

# Navajo Code Talkers

During World War II, on the dramatic day when Marines raised the American flag at Iwo Jima, the first word of this momentous news crackled over the radio in odd sounding noises. Throughout the war, the Japanese were repeatedly baffled and infuriated by these seemingly inhuman sounds. They conformed to no linguistic system known to the Japanese.

The curious sounds were the military's way to give tactics and strategy that the master cryptographers in Tokyo were unable to decipher. This perfect code was the language of the Navajo tribe. Its application in WWII as a secret system of communication was one of the war's best-kept secrets.



The military was desperate for a way to open clear lines of communication among troops that would not be easily intercepted by the enemy. In the 1940s there was no such thing as a secure line. All talk had to go out onto the public airwaves. Standard codes were an option, but the cryptographers in Japan could quickly crack them. And there was another problem: The Japanese were proficient at intercepting short-distance communications, on walkie-talkies for example, and then having well-trained English-speaking soldiers sabotage the message or send out false commands to set up an ambush.

The solution was conceived by the son of missionaries to the Navajos, a former Marine named Philip Johnston. His idea: station a native Navajo speaker at every radio. Since Navajo had never been written down or translated into any other language, it was an entirely self-contained human communication system restricted to Navajos alone; it was virtually indecipherable without Navajo help.

Without some key or way into a language, translation is virtually impossible. Not long after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the military dispatched 29 Navajos to begin a test program. These first recruits had to develop technical terms of military artillery, since the Navajo had no words for tanks or missiles.

According to Chester Nez, one of the original code talkers: "Everything we used in the code was what we lived with on the reservation every day, like the ants, the birds, bears. Thus, the term for a tank was turtle, a tank destroyer was tortoise killer. A battleship was whale. A hand grenade was potato, and plain old bombs were eggs. A fighter plane was hummingbird, and a torpedo plane a swallow. Hitler was translated to "Crazy White Man."

It didn't take long for the original 29 recruits to expand to an elite corps of 425 Navajo Marines all from the American Southwest. Each Talker was so valuable, he traveled with a personal bodyguard. In the event of capture, the Talkers had solemnly agreed to commit suicide rather than allow America's most valuable war code fall into the hands of the enemy.

The language of the Code Talkers, their mission, and every detail of their messaging apparatus was a secret they were all ordered to keep, even from their own families. It wasn't until 1968, when the military felt convinced that the Code Talkers would not be needed for any future wars, that America learned of the incredible contribution a handful of Native Americans made to winning history's biggest war.

The Navajo Code Talkers, sending and receiving as many as 800 errorless messages at fast speed during the fog of battle, are widely credited with giving U.S. troops the decisive edge at Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa.

# Rosie the Riveter

The War Advertising Council's "Women in War Jobs" campaign was the most successful advertising recruitment campaign in American history.

Rosie the Riveter, a fictional character immortalized by posters supporting the war effort and a wartime song of the same name, helped to recruit more than two million women into the workforce. With millions of American men heading off to war, the nation was desperate for workers to staff the manufacturing plants needed for the war effort.

In December 1941, almost 13 million women were at work. By February 1943, that number rose to 15 million, but there was a need for two million more women by early 1944. The jobs that needed employees were in war production plants and necessary civilian services, as both were essential to support the country. Until this time, millions of American women had never worked outside their homes. The idea of taking any kind of job outside of their homes was a new idea, and like all new ideas, required explanation.



The nation's major magazines devoted their September 1943 covers to portrayals of women in war jobs, creating approximately 125 million advertisements. Womanpower ads, most of which were full pages, were among the interior pages of these magazines. Motion pictures, newspapers, radio, trade press, employee publications, and in-store displays all tied in importantly. Even museums participated, with the Museum of Modern Art in New York conducting a contest for the best magazine covers.



The underlying theme was that the social change required to bring women into the workforce was a patriotic responsibility for women, and an opportunity for employers to support the war economy. Those ads led to a tremendous change in the relationship between women and the workplace. As a result, employment outside of the home became socially acceptable and even desirable.

Rosie's image graced postage stamps and the cover of Smithsonian magazine and before long Rosie the Riveter became a nickname for women working in wartime industries. In May of 2002, Norman Rockwell's Rosie the Riveter painting was auctioned by Sotheby's for nearly \$5 million.

# The Tuskegee Airmen

During World War II, President Roosevelt directed the Air Corps to admit black units, but they were required to serve in segregated flying units. They faced the same racial tensions and discriminations that existed in the United States at that time, but were determined to serve and protect their country in spite of the jaunts and jeers.

Over 1,000 men trained as pilots and earned their wings at the Tuskegee Army Air Field in Tuskegee, Alabama. They flew more than 15,000 missions over North Africa and Europe. The units made ground attacks, patrolled coastlines, and acted as bomber escorts. As bomber escorts, they are credited with never losing an American bomber to enemy aircraft. The red tails of their planes were a welcome sight to the bomber crews that they protected.



The Airmen served in the North African campaign and were transported to Casablanca, Morocco, on the *USS Mariposa*. Their first combat mission was to attack the small but strategic volcanic island of Pantelleria in the Mediterranean Sea in preparation for the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943.

The Tuskegee Airmen were initially equipped with P-40 Warhawks, but later switched to the airplane that they would become most identified with, the P-51 Mustang.

In January 1944, German fighter-bombers raided Anzio but 11 of the Tuskegee Fighter Squadron's pilots shot down enemy fighters, including Capt. Charles B. Hall, who shot down two. The eight fighter squadrons defending Anzio together shot down a total of 32 Germans, and the Tuskegee had the highest score among them with 13.

The squadron won its second Distinguished Unit Citation in May 1944, after attacking German positions on Monastery Hill, attacking infantry on the hill for a counterattack, and bombing a nearby strong point to force the surrender of the German garrison.

Flying escort for heavy bombers, they racked up an impressive combat record. Reportedly, the Luftwaffe awarded the Airmen the nickname, "Schwarze Vogelmenschen," or "Black Birdmen." The Allies called the Airmen "Redtails" or "Redtail Angels," because of the distinctive crimson paint on the vertical stabilizers of the unit's aircraft. Although bomber groups would request Redtail escort when possible, few bomber crew members knew at the time that the Redtails were black.

By the end of the war, the Tuskegee Airmen were credited with 109 Luftwaffe aircraft shot down and destruction of numerous fuel dumps, trucks and trains. The squadrons flew more than 1,500 missions. The Tuskegee Airmen were awarded several Silver Stars, 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 8 Purple Hearts, 14 Bronze Stars and 744 Air Medals.

In all, 992 pilots were trained in Tuskegee from 1940 to 1946; about 445 deployed overseas and 150 Airmen lost their lives in training or combat.



# The American Nisei Regiments

Most are unaware of the Japanese-American participation in World War II. Even though many Japanese were being interned in prison camps such as Manzanar, there were a select few that were enlisted in the US army to help break the language barrier.

Nisei is the term for first generation Japanese-Americans. They were born and raised in America, but with parents who emigrated from Japan. The army interviewed 5,000 Nisei to act as translators in the war. The ones that were accepted were ironically sent to a special school in Minnesota to better comprehend the customs and language of Japan. 3,700 Nisei graduated from the school served in the Pacific, saving many American lives.

During World War II the Nisei quickly earned distinction in combat. They were originally recruited primarily as interpreters, but soon came to serve in other capacities as well. The military also used them as both scouts and combatants.

In the Philippines the Nisei provided a valuable service by translating documents obtained from the enemy, and by the time the United States was ready to invade the Philippines the translations had helped the American army garner a comprehensive understanding of the Japanese plans.

Many Nisei served in Burma and China in the 5307th regiment that was known as "Merill's Marauders" in honor of its commander Brigadier General Frank D. Merrill. Under his command the Nisei served as spies, who traveled to enemy lines to eavesdrop on the enemy plans. The Nisei soon earned the admiration of their comrades for their loyalty and valor.

During the war two all-Nisei regiments were formed. The first was the 100th Infantry Battalion of Hawaii, and it was the only Nisei regiment during the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor. As the war progressed, necessity caused the formation of yet another all-Nisei regiment, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which fought in North Africa, France, and Italy and became known for its fanatic fighting style.

By enlisting in the army the Nisei demonstrated their loyalty to America. Their oath of honor and loyalty to our country and our liberties would contribute to the eventual just treatment and equality of the Nisei. The

government and the people both began to doubt the morality of Japanese internment.

The 442nd became the most decorated active American unit in World War II and suffered the highest casualty rate of any American regiment during the entire war. The members received much recognition, including seven Presidential Unit Citations, 52 Distinguished Service Crosses, and 560 Silver Stars. The 100th Infantry Battalion also earned distinction, and obtained over 1000 Purple Hearts. Included among them was Daniel Inouye, who lost his arm fighting in Italy. He is currently a Senator from Hawaii.

Although Japanese Americans were targets of hostility and persecution at the start of World War II, as the war progressed American attitudes towards them were changed, due in a large part to the distinguishable military service of the Nisei. With the help of the Nisei, America was victorious in several decisive battles including the Battle at Midway, against the Japanese empire.

