

Fighting the White Man's War: Native Americans and World War II

Walter C. Fleming, PhD
Department Head and Professor
Native American Studies
Montana State University



On the Eve of the War

- Since 1930, the Native population increased to 345,252 (compared to 237,196 in 1900, the nadir)
- Impact of IRA and John Collier, commissioner of Indian Affairs (1933-1945)
 - Indian Self Government
 - Indian self-sufficiency and cultural autonomy

Criticism of Indian New Deal

- Inequities in legal status (Indians not permitted to vote in seven states).
- IRA governments asserted to be "corporate assimilation."
- Gap between Indians standard of living and non-Indians widened as relief appropriations diminished.

“Before the war, the American Indian was America’s outsider, its most isolated minority ... Assimilation seemed far-fetched.”

Historian Gerald Nash

The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War

Impact of WWII ...

In comparison to the 15 million other Americans who served, the Native role may seem insignificant (and difficult to assess).





Indians in the Great War

- In 1917, approximately 1/2 of all Indians were not citizens of the United States.
- Despite this, approximately 12,000 Indians served in the military service WWI.
- This led, in part, to the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act.

John Collier, at the eve ...

- Noted that there were 42,000 Indians eligible for military service.
- Proposed an All-Indian division administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Proposed an all Navajo regiment.




Challenges

- In contrast to policies governing African American inductees, the War Department favored the integration of Indians into white units.
 - Mistrust of the government
 - The Federal Government had the power to force Indians to serve in the military but did not have the power to compel Mississippi to grant Indians the vote.
 - Lack of English skills

Local Control vs BIA

- Local boards took over selective service in July 1941, despite (or because of) BIA success.
- Local boards were inconsistent and unfair in instances. On the Leech Lake Reservation, Chippewa inductees were rejected for having bad teeth (causing one rejectee to comment: "I don't want to bite 'em, I just want to shoot 'em!")



Other challenges

- Taos Pueblo Indians expressed concerns about having to cut their hair.
- Lakota elders over the enlistment age objected to not being able to serve.
- Seminoles in Florida were technically still at war with the U.S. (65 hid out in Everglades to avoid registration.)

Six Nations of the Iroquois

- Challenged the right of the Federal Government's authority to draft their sons.
- Iroquois based their claim on their 1784 Treaty, stating that "we do not consider the Act of June 2, 1924 as applying to the Six Nations Confederacy."
- In *Ex Parte Green*, the courts ruled that the Iroquois were not exempt from the draft.
- "We reach this decision most reluctantly."
- July 1942, the Six Nations declared war on the Axis Powers.

- In March 1941, the BIA announced that it had registered 7,500 Indians.

- By the spring of 1941, the ratio of volunteers to inductees was nearly 15 to 1 for American Indians.

- In all, 44,500 American Indians served (4,500 Navajos and 1,500 Pueblos).



- These figures represent over one-third of all able-bodied Indian men between ages 18 and 30, and among some tribes, the percentage of men in the military was as high as 70 %.



Answering the Call

- The record number of Indian volunteers came from the Fort Peck Reservation, Montana, where of 252 registered, 113 volunteered for duty.
- Collier – *“the Sioux who left this reservation were descendants of the band which whipped Custer.”*
- Navajo requested that special all-Indian training units be established for those who failed the literacy test. Those that passed were integrated into white regiments.

“On the Warpath” with the Saturday Evening Post

“The Nazis for years have directed propaganda at the American Indian, dwelling on his exploitation at the hands of the white man.”

October 24, 1942



“How could the American Indians think of bearing arms for their exploiters?”

“Radio Berlin predicted an Indian uprising in the United States if the descendants of the first Americans were asked to fight against the Axis. Doctor [Third Reich Propaganda Minister Josef] Goebbels soon will have his answer—when our Indians appear on the firing line in Europe.”



Of the 60,000 Indian males between 21-44, approximately 8,800 are serving in the Army, Navy and Marine Corps.

At some reservations half the men have tried to enter the armed forces. Army officials declare that had the percentage of volunteers been as high in the rest of the country as among the Indians, there would have been no need for Selective Service.

The Crow council recently sent President Roosevelt \$10,000 out of tribal funds to help pay for guns and bombs.

The Klamaths in Oregon are erecting, with their own money, a \$150,000 trades school to train braves for work in shipyard and airplane factories.

Many tribes have formally declared war on the Axis.


The Navaho Indians at Window Rock, Arizona, took along their own rifles when they went off to register for Selective Service. They did not understand the workings of the draft. They felt like their Blackfoot brother in the Rockies of Montana, who asked contemptuously, "Since when had it been necessary for the Blackfeet to draw lots to fight?"

--Richard L. Neuberger

The "Chiefs" Goes to War

- When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, there were 4,000 American Indians in the military. By war's end, approximately 25,000 reservation Indians had served:

- Army	21,767
- Navy	1,910
- Coast Guard	121



“A perfect soldier ...”

- *“Indians have better muscular coordination than any other race ... They have the physical qualifications for a perfect soldier.”*
- *“The real secret which makes the Indian such an outstanding soldier is his enthusiasm for fight.”*
– Major Lee F. Gilstrap, Forty-fifth Division



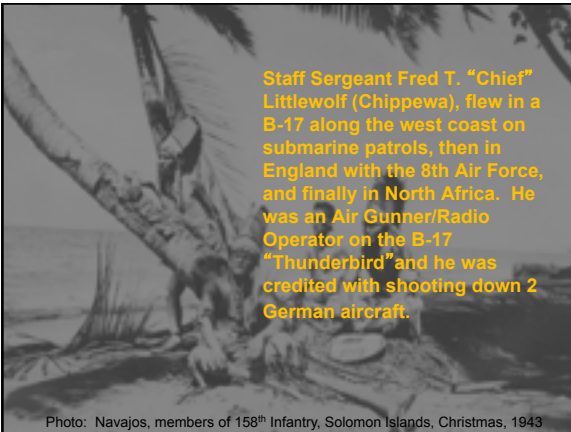
Dan Waupoose, a Menominee chief

“The red soldier is tough. Usually he has lived outdoors all his life, and lived by his senses; he is a natural Ranger. He takes to commando fighting with gusto. Why not? His ancestors invented it ... At ambushing, scouting, signaling, sniping, they’re peerless. Some can smell a snake yards away and hear the faintest movement; all endure thirst and lack of food better than average.”

American Legion Magazine
July 1943

Individual Stories

- Over 300 Indians, including a descendant of the famed Apache chief Geronimo, took part in the defense of Bataan and Corregidor.
- One Sioux soldier, Kenneth Scisson of South Dakota, became an American commando unit’s leading German-killer.
- Captain Harlyn Vidovich (Paiute Shoshone), grandson of Wovoka (creator of the Ghost Dance) flew a P-40 Warhawk with the Flying Tigers in China during World War II.



Staff Sergeant Fred T. "Chief" Littlewolf (Chippewa), flew in a B-17 along the west coast on submarine patrols, then in England with the 8th Air Force, and finally in North Africa. He was an Air Gunner/Radio Operator on the B-17 "Thunderbird" and he was credited with shooting down 2 German aircraft.

Photo: Navajos, members of 158th Infantry, Solomon Islands, Christmas, 1943

Code Talkers



Not all "Code Talkers" were Navajo!

There were 18 tribes utilized as Code Talkers, including the Choctaw, Comanche, Sioux and Crow.

Choctaw Code Talkers

- In the closing days of World War I, eight Choctaws were instrumental in helping the American Expeditionary Force to win several key battles in the Mousse-Argonne campaign, which proved to be the final big German push of that war, as "code talkers."



Comanche Code Talkers

Among the allied troops that came ashore in Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944, were thirteen Comanche in the 4th Infantry Division, 4th Signal Company. Under German fire they laid communications lines and began sending messages in a form never before heard in Europe—coded Comanche. For the rest of World War II, the Comanche Code Talkers played a vital role in transmitting orders and messages in a code that was never broken by the Germans.



Sioux Code Talkers

HOUSE COMMEMORATION NO. 1025
Introduced by Representative Gillespie and Senator Hagen

A LEGISLATIVE COMMEMORATION. Honoring the Sioux Code Talkers in recognition of their great contributions and service to their nation during World War II.

WHEREAS, during WW II our United States military sought a code to allow unoperable secure communications by telephone and radio; and

WHEREAS, the Sioux language, with its extreme complexity, developed into a solution for an unoperable code; and

WHEREAS, eleven American Indian Veterans from South Dakota answered the call of duty for our United States military to use their Indian languages of Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota Sioux as code language during WWII, namely, Edmund S. Jolly of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, Philip "Sioux" LeGarde of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Basilus Purgismond of the Ogala Sioux Tribe, Louis Joseph of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Guy Pevsner of the Sisseton-Winkonko Sioux Tribe, John and Arlo of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and Clay English, Sr. of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Walter L. John of the Santee Sioux Tribe, Simon Sorenson of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Clarence Sings of the Ogala Sioux Tribe, and Charles Whisper of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe; and

WHEREAS, the Sioux Code Talkers transmitted information on troop movements, tactics, orders, and crucial intelligence; and

WHEREAS, Sioux Code Talkers are credited for saving the lives of countless American and allied forces; and

WHEREAS, the Sioux Code Talkers operated under some of the heaviest combat, manned radio networks, worked around the clock, and were highly successful in communications operation; and

WHEREAS, these men performed an important service to the preservation of democracy and deserve recognition which is long overdue;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT COMMEMORATED, by the Seventy-seventh Legislature (2002) of the State of South Dakota, that the South Dakota Legislature recognizes the Sioux Code Talkers and their immeasurable contribution to their nation in a great time of need.



Crow Code Talkers

Barney Old Coyote flew over 50 missions during WWII. With his brother, Henry, Dr. Old Coyote transmitted messages between bombers in the Crow language.



Meskwaki Code Talkers

- Twenty-seven Meskwakis in total enlisted in the Iowa National Guard in 1941 and were activated in the Army's 34th Division.
- Eight members of the tribe served as scouts and Code Talkers for eight companies of their division in North Africa during World War 2.
- Edward Benson - Dewey Roberts - Frank Sanache - Willard Sanache - Melvin Twin - Judy Wayne Wabaunsee - Mike Wayne Wabaunsee, and Dewey Youngbear.

Navajo Code Talkers*



A special group of Navajos were formed during World War II called the Navajo Code Talkers. The Code Talkers used a special code based on the Navajo language to transmit messages, making it futile for the Japanese enemy to decipher American battle messages about the time and place of attack. The complex syntax and complicated tonal qualities of the Navajo language could baffle even the most experienced linguists.

* Navajo Code Talkers.
 Dine Bizaad - Navajo, it's (their) language
 yee - with it, or by means of it
 nidaabaa' - place for of 'he/she/it went to war'
 -lgi - particle that converts the verb nidaabaa' and the phrase as a whole into a noun, or adverbial/adjectival component.

Navajo Code Talkers' Dictionary

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
PHILIPPINES	KE-YAH-DA-NA-LHE	FLOATING ISLAND
RUSSIA	SILA-GOL-CHI-IH	RED ARMY (mas)
SPAIN	DEBA-DE-NIH	SHEEP PAIN

Vocabulary

SABOTAGE	A-TKEL-YAH	HINDER
SABOTEUR	A-TKEL-EL-INI	TROUBLE MAKER
SAILOR	CHA-LE-GAI	WHITE CAPS
SALVAGE	NA-HAS-GLAH	PICK THEM UP
SAT	BIH-LA-SANA-CID-DA-HI	APPLE SITTING
SET	DZEH-CID-DA-HI	ELK SITTING
SIT	TKIN-CID-DA-HI	ICE SITTING
SCOUT	HA-A-SID-AL-SIZI-GIH	SHORT RACCOON
SCREEN	BESH-NA-NES-DIZI	SCREEN
SECRET	BAH-HAS-TKIH	SECRET
SECURE	YE-DZHE-AL-TSISI	SMALL SECURITY
SEIZE	YEEL-STOD	SEIZE
SEMI COLON	DA-AHL-ZHIN-BI-TSA-NA-DAHL	DOT DROP



After 56 years since the end of World War 2, on July 2001, the first group of Navajo Code Talkers (the original 29), who were chosen and developed the code, were given the Gold Congressional Medal of Honor in Washington, DC. Only 5 were alive and only 4 were able to attend. In November 2001, the other approximately 400 Navajo Code Talkers were given the Silver Congressional Medal of Honor in Window Rock, AZ.



Counting Coup

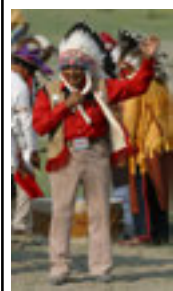
- “Coup” – French for “strike” or “blow”
- Generally, any brave deed performed in battle
- Crow Coups
 - Leading a successful war party
 - Taking an enemy’ s weapon
 - A coup proper – touching an enemy w/ hand or coup stick
 - “Stealing” an enemy’ s horse

Joe Medicine Crow Modern War Chief

- b. Oct. 23, 1913



"When I went to Germany, I never thought about war honors, or the four 'coups' which an old-time Crow warrior had to earn in battle....But afterwards, when I came back and went through this telling of war deeds ceremony... lo and behold I [had] completed the four requirements to become a chief."



- He spent the next few years trooping through Europe and fighting as an infantryman in the 103rd (or "Cactus") Division.
- It was only when he had returned from the war and was recounting his deeds to tribal elders that he realized that he had completed the four actions necessary to be declared a war chief by his tribe: touch a fallen enemy with a coup stick, take an enemy's weapon without killing him, capture a prized horse or horses and bringing back warriors and war deeds.
- "I'd be at the wrong place at the wrong time, and I'd complete these deeds," he said.
- In Medicine Crow's case, the coup stick was a gun that was knocked from his hands during a struggle with an enemy soldier whom he then disarmed, but left alive, thereby completing two deeds in one action. He later crawled through mud and gunfire to retrieve dynamite to detonate an installation of the German artillery known as "Big Berthas."
- And, through sheer random luck, he happened to capture several horses from a group of deserting S.S. officers near the end of the war.

WW II American Indian Congressional Medal of Honor Awardees



They are;
[Jack C. Montgomery](#), a Cherokee from Oklahoma;
[Ernest Childers](#), a Creek from Oklahoma;
[Van Barfoot](#), a Choctaw from Mississippi.

Lt. Col. Ernest Childers, US Army



- World War II Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient
- Creek Indian from Broken Arrow, OK



Honors

- 3 Congressional Medals of Honor
- 30 Distinguished Flying Crosses
- 70 Air Medals
- More than 200 medals and citations for meritorious service

Major General Clarence L. Tinker

- Clarence Leonard Tinker was the first American Indian in U.S. Army history to attain the rank of major general.
- One-eighth Osage Indian, Tinker was born on November 21, 1887, in Osage County, Oklahoma, the former Osage Nation, Indian Territory.
- Died on June 7, 1942, near Midway Island, the first American general to perish in World War II.



Cost of Freedom

- 550 American Indian dead
- 700 wounded
 - Equals 5 % of the Indian fighting force which approximates the dead and wounded for all Americans.
 - Highest Casualty Rates
 - Sioux (one-fifth of total deaths although only 10 % of all Indians in 1940)
 - Blackfeet and Assiniboine

“Call Him Drunken Ira Hayes; He Won’ t Answer Anymore”



PFC Ira Hayes, USMC, Pima
 Born - January 12, 1923 Sacaton, Arizona
 Died - January 24, 1955 Bapchule, Arizona
 Buried in Arlington National Cemetery



“Old Glory Goes Up On Mount Suribachi.” Joe Rosenthal, 1945.

- Racism has long been an obstacle for American Indian people to overcome. The Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 granted full United States citizenship to all American Indians. However, some states still refused to let American Indians vote. Not until 1948 in Arizona and New Mexico, and 1957 in Utah, could American Indians vote in those states.

“This is My War Too!”



Sergeant Clarice Williams



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

Bismarck Agency
Bismarck, North Dakota
July 15, 1947

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

The information given below was obtained from the records of the Personnel Agency, Bismarck, Dakota, United States Indian Service, operated under the Department of the Interior.

In act of Congress, approved June 3, 1939 (52 Stat., 852) authority was conferred upon all commissioners, Indian Reservations, United States of the United States.

Name: Clarice Williams
 Date of Birth: _____
 Place of Birth: Edmore, North Dakota, North Dakota
 Title: Manager - Health
 Name of Indian Reservation: NA

[Signature]
Special Agent

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
Bismarck, North Dakota

September 4, 1948

Miss Clarice Williams
Bismarck, North Dakota

Dear Miss Williams:

I wish to request you wear your hair in the Women's Army Corps. I am sure that you will enjoy an opportunity to the United States as you wear in the uniform of your country. We also would like you to wear Indian Service with you. I believe your contribution to the Army is very great. We are very interested in you and your service.

You are now being considered for the position of Manager. I wish to advise you that you will be required to wear the uniform of the United States Army in the position of Manager. You will be required to wear the uniform of the United States Army in the position of Manager. You will be required to wear the uniform of the United States Army in the position of Manager.

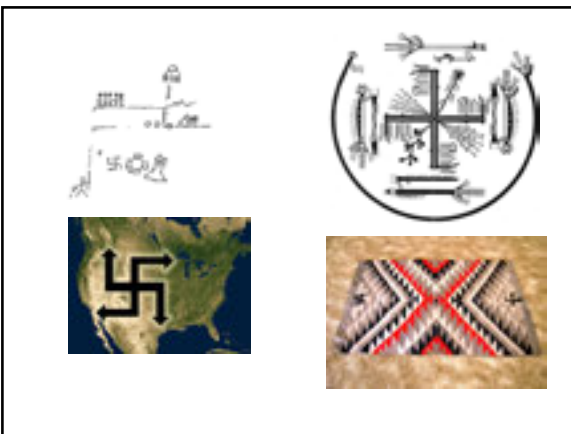
Very truly yours,
[Signature]
Special Agent

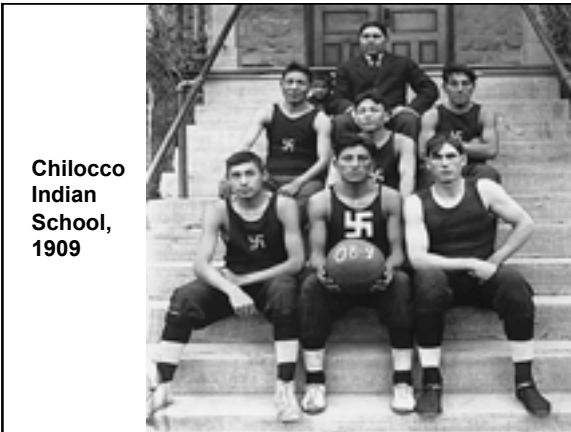
We expect to hear from you in the near future.

BECAUSE THE ABOVE ORNAMENT WHICH HAS BEEN
A SYMBOL OF FRIENDSHIP AMONG OUR FOREFATHERS
FOR MANY CENTURIES HAS BEEN DESECRATED RECENTLY
BY ANOTHER NATION OF PEOPLES,
THEREFORE IT IS RESOLVED THAT HENCEFORTH
FROM THIS DATE ON AND FOREVER MORE OUR
TRIBES RENOUNCE THE USE OF THE EMBLEM
COMMONLY KNOWN TODAY AS THE SWASTIKA
OR FYLFOT ON OUR BLANKETS, BASKETS, ART
OBJECTS, SANDPAINTINGS AND CLOTHING.

Fylfot - "Fill-fought"







After War

- Income levels for Native Americans increased by 250 % between 1940 – 1944.
- Rising Mobility
 - Increased interaction with dominant society
 - Pan-Indian contact

- This was the first large-scale exodus of Indian men from the reservations since 1880s.
- 1st contacts with non-Indian world, in some cases (and the first time meeting an Indian for most non-Indians).
- Native experience was largely a solitary endeavor (assimilationistic in nature).

In the end, ...

- *My wartime experiences developing a code that utilized the Navajo language taught how important our Navajo culture is to our country. For me that is the central lesson: that diverse cultures can make a country richer and stronger.* --Chester Nez, the last surviving member of the Original 29 Navajo Code Talkers

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