Navajo Code Talkers," file 1535–75, record group 127, records of the United States Marine Corps, National Archives, College Park, Maryland (hereafter cited as NA–RG–127).

11. Memorandum AO–254–erb, file 1535–75, NA–RG–127.

12. Memorandum AP–54–ctw, file 1535–75, NA–RG–127.

13. Memorandum AP–262–dew, 1st endorsement, file 1365–150, NA–RG–127. Lt. Colonel George Hall's comments were not unusual in any way. Throughout the war, the Code Talkers continued to receive excellent fitness reports from most of their commanding officers.

14. Jimmy King interview by Benis Frank, July 1971, Marine Corps Oral History Transcript VE 25.A1 M37, Marine Corps University, Quantico, Virginia, (hereafter cited as Marine Corps Transcripts)

15. Paul, *Navajo Code Talkers*, 16.

16. Kanji Shibata, "Nihongun nayamaseta Navajo tsoku ango-butai" (Tokyo), *Mainichi Shimbun*, 5 January 1986, translated by Shidara Atsushi. Note that all Japanese names are given in Japanese fashion with surname first, then given name.

17. Cosey Stanley Brown, interview by Jones Van Winkle, in *The Navajos and World War II*, ed. Keats Begay, and Broderick Johnson (Tsaile, Navajo Nation, Arizona: Navajo Community College Press, 1977), 54.

18. Memoirs, Philip Johnston Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona, Flagstaff (hereafter cited as Johnston Collection).

19. William McCabe, interview by John Sylvester, July 1971, interview 1171, Doris Duke Collection, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as Duke Collection). McCabe's comments indicate that he perceived himself as something of a leader among the "First 29," and it was he who ordered John Benally to the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) facility. Benally's comments do not contain reference to this story. After this incident, the ONI was fully informed concerning the Navajo code.

20. Ibid.

21. "Call Signs," serial 6, item 14, file 46A, NA-RG-127. Earlier in the war, the terms "Arizona" or "New Mexico" were commonly used to designate a Code Talker transmission.

22. McCabe interview.

23. Bill Toledo, interview by Sally McClain, August 1992, Sally McClain personal collection (hereafter cited as McClain Collection). The author wishes to acknowledge Ms. McClain's kindness in providing this and other interview transcripts used in this article.

24. Every interview listed in this work, in which the interviewee provided his opinion of Navajo/Anglo relations, verifies the absence of ethnic tensions.

25. Al Mertz, interview by Sally McClain, April 1992, McClain Collection.

26. Ibid.

27. Sam Billison, interview by Sally McClain, May 1993; Harold Foster, interview by Sally McClain, October 1991, both in McClain Collection.

28. Billison interview.

29. John Benally, interview by Benis Frank, July 1971, Marine Corps Transcripts.

30. Memorandum MB 116 enclosure (A), file 2185-20, NA-RG-127; Kee Etsicitty, interview by Sally McClain, April 1992, McClain Collection. Mention of the uniform is made by Benally, Toledo, and almost every other man whose interviews are cited in this work.

31. Memorandum 4/47-elb 83084, file 1365-150-50, NA-RG-127.

32. Memorandum AP-361-jbj, file 1535-75, NA-RG-127. King Interview. King makes mention of caucasian Marines who thought they knew the Navajo language, by virtue of growing up on or around the reservation. According to King, however, they only knew the trade language, and invariably failed the testing that determined who would be sent to Camp Elliott for training.

33. Memoirs, Johnston Collection.

34. Peter Sandoval, interview by Nanette Bulow, August 1971, interview 1228, Duke Collection.

35. Alex Williams, Sr., interview by Benis Frank, July 1971, Marine Corps Transcripts.

36. King interview.

37. James M. Stewart, "The Navajo Indian at War," *Arizona Highways* 19 (June 1943), 22-23.

38. Memorandum MB 116, enclosure (A), (C) and endorsements, file 2185–20, NA–RG–127.

39. AICL, 87–88.

40. Paul Blatchford, interview by Sally McClain, October 1991, McClain Collection.

41. Ibid.

42. "Communications Security," GHQ/SCAP records; Toledo interview.

43. Foster interview.

44. Dan Akee, interview by Ernest Bulow, July 1971, interview 1159, Duke Collection.

45. McClain, *Navajo Weapon,* 118, file 76–30 F5, quoted in NA–RG–127.

46. James T. Nahkai, interview by John D. Sylvester, July 1971, interview 1162, Duke Collection.

47. AICL, 38A.

48. Robert W. Young and William Morgan, Sr., *The Navajo Language: A Grammar and Colloquial Dictionary*, 2nd edition (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Thomas Claw, interview by John D. Sylvester, July 1971, interview 1172, Duke Collection.

49. Hisashi Takahashi, "A Case Study: Japanese Intelligence Estimates of China and the Chinese 1931–1945," in *The Intelligence Revolution: A Historical Perspective*, ed. Lt. Col. Walter T. Hitchcock (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988), 203–22.

50. Takahashi, "Japanese Intelligence Estimates," United States Strategic Bombing Survey (Pacific), *Japanese Military and Naval Intelligence Section, G–2, Report Number 97: Japanese Military and Naval Intelligence* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), 6, 18 (hereafter cited as USBBS). The figure of seventeen Army staff officers is given in two different references, one citing the beginning of the war and the other citing the end. I have chosen the former for this citation.

51. USBBS, 40. Takahashi, "Japanese Intelligence Estimates."

52. USBBS, 1, 13.

53. USBBS, 37; Major Hori Eizo, quoted in Alvin D. Coox, "Japanese Military Intelligence in the Pacific Theater: Its Non–Revolutionary Nature," in *The Intelligence Revolution,* ed. Lt. Col. Walter T. Hitchcock, 197–201.

54. Coox, "Japanese Military Intelligence."

55. Ibid.

56. Exhibit B, USBBS,102.

57. Several of the men whose interviews were used for this work mention the Japanese attempts to break into Code Talker transmissions. Joe Keiyoomia, interview by John Sylvester, September 1970, interview 644, Duke Collection.

58. *Hodo Tokshu.* Tanaka Junko, interview by Naoya Ryoji. Translated by Shidara Atsushi, 1989, News Program.

59. Alvin Coox, telephone interview by author, 29 February 1996.

60. Mrs. Jimmie Gleason, interview by Sally McClain, October 1991, McClain Collection. At the time of the interview, Mrs. Jimmie Gleason was a widow.

61. Bernstein, *American Indians in World War II,* 134–51.

62. Billison interview.

63. McClain, *Navajo Weapon,* 230–33.

64. Kawano, *Warriors,* 12. It was during this reunion that the Doris Duke collection interviews and the Marine Corps Oral History interviews were conducted.

65. McClain, *Navajo Weapon,* 235–38.

66. Thomas Begay, interview by Sally McClain, August 1992, McClain Collection.

# *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo*

## *150th Anniversary Symposium*

**February 13–15, 1998**

**Santa Fe, New Mexico**

*"Where the roots of Hispanos took hold in the United States"*

General Manuel Armijo was in his third controversial term as governor of New Mexico when enterprising Americans came West into Mexican provinces to exploit commerce on the Santa Fe Trail. Allying themselves with local businessmen and politicians, they wrested control of many key interests in Taos. Their eyes were focused on Santa Fe by the time United States President James K. Polk pronounced on May 13, 1846 that a state of war existed between Mexico and the United States.

Polk rode the wave of Manifest Destiny, proposing to buy California and New Mexico if he could, but to seize them if a sale was refused. Governor Armijo vowed to defend New Mexico at all costs and then fled to Chihuahua leaving his treasury depleted and his army demoralized. Only three months after war was declared, General Stephen Watts Kearny led 1,700 tired troops into Santa Fe, where Acting Governor Juan Bautista Vigil y Alarid surrendered New Mexico to the United States.

United States military forces marched into Mexico City on September 14, 1847. A proposed treaty to end the war was signed in Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848, but was amended in the United States Congress before ratification by both nations and becoming law on May 30. The fighting was over but important disputes arising from the treaty linger, still waiting for resolution a century and a half later.

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