

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

# Army Code Talkers

By The United States Government  
Unknown

*In the late 19th and mid-20th centuries, boarding schools were established to house American Indian children with the intent of erasing their heritage and identities. This included their native languages. During World War I, however, the United States realized that they would need American Indian languages to win the war. As you read, take notes on how the United States' military used American Indian languages.*

[1] Napoleon once said, "the secret of war lies in the communications." If he were around today, he might have revised it to "secure communications."

During World Wars I and II, the military needed a quick and reliable means of protecting its radio, telephone, and telegraphic<sup>1</sup> messages from enemy intelligence. American Indian tribes had their own languages and dialects<sup>2</sup> that few outside the tribes understood, and many of their languages were not even written down. Their languages were ideal for the task at hand and fortunately, a large number of American Indians had joined the armed forces.



*"ChoptawCoders" by Unknown is in the public domain.*

## World War I

In France during World War I, the 142nd Infantry Regiment, 36th Division, had a company of Indians who spoke 26 languages and dialects. Two officers were selected to supervise a communications system staffed by 18 Choptaw individuals. The team transmitted messages relating to troop movements and their own tactical plans in their native tongue. Soldiers from other tribes, including the Cheyenne, Comanche, Cherokee, Osage, and Yankton Sioux also were enlisted to communicate as code talkers. Previous to their arrival in France, the Germans had broken every American code used, resulting in the deaths of many soldiers. However, the Germans never broke the American Indians' "code," and these soldiers became affectionately known as "code talkers."

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1. a system of sending messages from a distance along a wire, usually by using signals  
 2. a form of a language that is specific to a region or group of people

## World War II

During World War II, the Army used American Indians in its signal communications operations in both the European and Pacific theaters<sup>3</sup> of operations. Student code talkers were instructed in basic military communications techniques. The code talkers then developed their own words for military terms that never existed in their own native tongue. For instance, the word for “colonel” was translated to “silver eagle,” “fighter plane” became “hummingbird,” “minesweeper” became “beaver,” “half-track” became “race track,” and “pyrotechnic” became “fancy fire.”

- [5] The Army and Marine Corps used a group of 24 Navajo code talkers in the Pacific Theater, who fought in the many bloody island campaigns.<sup>4</sup> In North Africa, eight soldiers from the Meskwaki tribe in Iowa served as code talkers in the 168th Infantry Regiment, 34th Division. In Europe, the 4th Signal Company, 4th Infantry Division, was assigned 17 Comanche code talkers. From the D-Day landings at Normandy in June 1944, to the liberation of Paris and the Battle of the Bulge, they kept the lines of communications secure.

Soldiers from other tribes, including the Kiowa, Winnebago, Chippewa, Creek, Seminole, Hopi, Lakota, Dakota, Menominee, Oneida, Pawnee, Sac, Fox, and Choctaw served during the war. Some were killed and wounded, and at least one was taken prisoner. As a testament<sup>5</sup> to their commitment and strength, the enemy was never able to break the code talkers’ communications.

Many of the code talkers continued in their military careers, serving during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

## Belated Recognition

For many years, the code talkers’ work remained classified.<sup>6</sup> Then on June 18, 2002, Congress passed the Code Talkers Recognition Act to recognize the important part that these soldiers played in “performing highly successful communications operations of a unique type that greatly assisted in saving countless lives and in hastening<sup>7</sup> the end of World War I and World War II.” The act further states that the code talkers operated “under some of the heaviest combat action... around the clock to provide information... such as the location of enemy troops and the number of enemy guns.”

Congress recognized the remarkableness of the code talkers’ achievements, despite societal discrimination against them. The act states that at “...a time when American Indians were discouraged from practicing their native culture, a few brave men used their cultural heritage, their language, to help change the course of history.”

*“American Indians in the United States Army” was released by the U.S. Government and is in the public domain.*

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3. an area involved in war operations
  4. a series of military operations in a specific area and intended to achieve a particular goal
  5. something that serves as evidence for a fact or quality
  6. kept secret from all but a few people in the government
  7. **Hasten (verb):** to cause something to happen sooner; to quicken

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What meaning of “intelligence” is used in paragraph 2 of the text?
  - A. a high mental capacity
  - B. the knowledge of an event
  - C. the ability to understand information
  - D. a group that intercepts military information
  
2. PART B: Which sentence from the article provides an example of the type of intelligence discussed in paragraph 2?
  - A. “Previous to their arrival in France, the Germans had broken every American code used, resulting in the deaths of many soldiers.” (Paragraph 3)
  - B. “The code talkers then developed their own words for military terms that never existed in their own native tongue.” (Paragraph 4)
  - C. “From D-Day landings at Normandy in June 1944, to the liberation of Paris and the Battle of the Bulger, they kept the lines of communications secure.” (Paragraph 5)
  - D. “Congress recognized the remarkableness of the code talkers’ achievements, despite societal discrimination against them.” (Paragraph 9)
  
3. PART A: What is the central idea of the text?
  - A. A secure way of communicating is the most important element in achieving a military victory.
  - B. American Indians made great contributions to United States military operations in the field of communications.
  - C. A code using American Indian words to replace military terms helped keep soldiers safe during wartime.
  - D. American Indians have served in combat positions in the United States military in recent wars.
  
4. PART B: Which TWO sentences are most important to include in a summary of the text?
  - A. Napoleon once said that being able to communicate with the army was the most important element in winning a war.
  - B. The Kiowa, Winnebago, Seminole, and Hopi tribes were just some of the American Indian tribes represented in the military.
  - C. American Indian soldiers created secret codes using their native languages.
  - D. The enemies of the United States were unable to break the American Indian codes.
  - E. Navajo code talkers were used in the Pacific during World War II.
  - F. The American Indian code talkers faced a great deal of discrimination.

5. PART A: How does the organization of the text help readers understand the central idea?
- A. The use of comparison and contrast shows how American Indians were treated differently from other citizens.
  - B. The use of problem and resolution illustrates that effective communication is essential to victory.
  - C. The use of cause and effect provides information about the roles American Indians played in ending U.S. wars.
  - D. The use of chronological order describes the value of American Indians to military efforts throughout U.S. history.
6. PART B: What information in the article supports the answer to Part A?
- A. the discussion about American Indians' contributions to World Wars I and II, followed by an explanation of the importance of those contributions
  - B. the quotation from Napoleon about the importance of communications during war
  - C. the list of American Indian tribes that contributed to different American war efforts
  - D. the explanation that, in World War II, America's enemies were unable to crack the American Indians' code
7. PART A: According to the text, which characteristic of American Indians most influenced the military's decision to recruit them to create secret codes?
- A. Their native languages were unknown outside of their tribes.
  - B. Their training allowed them to break enemy codes.
  - C. They tended to volunteer for service in large numbers.
  - D. They had a high degree of professionalism about their jobs.
8. PART B: Which fact presented in the article supports the answer to Part A?
- A. Members from numerous tribes served in the military during wartime.
  - B. The code talkers were used in many different theaters of operations.
  - C. Military leaders kept information about the codes classified for decades.
  - D. There was no written record of some American Indian languages.

