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Carl Nelson Gorman was one of the original 29 Navajo Code Talkers. In this photo—taken on the 27th of June, 1944—we see Gorman tracking enemy movements on the island of Saipan. Photo, online via the U.S. National Archives.

Marine drill sergeants are proud of the methods they use to whip recruits into shape. Deprivation (of modern comforts and conveniences) is a trademark control device.

The Navajo recruits, however, were unlike their counterparts. They were already used to deprivation. Many lived in rural log cabins, or hogans, and could survive for days at a time without food. It was nearly impossible for the drill sergeants to “get to” the Navajos.

Philip Johnston, a 40-year-old civilian who knew the Navajo language, wanted to be involved in the Code Talker program as an instructor. He sent a letter asking to become a Marine. His wish was granted, and he was sworn in as a USMC Staff Sgt.

Finished with their basic training, in 1942, Code Talkers were sent to Guadalcanal to participate in a major Allied offensive. Two other Code Talkers remained at Camp Elliott to teach the next batch of Navajo recruits.

The objective of the battle for Guadalcanal was to capture that island before the Japanese could finish building an air strip on it. Hostilities began, in the Pacific, during August of 1942, when the First Marines (including men like Robert Leckie and Sid Phillips) began to implement "Operation Watchtower" (code name for the Guadalcanal Campaign).

Called Henderson Field, after the Marines captured it, the air strip was key to both sides. The Japanese wanted it so their planes had a base from which to disrupt Allied shipments to Australia, New Zealand and other Pacific locations. The Allies needed the airfield to prevent that from happening.

Marines, like Sgt. John Basilone (who won the Medal of Honor for his extraordinary heroism, then was sent home to sell war bonds), helped to keep the airfield in Allied hands.

When the first Code Talkers were sent into combat, at Guadalcanal, how were they received? The Americans thought they were listening to a Japanese exchange:

I called the 7th Marines and before we finished talking, the radio was buzzing, the telephone was ringing, and then runners came to say that the Japs were talking on our frequency and that they had taken over everything... (Navajo Code Talkers, by Nathan Aaseng, page 32)

When the officer-in-charge figured out it was the Navajos speaking to each other, he gave them a chance to compete against another code breaker. Aaseng continues the story:

Then the colonel had an idea. He said he would keep us on one condition: that I could out-race his "white code" - a cylinder-thing that you set a coded message on and send by radio...tick, tick, tick. Then the receiver signals he has received the message and gives the roger on it.

We both sent messages - with the white cylinder and by voice. Both of us received answers. The race was to see who could decode his answer first. He said, "Are you ready?" I said, "I've started already."

"How long will it take you?" I was asked. "Two hours?" "Two hours?! I can get ready in two minutes...and give you a head start," I answered.

How long did it actually take for this new Code Talker to accurately receive and translate his message?

I got the roger on my return message from four units in about four and a half minutes. The other guy was still decoding when I said, "Colonel, when are you going to give up that signal outfit? The Navajos are more efficient." (Aaseng, Navajo Code Talkers, page 32)

Not only were the Navajos more efficient, they were fast-becoming indispensable as they used their code in other Pacific battles. At Cape Gloucester, located at the northwest end of New Britain island (in the Bismarck Archipelago), the 1st Marines fought to capture (then secure) another Japanese airfield.

Engaging the enemy amidst torrential rain, and at great personal hardship, the Marines accomplished their mission at Cape Gloucester. The price of that battle, however, was exceedingly high. Within days, Marine casualties included 310 killed and 1,083 wounded.

As the island-hopping battles continued, in the Pacific, the Navajo Code Talkers were among the first to land on the beach when the Marines arrived at Saipan, in 1944.

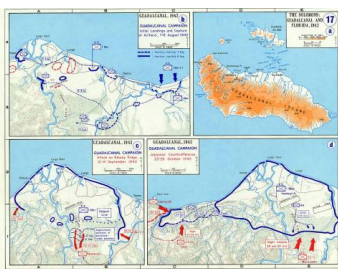
See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/MEET-the-NAVAJO-CODE-TALKERS-Wind-Talkers-Navajo-Code-Talkers-in-WWII)

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See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/MEET-the-NAVAJO-CODE-TALKERS-Wind-Talkers-Navajo-Code-Talkers-in-WWII)

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Media Stream

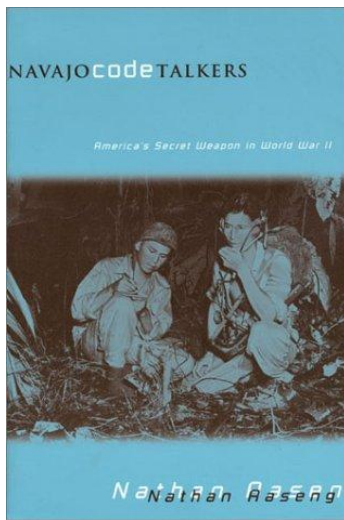


Allied Offensive - Battle Plan of Guadalcanal

Annotated map of the battle for Guadalcanal, online courtesy U.S. Military Academy.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Allied-Offensive-Battle-Plan-of-Guadalcanal>



Navajo Code Talkers - by Nathan Aaseng

Image online, courtesy the openlibrary.org website.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Navajo-Code-Talkers-by-Nathan-Aaseng>



Robert Leckie - The Pacific

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives, Department of Defense.

Quoted passages from Leckie's books, *Helmet for My Pillow* and *Lord, What a Family!*

Other quoted passages from a February 21, 2010 [Star Ledger](http://www.starledger.com) article: "HBO series illuminates N.J. Marine's book on World War II experience," by Mark Dilonno.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Robert-Leckie-The-Pacific1>

Battle of Cape Gloucester - Purpose of the Fighting

Map and quotations from "[Bismarck Archipelago - The U.S. Army Campaign of World War II](http://www.army.mil)," online courtesy the U.S. Army Center of Military History.

Externally linked maps - from *Reports of General MacArthur*, Volume I - in order of appearance, above:

1. Plate 12 - "The United States Superimposed on the Southwest Pacific Area" - at page 41;
2. Plate 1 - "The Japanese Conquests which Isolated General MacArthur's Forces in the Philippines" - at page 1; and
3. Plate 2 - "The Japanese Invasion of the Philippines and the Forces Employed" - at page 5.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Battle-of-Cape-Gloucester-Purpose-of-the-Fighting0>



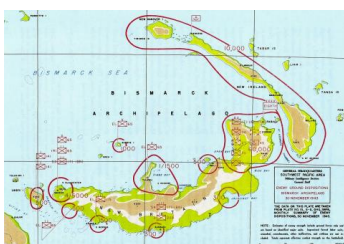
Battle of Cape Gloucester - Marines Land and Fight

Image 127-G-68998 from the U.S. National Archives. Online, courtesy NARA.

Quotations from "[Bismarck Archipelago - The U.S. Army Campaign of World War II](http://www.army.mil)," online courtesy the U.S. Army Center of Military History.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Battle-of-Cape-Gloucester-Marines-Land-and-Fight>



Cape Gloucester - Japanese Positions, 1943 Battle

Map from *Reports of General MacArthur - The Campaigns of MacArthur in the Pacific*, Volume I - Plate 38, at page 130.

Online, courtesy U.S. Army Center of Military History.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Cape-Gloucester-Japanese-Positions-1943-Battle>



Cape Gloucester - Marine Machine Gunners

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Cape-Gloucester-Marine-Machine-Gunners>

Guadalcanal - War in the Pacific, Part 3

Clip from "Shootout - WWII: Guadalcanal," online courtesy The History Channel.

Writers:

Amy Huggins, Arthur Drooker and Darryl Rehr

Series Directors:

Amy Huggins, Brian Coughlin, Douglas Cohen, Laura Verklan and Tony Long

Series originally aired:

2005

Series released on DVD:

A&E Home Video, May 2007

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Guadalcanal-War-in-the-Pacific-Part-3>

Guadalcanal - War in the Pacific - Edson's Ridge

Clip from "Shootout - WWII: Guadalcanal," online courtesy The History Channel.

Writers:

Amy Huggins, Arthur Drooker and Darryl Rehr

Series Directors:

Amy Huggins, Brian Coughlin, Douglas Cohen, Laura Verklan and Tony Long

Series originally aired:

2005

Series released on DVD:

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View this asset at:

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Guadalcanal - War in the Pacific - John Basilone

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Writers:

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2005

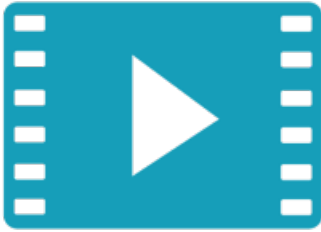
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A&E Home Video, May 2007

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Battle of Cape Gloucester - Wounded Marines

Historical footage, online courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Battle-of-Cape-Gloucester-Wounded-Marines>



Battle of Cape Gloucester - Ill and Exhausted Marines

Historical footage of Marines at Cape Gloucester, New Britain - online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

Quoted passages from *Helmet for My Pillow*, by Robert Leckie.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Battle-of-Cape-Gloucester-Ill-and-Exhausted-Marines0>



Sid Phillips Describes War in the Pacific

Video clip from *The War* - "A Very Fearful Time" (excerpted from Episode 1, "A Necessary War"). Online, courtesy Australian Broadcasting Company ([ABC1](#)).

The War - Directed by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick - available in DVD and supporting book (online, courtesy Google Books).

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Sid-Phillips-Describes-War-in-the-Pacific1>



Sid Phillips - A Fearful Time

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John Basilone Selling War Bonds

Video footage from the U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/John-Basilone-Selling-War-Bonds>