

Language Arts / Social Studies Lesson Plan

Language & Talking Code

Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings:

OSEU 6.9-12.3 Students will be able to analyze the cause and effect on loss of cultural identity of the Oceti Sakowin.

OSEU 7.9-12.2 - Students are able to identify the positive effects that Tribal people have initiated for social change.



Common Core State Standards:

RL8.4 - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

RI8.3—Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).

SL8.1 – Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clarity.

RH6-8.7-- Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

Introduction:

- Indigenous languages, including Lakota, Dakota and Nakota, have been threatened historically by laws and policies that prevented them from being passed on generationally
- WWI and WWII provided an opportunity for many speakers of Native American languages to become Code Talkers and use their language to save lives and protect vital communications from interception
- All languages are “codes” and sometimes the purpose of language use is to communicate, sometimes the purpose is to prevent communication
- Many Native American code talkers who were not honored in the past, have been recognized for their service in recent years
- Many Lakota, Dakota and Nakota speakers provided code talker services during WWII

Language Arts Lesson:

- Show clip from PBS Evolutionary Origins of Language video at <http://youtu.be/maUN3asrHAo>
 - Whole Class Circle Discussion:
 - Why did people develop language?
 - What are some ways that Language can bring people together?
 - What are some ways that language can separate or exclude people?
 - Have you ever been “excluded” by language?
- Read *The Gullah Language* article,

- What's colonialism?
- What might happen when a colonized region has a "colonizer" language and another language connected with the people being colonized?
- How do you think it would affect both languages and why?
- View Gullah Storyteller Carolyn White video: http://youtu.be/3kY_0IXMeVM
 - How much of the story did you understand?
 - How would this "new language" impact the people who speak it?
 - How would this "new language" impact the people who don't speak it?
- View and discuss stories 1-6 under Boarding School tab at <http://nmai.si.edu/education/codetalkers/>
- (If time) View Chief Robert Joseph: Residential School Experience: http://youtu.be/_D2hk7JEQtI

Social Studies Lesson:

- View Code Talkers Documentary at: <http://youtu.be/3Y0mmVxxr3w>
- Distribute Native Words Native Warriors and Navaho Code Talkers' Dictionary handouts
- View and discuss stories 1-3 under Code Talkers tab at <http://nmai.si.edu/education/codetalkers/>
- Distribute Lakota Code Talking Key handout
 - Students independently develop a 5 to 7 word message to code to the class.
 - Using the key, create the code
 - take time to decode as a class (or as a race individually) 2 or 3 of the codes
- Distribute The Last Lakota Code Talker handout and read together (if time)
- View Senator Tim Johnson's speech honoring Code Talkers (if time) at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQCO10xiwK8>

The Gullah Language

The Gullah language is what linguists call an English-based creole language. Creoles arise in the context of trade, colonialism, and slavery when people of diverse backgrounds are thrown together and must forge a common means of communication. According to one view, creole languages are essentially hybrids that blend linguistic influences from a variety of different sources. In the case of Gullah, the vocabulary is largely from the English "target language," the speech of the socially and economically dominant group; but the African "substrate languages" have altered the pronunciation of almost all the English words, influenced the grammar and sentence structure, and provided a sizable minority of the vocabulary. Many early scholars made the mistake of viewing the Gullah language as "broken English," because they failed to recognize the strong underlying influence of African languages. But linguists today view Gullah, and other creoles, as full and complete languages with their own systematic grammatical structures.



Sea Island Gullahs, about 1930.

Source: <http://www.yale.edu/glc/gullah/06.htm>

Code Talking | INTELLIGENCE AND BRAVERY

The Code Talkers' role in war required intelligence and bravery. They developed and memorized a special code. They endured some of the most dangerous battles and remained calm under fire. They served proudly, with honor and distinction. Their actions proved critical in several important campaigns, and they are credited with saving thousands of American and allies' lives.

AMERICAN INDIAN WARRIOR TRADITION



Buffalo hide painted about 1880 by Oglala Lakota (Sioux) named Young Man Afraid of His Horse. Depicts the actions of traditional warriors in battle. 2

For thousands of years, American Indian men have protected their communities and lands. “Warrior” is an English word that has come to describe them. However, their traditional roles involved more than fighting enemies. They cared for people and helped in many ways, in any time of difficulty. They would do anything to help their people survive, including laying down their own lives.

Warriors were regarded with the utmost respect in their communities. Boys trained from an early age to develop the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical strength they would need to become warriors. Many tribes had special warrior societies, which had their own ceremonies, songs, dances, and regalia that they wore. Usually, a warrior had to prove himself before being asked to join a warrior society. It was a great honor to be chosen in this way.

Despite everything that American Indians had endured in the past, the warrior tradition—the tradition of protecting their people—called many of them to serve in the United States military. They cared about their communities and the lands on which their people had lived for thousands of years. Many of them also served out of a sense of patriotism, wanting to defend the United States. For some American Indians, the military offered economic security and an opportunity for education, training, and world travel.

More than 12,000 American Indians served in World War I—about 25 percent of the male American Indian population at that time. During World War II, when the total American Indian population was less than 350,000, an estimated 44,000 Indian men and women served.

RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

In World War I, Choctaw and other American Indians transmitted battle messages in their tribal languages by telephone. Although not used extensively, the World War I telephone squads played a key role in helping the United States Army win several battles in France that brought about the end of the war.

Beginning in 1940, the army recruited Comanches, Choctaws, Hopis, Cherokees, and others to transmit messages. The army had special American Indian recruiters working to find Comanches in Oklahoma who would enlist.

The Marine Corps recruited Navajo Code Talkers in 1941 and 1942. Philip Johnston was a World War I veteran who had heard about the successes of the Choctaw telephone squad. Johnston, although not Indian, had grown up on the Navajo reservation. In 1942, he suggested to the Marine Corps that Navajos and other tribes could be very helpful in maintaining communications secrecy. After viewing a demonstration of messages sent in the Navajo language, the Marine Corps was so impressed that they recruited 29 Navajos in two weeks to develop a code within their language.



Navajo Code Talkers Corporal Henry Bake, Jr., (left) and Private First Class George H. Kirk operating a portable radio set at Bougainville, an island in the South Pacific, in December 1943. 1



United States Marine Corps Platoon 382, made up of the first 29 Navajo Code Talkers, 1942. 4

After the Navajo code was developed, the Marine Corps established a Code Talking school. As the war progressed, more than 400 Navajos were eventually recruited as Code Talkers. The training was intense. Following their basic training, the Code Talkers completed extensive training in communications and memorizing the code.



Comanche Code Talkers of the 4th Infantry Division, 1941. 3

Some Code Talkers enlisted, others were drafted. Many of the Code Talkers who served were under age and had to lie about their age to join. Some were just 15 years old. Ultimately, there were Code Talkers from at least

16 tribes who served in the army, the marines, and the navy.

All I thought when I went in the Marine Corps was going to give me a belt of ammunition, and a rifle, a steel helmet, and a uniform. Go and shoot some of those Japanese. That's what I thought; but later on they told us differently, you know different style, purpose of why they got us in.—Chester Nez, Navajo Code Talker, National Museum of the American Indian interview, 2004

That was about 1940, and when I got home I said, I found out they was recruiting 20 Comanches who could talk their tribe fluently for a special unit, and I told dad, "I'd like to go."—Charles Chibitty, Comanche Code Talker, National Museum of the American Indian interview, 2004

We were drafted. They made us go. I didn't volunteer.—Franklin Shupla, Hopi Code Talker, National Museum of the American Indian interview, 2004

CONSTRUCTING THE CODE

Many American Indian Code Talkers in World War II used their every day tribal languages to convey messages. A message such as, "Send more ammunition to the front," would just be translated into the Native language and sent over the radio. These became known as Type Two Codes.

However, the Navajos, Comanches, Hopis, and Meskwakis developed and used special codes based on their languages. These became known as Type One Codes.

To develop their Type One Code, the original 29 Navajo Code Talkers first came up with a Navajo word for each letter of the English alphabet. Since they had to memorize all the words, they used things that were familiar to them, such as kinds of animals.

So we start talking about different things, animals, sea creatures, birds, eagles, hawks, and all those domestic animals. Why don't we use those names of different animals—from A to Z. So A, we took a red ant that we live with all the time. B we took a bear, Yogi the Bear, C a Cat, D a Dog, E an Elk, F, Fox, G, a goat and so on down the line.—Chester Nez, Navajo Code Talker, National Museum of the American Indian interview, 2004

Here are some of the words they used:

Letter	Navajo word	English word
C	MOASI	Cat
D	LHA-CHA-EH	DOG
E	DZEH	Elk
I	TKIN	Ice

O	NE-AHS-JAH	Owl
R	GAH	Rabbit
V	A-KEH-DI-GLINI	Victor

See if you can translate the following coded message:

MOASI NE-AHS-JAH LHA-CHA-EH DZEH GAH DZEH MOASI DZEH TKIN A-KEH-DI-GLINI
DZEH LHA-CHA-EH

This is the English translation:

C-O-D-E R-E-C-E-I-V-E-D

Here's how the message is decoded:

MOASI (C-Cat), NE-AHS-JAH (O-Owl), LHA-CHA-EH (D-Dog), DZEH (E-Elk), GAH (R-Rabbit), DZEH (E-Elk), MOASI (C-Cat), DZEH (E-Elk), TKIN (I-Ice), A-KEH-DI-GLINI (V-Victor), DZEH (E-Elk), LHA-CHA-EH (D-Dog)

CREATING SPECIAL CODE WORDS

The Navajos, Comanches, Hopis, and others also had to develop special words for World War II military terms, such as types of planes, ships, or weapons. They were given picture charts that showed them the items. After looking at the pictures, they came up with words that seemed to fit the pictures.

Native word	Literal meaning	Code Meaning
tushka chipota (Choctaw)	warrior soldier	soldier
atsá (Navajo)	eagle	transport plane
paaki (Hopi)	houses on water	ships
wakaree´e (Comanche)	turtle	tank

Well, when they first got us in there for Code Talkers, we had to work that out among our own selves so, we didn't have a word for tank. And the one said it's like a [Comanche words] he said, it's just like a turtle, you know. It has a hard shell and it moves and so we called it a wakaree´e, a turtle. —Charles Chibitty, Comanche Code Talker, National Museum of the American Indian interview, 2004

SENDING MESSAGES IN CODE

On the battlefield, the work of sending coded messages was extremely serious. Being able to keep messages secret could make the difference between winning and losing a battle—or affect how many lives were saved or lost.

Code Talkers did more than speak into a hand-held radio or phone. They had to know how to operate both wire and radio equipment, and often had to carry it on their backs. They had to know how to set up and maintain the electronic communication wires, or lines. Sometimes their messages were broadcast over a wide area, helping to direct bigger operations. At other times, messages related to a smaller group, such as a platoon.

Code Talkers were given the messages in English. Without writing them down, they



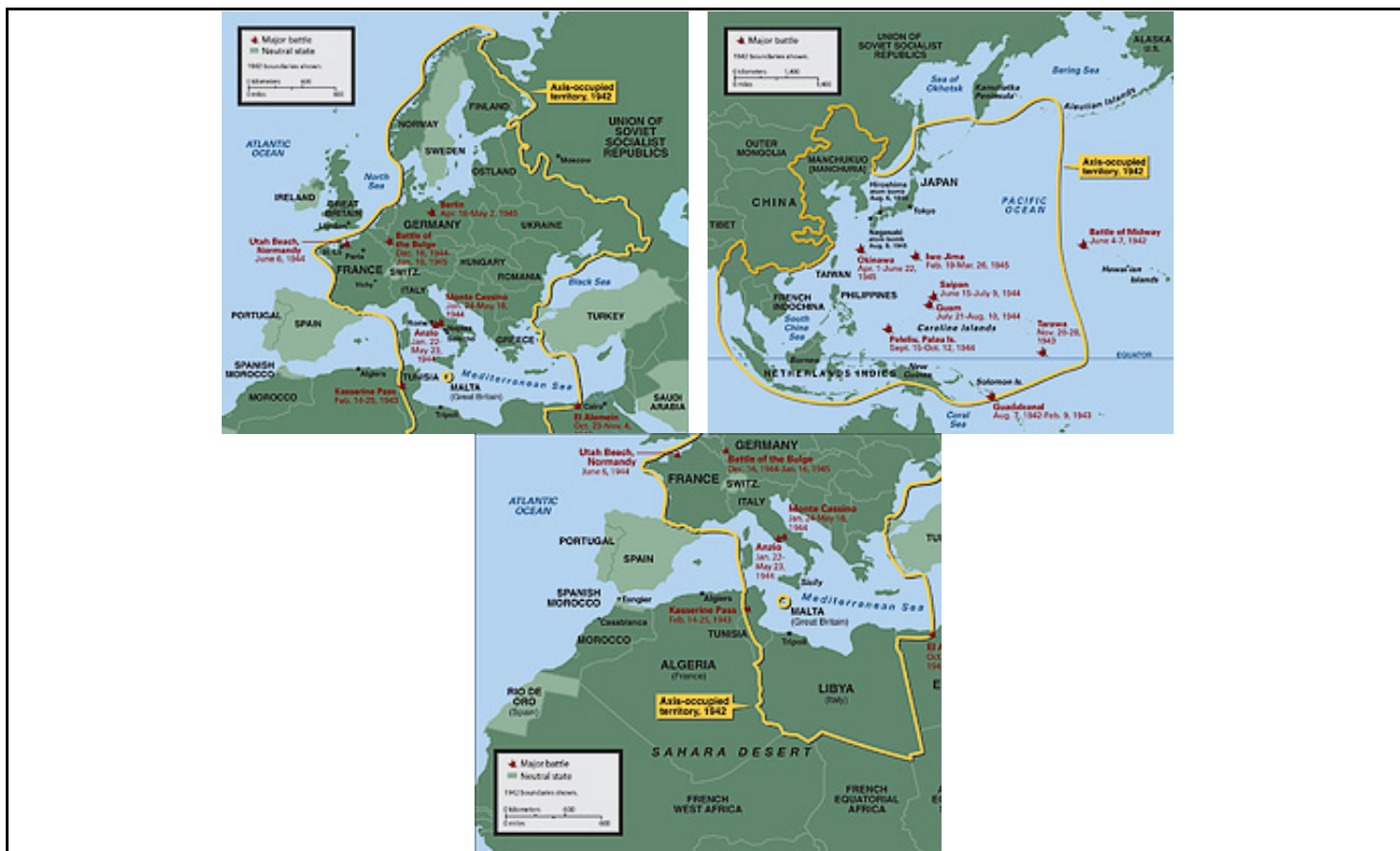
Unidentified American Indian Marine uses a "Walky-Talky" to send communications in the South Pacific, November 1943. 5

translated and sent them to another Code Talker. After the message was transmitted and received, it was written down in English and entered into a message logbook. The Code Talkers also sent messages in English. Messages were only coded when absolute security was needed.

The commanding officer, they give you a message that's written. It's just short talking about how much ammunition and certain map area that Marines are getting killed. They need more machine gun ammunition. You translate that as small as you can. —John Brown, Jr., Navajo Code Talker, National Museum of the American Indian interview, 2004

LOCATIONS SERVED IN WORLD WAR II

The Navajo and Hopi were assigned to service in the Pacific in the war against Japan. The Comanches fought the Germans in Europe, and the Meskwakis fought them in North Africa. Code Talkers from other tribes fought at various locations in Europe, the Pacific, North Africa, and elsewhere.



These maps of Europe, the Pacific Islands, and Africa during World War II show the territory occupied by the enemies of the United States and where some of the important battles occurred. 6

CODE TALKERS REMEMBER THE WAR

Like all soldiers, Code Talkers carry many memories of their war experiences. Some memories are easy to revisit. Others are very difficult. Some veterans do not really like to discuss these memories, while others can more comfortably recall them. They remember how fierce and dangerous some of the fighting was. Some remember when their fellow soldiers were wounded or killed. They remember the noise and the violence of war. Others recall being prisoners of war. Sometimes they have more pleasant memories of different cultures and places that they had never seen before and probably would never see again. They also remember how their American Indian spirituality was important to them during the war.

The, uh Mount Suribachi was on our left side just looming up. Here we started going over aboard the ship going down the net into a landing craft ship, a smaller ship. We took all our gear then we went down there. And we circulate round and round for awhile until they say go. When they say go, all those little bitty landing ships they go together right down to the beach. Before we hit the beach, the uh, officer on that ship he tell us to pray in your own belief. Me I just took out my corn powder as I was told by our medicine man and then pray. So, I think some of the kids join me to pray.

—Sam Tso, Navajo Code Talker, National Museum of the American Indian interview, 2004



Sixth Fleet during the invasion of Iwo Jima, with Mt. Suribachi in the background, 1945. 7

Utah Beach in Normandy was something else. Everybody asked me if I would go through it again, and I said, no, but I could train the younger ones how we used our language and let them go ahead and do it because it was hell.—Charles Chibitty, Comanche Code Talker, National Museum of the American Indian interview, 2004

A cup of hot water in the morning for coffee. A little bowl of soup at noon, then two potatoes at night. That's what you live on. That's what I lived on for three years.—Frank Sanache, Meskwaki Code Talker (discussing the meals provided for him as a prisoner of war), National Museum of the American Indian interview, 2004

We prayed to the sun, stars, whatever. It's our way of keeping in contact with somebody. Our superior or whatever you might call him. That's how we do it.—Franklin Shupla, Hopi, National Museum of the American Indian interview, 2004

CARL GORMAN IN THE WAR



Private First Class Carl Gorman of Chinle, Arizona, at an observation post on the island of Saipan. 8

Carl Gorman joined the United States Marine Corps in 1942 when he learned they were recruiting Navajos. He went through all of the difficult training and was one of the original 29 Navajos who were given the secret mission of developing the Navajo code. Carl answered one of his officers who had asked why Navajos were able to memorize the complex code so quickly: “For us, everything is memory, it’s part of our heritage. We have no written language. Our songs, our prayers, our stories, they’re all handed down from grandfather to father to children—and we listen, we hear, we learn to remember everything. It’s part of our training.” (*Power of a Navajo: Carl Gorman, the Man and His Life*, by Henry and Georgia Greenberg, 1996)

Carl served in four important Pacific battles: Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Tinian, and Saipan. In 1942, Carl was stricken by Malaria, a severe tropical disease, yet he continued to fight. In 1944, Carl was evacuated from Saipan suffering both from the effects of

Malaria and shell shock. Shell shock is the psychological effects of being in extremely stressful and dangerous situations, such as combat. Malaria is an infectious disease caused by a parasite spread through the bite of a mosquito. Malaria was a common disease in the Pacific islands where much of the war against Japan was fought. He had to be hospitalized and took many months to recover.

CHARLES CHIBITTY IN THE WAR

Charles Chibitty was one of 17 Comanche men who served as Code Talkers in World War II. In 1941, when he learned that Comanches were being recruited to speak their language, he volunteered for the United States Army. Mr. Chibitty helped develop the code that the Comanches used and participated in some of the fiercest fighting of the war, including the D-Day landing in Normandy. He attained the rank of Corporal.

Well, I was afraid and if I didn't talk to the Creator, something was wrong. Because when you're going to go in battle, that's the first thing you're going to do, you're going to talk to the Creator.—Charles Chibitty, Comanche Code Talker, National Museum of the American Indian interview, 2004



"Indian Code Talkers," painting by Wayne Cooper depicting Charles Chibitty during the D-Day landings at Utah Beach. 9

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the similarities between the older American Indian warrior traditions and the Code Talkers of World War II?
- What were some of the most difficult challenges the Code Talkers faced in war?

WORKBOOK: TALKING IN CODES

Can you YIL-TAS, TSAH-AS-ZIH, A-KHA, NO-DA-IH, GAH, A-KHA, GLOE-IH, TSAH, HANE-AL-NEH?

That's Navajo code for "code your own message?"

Navajo Code Talkers memorized 17 pages of code as part of their training. Imagine the pressure that was on the Code Talkers. First, they had to develop a code that the enemies would not be able to translate. Then they had to memorize it. In battle, they had to transmit their messages with the utmost care and accuracy under difficult circumstances. Their work saved lives and helped the United States achieve victories.

The Navajo Code Talkers developed their own code dictionary. This dictionary was kept secret for many years and was only made public in 1968. To find a copy of the Navajo Code Dictionary, go to the following website:

<http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq61-4.htm>

Coding messages

Use the Navajo Code Dictionary to code this realistic message. Copy the message in English to your workbook. Then, write the Navajo code version:

"Fierce action at forward position. Intense mortar attack. Request reinforcements immediately!"

Then, in your workbook, make up and write your own coded message to a friend.

1. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of National Archives, 127-N-69899B
2. Photograph by David Heald. National Museum of the American Indian, T000522
3. Courtesy of the Family of Major General Hugh F. Foster Jr. and the 4th Infantry Division Museum
4. Official Marine Corps photograph. Courtesy of the Command Museum, MCRDSD
5. Photographer unknown. National Archives, 127-MN-64081
6. Maps by Shell T. Kimble
7. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of National Archives
8. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of National Archives, 127-MN-83734
9. Courtesy of the Oklahoma State Senate Historical Preservation Fund, Inc.



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Navajo Code Talkers' Dictionary

REVISED 15 JUNE 1945

(DECLASSIFIED UNDER DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE DIRECTIVE 5200.9)

ALPHABET	NAVAJO WORD	LITERAL TRANSLATION
A	WOL-LA-CHEE	ANT
A	BE-LA-SANA	APPLE
A	TSE-NILL	AXE
B	NA-HASH-CHID	BADGER
B	SHUSH	BEAR
B	TOISH-JEH	BARREL
C	MOASI	CAT
C	TLA-GIN	COAL
C	BA-GOSHI	COW
D	BE	DEER
D	CHINDI	DEVIL
D	LHA-CHA-EH	DOG
E	AH-JAH	EAR
E	DZEH	ELK
E	AH-NAH	EYE
F	CHUO	FIR
F	TSA-E-DONIN-EE	FLY
F	MA-E	FOX
G	AH-TAD	GIRL
G	KLIZZIE	GOAT
G	JEHA	GUM
H	TSE-GAH	HAIR
H	CHA	HAT
H	LIN	HORSE
I	TKIN	ICE
I	YEH-HES	ITCH
I	A-CHI	INTESTINE
J	TKELE-CHO-G	JACKASS
J	AH-YA-TSINNE	JAW
J	YIL-DOI	JERK
K	JAD-HO-LONI	KETTLE
K	BA-AH-NE-DI-TININ	KEY
K	KLIZZIE-YAZZIE	KID
L	DIBEH-YAZZIE	LAMB
L	AH-JAD	LEG
L	NASH-DOIE-TSO	LION
M	TSIN-TLITI	MATCH
M	BE-TAS-TNI	MIRROR
M	NA-AS-TSO-SI	MOUSE
N	TSAH	NEEDLE
N	A-CHIN	NOSE
O	A-KHA	OIL
O	TLO-CHIN	ONION
O	NE-AHS-JAH	OWL
P	CLA-GI-AIH	PANT
P	BI-SO-DIH	PIG
P	NE-ZHONI	PRETTY
Q	CA-YEILTH	QUIVER
R	GAH	RABBIT
R	DAH-NES-TSA	RAM
R	AH-LOSZ	RICE
S	DIBEH	SHEEP
S	KLESH	SNAKE
T	D-AH	TEA
T	A-WOH	TOOTH

T	THAN-ZIE	TURKEY
U	SHI-DA	UNCLE
U	NO-DA-IH	UTE
V	A-KEH-DI-GLINI	VICTOR
W	GLOE-IH	WEASEL
X	AL-NA-AS-DZOH	CROSS
Y	TSAH-AS-ZIH	YUCCA
Z	BESH-DO-TLIZ	ZINC

NAMES OF VARIOUS

ORGANIZATIONS	NAVAJO WORD	LITERAL TRANSLATION
CORPS	DIN-NEH-IH	CLAN
DIVISION	ASHIH-HI	SALT
REGIMENT	TABAHA	EDGE WATER
BATTALION	TACHEENE	RED SOIL
COMPANY	NAKIA	MEXICAN
PLATOON	HAS-CLISH-NIH	MUD
SECTION	YO-IH	BEADS
SQUAD	DEBEH-LI-ZINI	BLACK SHEEP

OFFICERS

COMMANDING GEN.	BIH-KEH-HE (G)	WAR CHIEF
MAJOR GEN.	SO-NA-KIH	TWO STAR
BRIGADIER GEN.	SO-A-LA-IH	ONE STAR
COLONEL	ATSAH-BESH-LE-GAI	SILVER EAGLE
LT. COLONEL	CHE-CHIL-BE-TAH-BESH-LEGAI	SILVER OAK LEAF
MAJOR	CHE-CHIL-BE-TAH-OLA	GOLD OAK LEAF
CAPTAIN	BESH-LEGAI-NAH-KIH	TWO SILVER BARS
LIEUTENANT	BESH-LEGAI-A-LAH-IH	ONE SILVER BAR
COMMANDING OFFICER	HASH-KAY-GI-NA-TAH	WAR CHIEF
EXECUTIVE OFFICER	BIH-DA-HOL-NEHI	THOSE IN CHARGE

NAMES OF COUNTRIES

AFRICA	ZHIN-NI	BLACKIES
ALASKA	BEH-HGA	WITH WINTER
AMERICA	NE-HE-MAH	OUR MOTHER
AUSTRALIA	CHA-YES-DESI	ROLLED HAT
BRITAIN	TOH-TA	BETWEEN WATERS
CHINA	CEH-YEHS-BESI	BRAIDED HAIR
FRANCE	DA-GHA-HI	BEARD
GERMANY	BESH-BE-CHA-HE	IRON HAT
ICELAND	TKIN-KE-YAH	ICE LAND
INDIA	AH-LE-GAI	WHITE CLOTHES
ITALY	DOH-HA-CHI-YALI-TCHI	STUTTER
JAPAN	BEH-NA-ALI-TSOSIE	SLANT EYE
PHILIPPINE	KE-YAH-DA-NA-LHE	FLOATING ISLAND
RUSSIA	SILA-GOL-CHI-IH	RED ARMY
SOUTH AMERICA	SHA-DE-AH-NE-HI-MAH	SOUTH OUR MOTHER
SPAIN	DEBA-DE-NIH	SHEEP PAIN

NAMES OF AIRPLANES

PLANES	WO-TAH-DE-NE-IH	AIR FORCE
DIVE BOMBER	GINI	CHICKEN HAWK
TORPEDO PLANE	TAS-CHIZZIE	SWALLOW
OBS. PLAN	NE-AS-JAH	OWL
FIGHTER PLANE	DA-HE-TIH-HI	HUMMING BIRD
BOMBER PLANE	JAY-SHO	BUZZARD
PATROL PLANE	GA-GIH	CROW
TRANSPORT	ATSAH	EAGLE

NAMES OF SHIPS

SHIPS	TOH-DINEH-IH	SEA FORCE
BATTLESHIP	LO-TSO	WHALE
AIRCRAFT	TSIDI-MOFFA-YE-HI	BIRD CARRIER
SUBMARINE	BESH-LO	IRON FISH
MINE SWEEPER	CHA	BEAVER
DESTROYER	CA-LO	SHARK
TRANSPORT	DINEH-NAY-YE-HI	MAN CARRIER
CRUISER	LO-TSO-YAZZIE	SMALL WHALE
MOSQUITO BOAT	TSE-E	MOSQUITO

NAMES OF MONTHS

JANUARY	ATSAH-BE-YAZ	SMALL EAGLE
FEBRUARY	WOZ-CHEIND	SQUEEKY VOICE
MARCH	TAH-CHILL	SMALL PLANT

Lakota Code-Talking Key

Letter	Written Form	English	Spoken Form
A	TA JUSKA	Ant	dah jue-shkah
B	AGUYAPI	Bread	ah – ghue – yah – pee
C	IGMU	Cat	ee – gmue
D	SUKA	Dog	shue – kah
E	WITKA	Eggs	wee– dkah
F	HOGA	Fish	hoh – ghahn
G	WICICALA	Girl	wee – chee – chah – lah
H	TIPI	House	dee – pee
I	TIMA HEL	Inside	dee-mah hayl
J	GNAYE	Joke	ghahyea
K	OCAJE	Kind	oh – chah – zjay
L	WOWICAKE SNI	Lie	woh-wee-chah-kay shnee
M	ITUKALA	Mouse	ee – due – kah – lah
N	PASU	Nose	pah – sue
O	HIHA	Owl	hee – hahn
P	OCAKU	Path	oh – chahn – kue
Q	INILA	Quiet	ee – nee – lah
R	WAKPA	River	wah – kpah
S	WA	Snow	wah
T	HI	Teeth	hee
U	OHLATE	Under	oh – ghlah – day
V	ICICU	Volunteer	ee – chee – chue
W	MNI	Water	mnee
X	LILA WOPIKE	Expert	lee-lah woh-pee-kay
Y	ZI	Yellow	zee
Z	MAKOEKAGE	Zone	mah – koh – ay – chah – ghay

Share |

8+1 6

The Last Lakota Code Talker

By Bernie Hunhoff

Clarence Wolf Guts was not the sort of hero who capitalized on his exploits; he never wrote any books or ran for office, and you could count his speaking appearances on one hand. When we met him in 2007, he was living almost as simply as he did when he was a boy on the Rosebud Reservation in the 1920s.

Much about Clarence Wolf Guts is confusing, beginning with his name. He didn't know what he was called when he was born on Feb. 26, 1924 in the Red Leaf community on the Rosebud Reservation of south-central South Dakota. His birth certificate listed him as Eagle Elk, but his father and uncles soon decided to give him a more unusual name — Wolf Guts.

He learned Lakota from his grandfather, Hawk Ghost, and his grandmother, Hazel Medicine Owl. "My grandfather taught me the facts of life and the Lakota language," he said. "He told me 'you'll go to school and stay in school.' But he also said to speak Indian because 'you'll need it later in life.'"

He and a cousin, Iver Crow Eagle, left the boarding school they attended in St. Francis in the eleventh grade to fight in World War II. "I didn't know if I could make the physical in Omaha," he said. "I had a perforated ear drum. I guess a bug got in there when I was a little kid. My grandmother took tweezers and pulled the bug out, and hurt my ear drum."

But it was 1942, and the U.S. Army wasn't fussy. The cousins were assigned to hand-to-hand combat training in Tennessee, desert exercises in Arizona, and finally to Ranger training at Camp Rucker in Alabama.

Wolf Guts recalled with considerable detail the day he became an important player in the war effort. A captain came to his barracks and asked, "You talk Indian?"

"I am Indian. One hundred percent Indian."

"Well, the general wants to see you."

"Me?" wondered Clarence. "What in the world did I do now?"

The captain told him to get a haircut, take a shower and dress in his best clothes. He also offered tips on military etiquette: stand two feet from the general, salute, say your name, rank and serial number. Then he and the captain went to see the general. "Sir, this is Clarence Wolf Guts from South Dakota," said the captain. "He talks Indian."

Major General Paul Mueller, commander of the U.S. Army's 81st Infantry, poured glasses of whiskey for the three of them, and told Clarence he wanted a man-to-man talk — "none of this 'sir' or 'general.' Just talk to me like a man."

"Can you speak Indian fluently?" the general asked. Clarence said he could "read, write and speak the Lakota Sioux language." Satisfied, the general explained that the Japanese were intercepting vital communications, and he intended to confuse them by sending messages in a Native American language.

Clarence told the general, "I don't want no rank, I don't want no money. I just want to do what I can to protect America and our way of life."

"I've never seen or met an Indian before," the general said. "You guys were first in this country?" "Yes, supposedly we were," replied Clarence.

Gen. Mueller said he liked his spunk. Then he asked if he knew of any other soldiers who spoke Lakota. Clarence said his cousin, Iver, was also at Camp Rucker, whereupon Gen. Mueller exclaimed, "I hit the jackpot!"

Two other Lakota from South Dakota — Roy Bad Hand and Benny White Bear — were also recruited. The four learned how to operate military radios, and they worked with officials to develop coded messages. They developed a phonetic alphabet and assigned military meanings to common words like turtle, tree or horse. Their communications helped the army to move troops and supplies without tipping off the enemy.

Clarence Wolf Guts, just by the good fortune of staying alive, became one of the most acclaimed WWII vets in South Dakota.

Clarence was Gen. Mueller's personal code talker and traveled with him and the 81st as the division moved from island to island in the Pacific, headed for Japan. Iver accompanied the general's chief of staff. Even though they had special protection — two bodyguards were assigned to each code talker — Clarence still shakes when he thinks of the bullets, mortars and bombs.



Clarence Wolf Guts, the last Lakota code talker. Photo by Bernie Hunhoff.



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Frustrated by a language they didn't know, the Japanese made special efforts to find the code talkers. Some code talkers in other units later said that if their outfit was overrun, the bodyguards were expected to shoot the code talkers to prevent their capture by the enemy. Clarence and Iver never spoke of that, but they had enough to worry about.

"How will we ever survive this?" Iver asked Clarence on a particularly harrowing day. Clarence replied, "There is a God. He is protecting us."

Thoughts of the Rosebud Reservation provided some comfort. "I always wondered if they had food on the table, if they're dancing, if they're remembering us," he said.

Clarence started to drink heavily in the army. "We went to war and war is hell," he said. "All I can say is we went to hell and back." He and many others found at least temporary relief in the bottle. "It's easier that way to take another man's life," he said.

As radio operators, they had access to another avenue of escape. "We could tune in the radio to the U.S. and get western music from San Francisco," said the old soldier. "We could hear *You Are My Sunshine* and *Chattanooga Choo Choo*."

They even got some kicks while on duty. Clarence started laughing one day while transmitting a message to Iver. "Are you laughing at me?" asked Iver. "No, I'm laughing at the Japanese who are trying to listen to us," Clarence said in Lakota.

Decades later, a Japanese general admitted that his country's top cryptographers couldn't decipher the code talkers' language. When told it was Native American he replied, "Thank you. That is a puzzle I thought would never be solved."

When the war ended, Clarence and about a dozen other Lakota code talkers returned to the reservation. They were not welcomed home with parades or programs, but he and a few soldiers held their own party, dancing and singing a song of thanks that they'd learned from Indian elders. Asked about it many years later, he said the dance of thanks wasn't for the dancers. "We did it for our people and the people of the United States of America. It was for them, and for the people of the world, because if the Japanese ever took over the world, we would be dead."

Code talkers from other Indian tribes were asked to not talk about their unique roles in the war, perhaps because the U.S. military thought it was a trick worth saving. All written reports about the code talkers were classified. Clarence didn't remember being told to keep his service record a secret, but he and his fellow Lakota soldiers, happy to be home on the Rosebud Reservation, told no one. They didn't think of their services as particularly heroic. Like many veterans, they tried to forget.

"I wanted to be a rodeo man," he said. I rode three bulls, and then I said 'I'll stick to horses.' Those bulls can kill you." He was a bronc rider at rodeos in Valentine, Gordon, Rapid City, White River, Fort Pierre and other West River cow towns.

He earned \$100 on a good weekend, but spent it on alcohol and gas to get to the next rodeo. In 1949 he broke his ankle at Cody, Neb. and soon retired from the arena. A year later he married Allgenia Brown. They had two daughters and a son before divorcing in 1959.

He worked on farms and ranches, on or near the reservation. Heavy drinking kept him from accomplishing very much; and it also caused his greatest sorrow. He attributes both of his daughter's deaths to alcohol, and he says many of his other relatives suffer from alcoholism.

But his life took a turn when the silence surrounding the role of the code talkers was lifted. It began when the military declassified official information about its linguistic trickery. Then Max Collins wrote a book, *Wind Talkers*, about two Navajo code talkers. The book became a hit movie in 2002. The U.S. Congress awarded congressional gold and silver medals to the Navajo soldiers, and the story spread. Over a hundred code talkers were identified from 17 tribes. Unfortunately, by then almost all the other code talkers had died. Clarence Wolf Guts, just by the good fortune of staying alive, became one of the most acclaimed WWII vets in South Dakota.

He received an honorary degree from Oglala Lakota College. He rode in the Rapid City American Legion parade, traveled to Oklahoma City as a special guest at the opening of a traveling exhibit on the code talkers, spoke at the American Indian Veterans Conference in Wisconsin and was honored at a national WWII conference in New Orleans where he was given a red, white and blue "flag" shirt.

South Dakota's congressional delegation — Senators Tim Johnson and John Thune, and Rep. Stephanie Herseth — introduced a bill to award him and the other forgotten code talkers the Congressional Gold Medal. Clarence traveled to Washington with the South Dakota Indian leaders, including Don Lowdner, the national commander of the American Indian Veterans Association of the United States, to testify for the legislation.

Clarence looked as uncomfortable at the senate committee hearing as the senators would look riding a bucking horse. His dark face was wrinkled and creased. His legs were so cramped that he could hardly stand. His hair was white and scruffy. Still, he spoke simple, heartfelt words to the lawmakers. "I am a full-blood Indian, and we do whatever we can to protect the United States because we love America," he said. "Nobody can ever take that away from us."

Editor's Note: In 2008, the Code Talkers Recognition Act was passed, honoring all Native Americans who used their native language to aid communications in World War II. Clarence Wolf Guts died June 16, 2010, at the age of 86.

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