

# Navajo Code Talkers oral histories, 1971

## Overview of the Collection

<b>Collector</b>	United States. Marine Corps
<b>Title</b>	Navajo Code Talkers oral histories
<b>Dates</b>	1971 (inclusive) 1971 1971
<b>Quantity</b>	0.25 linear foot
<b>Collection Number</b>	Ms0504
<b>Summary</b>	This collection consists of eight oral histories of the Marine Corps Navajo Code Talkers of World War II. The histories are bound in a volume, and include eighteen photographs of code talkers working during the war.
<b>Repository</b>	<a href="#">University of Utah Libraries, Special Collections.</a> Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library University of Utah 295 South 1500 East Salt Lake City, UT 84112-0860 Telephone: 801-581-8863 <a href="mailto:SPCreference@lists.utah.edu">SPCreference@lists.utah.edu</a>
<b>Access Restrictions</b>	Twenty-four hour advanced notice encouraged. Materials must be used on-site. Access to parts of this collection may be restricted under provisions of state or federal law.
<b>Languages</b>	English

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## Historical Note

The history of the Marine Corps Navajo Code Talkers dates from 1942-1945. In 1942, a white man by the name of Phillip Johnston, who had lived on a Navajo reservation for many years of his life, conceived an idea that he thought might help the war. He believed that the Navajo language, a verbal, rarely-written language, could be used as part of a code that would enable messages to be sent freely over the radio. An experiment was done in front of top Marine officials to prove that the system would work. After the go-ahead, Navajos volunteered or were recruited, and about 320 eventually contributed as code talkers. The code involved speaking in Navajo, but using substitute words for some things, as would a regular code. It was found that the Navajo speakers could put a message into the code, send it, and translate it faster than any other code system being used at that time. As far as is known, the Japanese were never able to break the Navajo code.

## Content Description

This collection consists of eight oral histories of the Marine Corps Navajo Code Talkers of World War II. The histories are bound in a volume, and include eighteen photographs of code talkers working during the war. The interviews were done 9-10 July, 1971, at Window Rock, AZ, where a reunion was being held. Benis M. French, representing the Marine Corps Headquarters in Washington, D.C., performed

the interviews. Because the code talkers were sent to separate places of the world during the war, each person's oral history details different experiences.

## Use of the Collection

### Restrictions on Use

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## Administrative Information

### Related Materials

See also the Doris Duke Oral History Project (Ms 417) located in the Manuscripts Division of Special Collections.

### Processing Note

Processed by Lora Crouch in 1988.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

Container(s)		Description
Box	Volume	
1	1	<p>Sidney Bedoni</p> <p>Bedoni was with the Marine Corps from 1942-1946. He was only seventeen when he joined, but he lied about his age. After boot camp and code talk training, he became a paratrooper. The Marines sent him to Guadalcanal, Vella Lavella, and eventually into Saipan and Okinawa. He remained a Private First Class and was never offered a promotion. After he returned home, he went through a traditional tribal purification ceremony to purge his mind of his war experiences.</p>
1	1	<p>Alex Williams</p> <p>Williams joined the Marines in 1943 but did not become a code talker until 1944. He was very active in this assignment, sometimes sending messages night and day. Later, he was given charge of the communications journal. While at war, Williams carried a small bag of corn pollen, which Navajos consider sacred. He states that his son also took one to Vietnam and came back safely.</p>
1	1	<p>Jimmy King, Sr.</p> <p>Navajo Code Talkers oral histories, 1971</p> <p><a href="http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv32742">http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv32742</a></p>

Container(s)	Description
	<p>King came from Shiprock, New Mexico. He volunteered for the code talker's service and was in the second group of Navajos trained for the project. He helped the other Navajos learn the code and became a communications instructor. During the interview, he described the language used and why some men were rejected from being code talkers. The code talkers were not kept out of danger during the war. King was sent to Peleliu where rough fighting was taking place. He received a bad heart due to the experience. King states that he loves the Marine Corps. He is now a successful businessman.</p>
<p>1 1</p>	<p><b>Wilfred Billey</b>          Billey, from Farmington, NM, joined the Marines in 1943. He received training at Camp Pendleton and Camp Elliott. Some of it was advanced infantry training as well as code training. Afterwards, he was sent to New Zealand and then Tarawa, but was not used much as a code talker there. He was then sent to Hawaii and was used constantly as a code talker. When the war was over, he was sent to Japan. In the end, he states that he used more English than Navajo in his code work during the war. He was discharged in 1946.</p>
<p>1 1</p>	<p><b>Carl Gorman</b>          Gorman tells of being with a group of code talkers when they ran out of food. There were no supplies for several days.</p>
<p>1 1</p>	<p><b>Paul Blatchford</b>          Paul Blatchford, from Tuba City, AZ, joined the Marines as a volunteer. He trained as a code talker, and because he had operated a two-way radio for the Bureau of Indian Affairs before the war, he taught the men how to keep the radios in repair. He also taught radio operation and advance code for nine months. Once, he asked for a promotion and a transfer, but did not get either, so he went AWOL. He returned after a time, and Phillip Johnston was very angry with him and so sent him to be disciplined by a high-ranking official. Blatchford was told that he could volunteer for the Fifth Reconnaissance, which he did. In five weeks he was promoted to Corporal. He was sent to Iwo Jima. During the invasion, he told the boats to zig zag, not to go straight in as they had been. They all escaped being hit.</p>
<p>1 1</p>	<p><b>John Bennally</b>          John Bennally, a native of Fort Defiance, was twenty-four when he joined the Marines. He was one of the first group of twenty-nine to be recruited, and so helped establish the original code. He was assigned to stay in the United States and recruit other Navajos. He chose them from other units of service according to how much education they had. They passed the same physical tests that the other Marines did. Bennally was not sent overseas until 1944. He helped train men on Hawaii and then was sent to Okinawa. He operated the radio from the first day that he was there, and was never told if the messages were top priority or secret. He states being glad he was in the war because afterwards he went to college on the G.I. bill.</p>
<p>1 1</p>	<p><b>Judge W. Dean Wilson</b></p>

Container(s)	Description
	<p>W. Dean Wilson, now a judge of the courts of the Navajo nation, was a Staff Sergeant in the US Marine Corps Reserve. He joined when he was sixteen, in 1942, and was one of the original twenty-nine code talkers. He had trouble with Morse code at first, but the other codes he learned easily. He was sent to Tarawa and was involved in heavy fighting. As a code talker, he had to carry extra loads of batteries for the radios, which were heavy. He was treated well by the other Marines and helped with kitchen and guard duty as well as code talking. After the war, Wilson stayed with the Marines. He served in the Korean War. He retired in 1967.</p>

## Names and Subjects

### Subject Terms :

Code and cipher stories

Navajo Indians--Interviews

World War, 1939-1945--Participation, Indian

World War, 1939-1945--Personal narratives, American

### Corporate Names :

United States. Marine Corps--History--World War, 1939-1945

### Form or Genre Terms :

Oral histories

Finding aid prepared by Lora Crouch  
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