

0. PHILIP JOHNSTON and the CODE TALKERS - Story Preface


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**Philip Johnston**

- A World War I veteran who had been raised on a Navajo (Nah-vuh-ho) Reservation
- He knew that Choctaw (another Native American language) had been used in WWI
- Under simulated combat conditions, he showed that Navajos could encode, transmit, and decode a three-line English message in 20 seconds. Machines required 30 minutes.



This image, from a slide-share power point about the Navajo Code Talkers by Alissa Hartenbaum, depicts Philip Johnston who conceived the idea of a Navajo-language code system to be developed and used during WWII.

Using Native Americans to transmit military messages to each other had been successfully tried near the end of World War I when 19 [Chocktaws](#) helped the U.S. win the Great War. The concept was also used in World War II, most notably for the D-Day invasion on the beaches of Normandy.

Philip Johnston, however, proposed a *different* idea. He believed Navajo speakers could develop a code they could teach to other “Code Talkers” who would then be sent wherever they were needed. If Philip Johnston’s idea could be implemented quickly, a code could be in place before the end of 1942.

Because Navajo is an unwritten language (follow the link to hear it spoken), sending messages would be simple once everything was in place. Code Talkers would have to memorize the code and use it when communicating with each other.

They would have neither cumbersome encryption machines nor logs which could be stolen by the enemy. They would only have themselves, as a “walking code,” and their radio or telephone equipment.

The concept was ingenious but difficult to initially implement. Each code talker would have to commit the entire code to memory (once it was created) and would have to know it as well as he knew his own name. Only such a thorough understanding of the code would allow a Navajo to instantly translate military communications in difficult combat conditions.

Living in San Diego at the time, Johnston proposed his idea to Lt. Colonel James E. Jones who was stationed seven miles north at Camp Elliott. Their conversation is recorded in *The Navajo Code Talkers*, originally published in 1973 by Doris A. Paul.

*Colonel, what would you think of a device that would assure you of complete secrecy when you send or receive messages on the battlefield?*

Incredulous, Jones responded:

*In all the history of warfare, that has never been done. No code, no cipher is completely secure from enemy interception. We change our codes frequently for this reason. (Code Talkers, page 8.)*

Persuaded to at least consider a demonstration, Jones and other officers were amazed two weeks later when

Navajo civilians instantly translated six commonly used military messages.

By April of 1942, at the time 600 Americans and thousands of Filipinos died during the infamous Batan Death March, Marine recruiters were authorized to visit the Navajo reservation. Instead of the 200 men that had been proposed, however, the commanders in Washington authorized 30. One of the recruits dropped out.

The remaining twenty-nine Navajo recruits (including Carl Gorman who later became a famous artist) developed the code which helped America win the war in the Pacific. They were sworn in at Fort Wingate, New Mexico, near the stunning scenery of Navajo Church.

Later recruits also learned the code, and what it meant to be a Marine, first at Camp Elliot and then at Camp Pendleton.

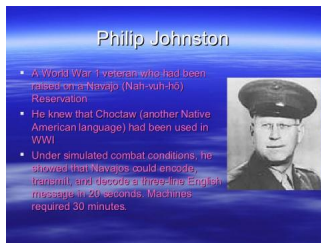
See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/PHILIP-JOHNSTON-and-the-CODE-TALKERS-Wind-Talkers-Navajo-Code-Talkers-in-WWII>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/PHILIP-JOHNSTON-and-the-CODE-TALKERS-Wind-Talkers-Navajo-Code-Talkers-in-WWII>

## Media Stream



### Philip Johnston and His Ideas about a Navajo-Language Code

Alissa Hartenbaum via Slide-Share Net.

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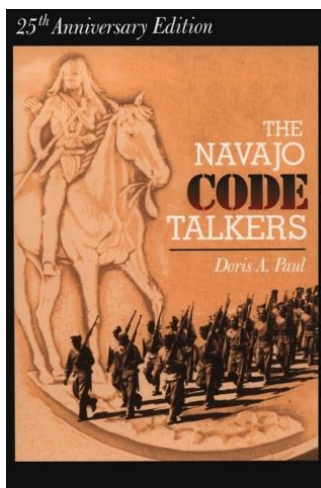


### Chocktaws - Soldiers of WW-I

Image online, courtesy Choctaw Code Talkers Association.

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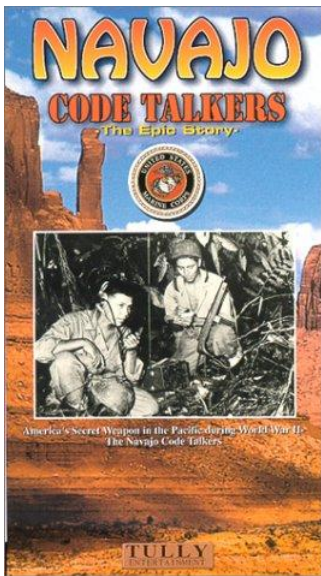
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### Navajo Code Talkers - by Doris A. Paul

Book-cover image online, courtesy Dorrance Publishing and Google Books.

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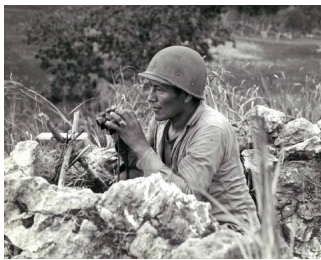


### Navajo Code Talkers: The Epic Story - Video Cover

Video-cover image online, courtesy Amazon.

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### Carl Gorman - Navajo Code Talker

Image of Carl Gorman online, courtesy Arizona State University.

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### Camp Elliot - Code Talkers

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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