

American Indians

DOUBLE VICTORY

A Multicultural History of
America in World War II

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THE ORIGINAL AMERICANS

From Battlefields to Ceremonies

Flashback at Bataan: The Long Walk

ON DECEMBER 7, 1941, Keats Begay was at Clark Field in the Philippines. He and other soldiers were getting ready for lunch when they heard the news that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. Then, as they were eating, they heard planes approaching. "Pretty soon we could see them," Begay recalled. "They were coming closer and closer. They were in rows, like groups of ducks in the sky." Then bombs began falling. "Our battery squad of about 12 soldiers was taking care of the ammunition when one of the bombs struck them. There were only cries heard. Later, when we looked, there was nothing left. All the soldiers were blown to pieces. We had to search for the body pieces."

After four days of fierce combat, the U.S. forces regrouped on the Bataan Peninsula, where they were joined by Filipino fighters. Finally, on April 9 the defenders surrendered. Of the 40,000 soldiers captured, 6,700 were Americans, 21 of them Navajos like Begay. The Japanese ordered the prisoners to march. "They did not tell us where we were going," said Begay. As the pris-

oners made their trek, they became thirsty but were not allowed to drink from wells along the road. "They chased one of the soldiers back when he tried to go to a well. If a soldier hesitated to cooperate with the Japanese guards, they just stabbed him with bayonets; then they left the body lying there." Begay saw "lots of dead bodies lying along the road. The bodies really stank, since it was very hot."

The brutal Bataan experience reminded Begay of what had happened to his tribe in 1863, when his people were marched by federal troops at bayonet point. "To me," he stated, "it was the same as the Long Walk, in which the poor Navajos had to march over 400 miles to Fort Sumner [the Bosque Redondo Reservation in New Mexico], and many lost their lives during that walk. Many of our elders still relate those stories to us. It was the same in the Bataan Death March. The poor soldiers had to march to the prison camp, and too many of them lost their lives."¹

"Why Fight the White Man's War?"

Begay was already in the army when the war began. But young Indians still on the reservations now had to face the question: should they fight for the United States, even cooperate with the draft? "There may be some justice in the Indians' opposition to registration," commented a reservation official. "They feel that this country was taken away from them by white men and for that reason they should not now be required to help in case of invasion or attack." Indeed, ever since the arrival of the English colonizers at Jamestown in 1607, native peoples had been losing their lands. "We had lost our own country to foreigners," said a Navajo.² Now they were being asked to help defend their conquerors. "Why do you have to go [to war]," an Indian mother asked her son. "It's not your war. It's the white man's war."³ Was it ^{country?} ^{No} ^{any} ^{their}

"Many people ask why we fight the White man's war," said Navajo Raymond Nakai, who enlisted in the marines. "Our answer is that we are proud to be American. We're proud to be

American Indians. We always stand ready when our country needs us."⁴ A soldier from the Celilo Tribe expressed a similar view: "My grandparents fought against the White man. They were defending their homes. In many respects we have been treated badly. In this land which once was ours, we are poor. Many people treat us as outcasts and inferiors. Yet our conditions have slowly been improved. The reservation schools are good. We are trained for trades and farming. The government defends our rights. We know what under Nazism we would have no rights at all. We are not Aryans and we would be used as slaves."⁵

In their declaration of war against Germany, Japan, and Italy, the Iroquois League announced: "It is the unanimous sentiment among the Indian people that the atrocities of the Axis nations are violently repulsive to all sense of righteousness of our people. This merciless slaughter of mankind upon the part of those enemies of free peoples can no longer be tolerated." The Cheyennes condemned the Axis nations as an "unholy triangle" seeking to "conquer and enslave the bodies, minds and souls of all free people."⁶ The Navajo Nation declared: "We resolve that the Navajo Indians stand ready . . . to aid and defend our government and its institutions against all subversive and armed conflict and pledge our loyalty to the system which recognizes minority rights and a way of life that has placed us among the greatest people of our race."⁷ In 1943, a Navajo soldier wrote to his tribal council: "I don't know anything about the white man's way. I never went outside the reservation. . . . I am proud to be in a suit like this now. It is to protect my country, my people, the head men, the chiefs of my people. . . ."⁸

A year after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the *New York Times* reported that 8,800 of the 60,000 Indian males between the ages of twenty-one and forty-four were in military uniform, a higher rate than for the general population. Indian eagerness for military service prompted the *Saturday Evening Post* to editorialize: "We would not need the Selective Service if all volunteered like Indians."⁹ Many Indians, reported Indian Affairs commissioner John Collier,

saw the international conflict as "more than just another war." To them, the war was a "life-and-death struggle for the survival of those things for which they [had] been unceasingly waging an uphill fight for many generations." Collier noted that a recent "rebirth of spirit, a reviving of the smoldering fires of local democracy, and a step toward economic rehabilitation" were helping Indians see "the possibilities in a world of the Four Freedoms."¹⁰

Praise for Indian patriotism and fighting prowess sometimes reflected stereotypical images from the frontier days. "The red soldier is tough," the *American Legion Magazine* declared. "Usually he has lived outdoors all his life, and lived by his senses; he is a natural Ranger. He takes to commando fighting with gusto. Why not? his ancestors invented it. . . . At ambushing, scouting, signaling, sniping, they're peerless. Some can smell a snake yards away and hear the faintest movement; all endure thirst and lack of food better than average." Similarly, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes noted how the "inherited talents of the Indian" made him "uniquely valuable — endurance, rhythm, time, coordination, sense perception, an uncanny ability to get over any sort of terrain at night, and . . . an enthusiasm for fighting."¹¹

Altogether, forty-five thousand Indians served in the United States armed forces, or more than 10 percent of the Indian population. Eight hundred Indian women joined the Wacs and Waves. Constituting 20 percent of the Forty-fifth Army Infantry Division, known as the "Thunderbird," Indian soldiers fought in North Africa, Italy, and France. The casualties for this unit were extremely high — 3,747 dead, 4,403 missing, and 19,403 wounded.

There were Indians who fought with great distinction. More than thirty of them were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, while another seventy received the Air Medal. Despite severe wounds, Lieutenant Ernest Childers single-handedly destroyed three German machine-gun emplacements and opened the way for the advance of his battalion in Italy. In 1944, this Creek soldier was awarded the nation's highest decoration for bravery in battle — the Medal of Honor. After the attack on Pearl Harbor,

General Clarence L. Tinker was given command of the air force in Hawaii. A member of the Osage tribe, he was the first Indian to reach the rank of general in the United States Army. At the Battle of Midway, Tinker personally led the squadron of bombers that spearheaded the attack. Killed in action, he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his heroism.¹²

Indians also left the reservations to work in the defense industries. "By war's end," reported historian Alison Bernstein, "40,000 persons — one half of the able-bodied men who had not entered the military and one-fifth of the women — had left Indian lands for war-related work." Indians were becoming an urban population: in 1940, less than 5 percent of the entire Native American population lived in cities; ten years later, this figure jumped to 20 percent. Trained in sheet metal and mechanics by reservation schools, Indians were applying their skills in shipyards, airplane plants, and tank factories. "The Indians are playing an important role in the agricultural and industrial production program of the war," observed Commissioner Collier. "Skilled Indian workers are to be found scattered throughout important war industries in almost every section of the country. They are doing highly technical jobs in aircraft industries on the west coast, in Kansas, and in New York state. . . . More than two thousand Navajos were employed in the construction of a large ordnance depot in New Mexico. On this particular project it was most interesting to see long-haired, fullblood Indians tying steel, operating jack hammers, doing welding, and handling some of the most difficult machine operations."¹³

Like "Rosie," Indian women became riveters. In Everett, Washington, Harriette Shelton Williams, daughter of the chief of the Snohomish Indians, went to work at Boeing Aircraft Corporation. The May 26, 1944, *Boeing News* published a picture of her dressed in her traditional clothing, with the caption: "She isn't dressed this way every day on her Boeing job, but fellow-workers say there's no mistaking the royal bearing of Princess Hiahl-tsa even when she wears a work-a-day garb."¹⁴ Many other Indian

women became janitors and office workers. Irene Stewart left the Navajo reservation to clean administrative offices in Bellemont, Arizona, and then went to Flagstaff to work in the defense industry.¹⁵ Similarly, in 1943 Agnes R. Begay went to work for the Bellemont Corporation at the Ordnance Depot in Flagstaff. "I was selected to work in the personnel office and help people get jobs, especially Navajos who had no formal education."¹⁶

In the war industries, however, Indian workers often received wages lower than that of whites. At Fort Wingate, Navajos demanded the same pay for the same work. "We do not understand," the Navajo tribal council protested, "how a Navajo can be a member of the union paying dues to secure the same benefits and be forced to accept a lower pay rate."¹⁷ The union denied the tribe's demand for equal wages, arguing that the Navajos did not pay taxes on their land and hence belonged to a special category of workers that deserved lower pay.

In the cities, Indians also experienced social discrimination. During the war, more than four thousand Indians moved to the Twin Cities; there they inhabited the first Indian ghettos. In 1944, the House Committee Investigating Indian Affairs found that Indians were being "forced to live in unwholesome surroundings or in a dirty, filthy city."¹⁸ "I came to the Twin Cities from the reservation in 1941, the year Pearl Harbor was attacked," wrote Ignatia Broker of the Ojibway. "I went to work in a defense plant and took night classes in order to catch up on the schooling I had missed. . . . Although employment was good because of the labor demand of the huge defense plants, Indian people faced discrimination in restaurants, night clubs, retail and department stores . . . and worst of all, in housing."¹⁹

But Broker also saw that the urbanization of Indians during the war had created a new pan-Indian identity. The migrations to the cities had given Indians a new sense of cross-tribal "brotherhood." In the war plants, Indian workers started social groups that brought together members of different tribes such as the Ojibway, the Dakota, the Arikara, the Menominee, the Gros Ventres, the Cree,

and the Oneida. These peoples had made "the trek to something new," explained Broker. "And because we, all, were isolated in this dominant society, we became an island from which a revival of the spirit began."²⁰

This kind of spiritual revitalization also occurred among Navajos fighting in faraway Pacific islands.

A Secret Weapon: An Unbreakable Code

Almost 20 percent of all reservation Native Americans in the armed services came from the Navajo Nation in the Southwest.

The reasons that forty-five hundred Navajos left their reservation to fight in the war were rooted in their history. Since the seventeenth century, when they acquired sheep from the Spanish, the Navajos had been herders. After the annexation of the Southwest at the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848, they found themselves under American rule. In 1863, Kit Carson's troops destroyed Navajo orchards and sheep herds. According to one tribal account, "those who escaped were driven to the Grand Canyon and the Painted Desert, where they hid in the rocks like wild animals, but all except a few were rounded up and caught and taken away to Hualte [Bosque Redondo]."²¹

"A majority of the Navajos," according to a member of the tribe, "didn't know the reason why they were being rounded up and different stories went around among the people." Many feared that they "would be put to death eventually." When they arrived at Bosque Redondo, they were told by the government to irrigate the land and become farmers. The general in charge of removal explained that the Navajos had to be taken away from "the haunts and hills and hiding places of their country" in order to teach them "the art of peace" and "the truths of Christianity." On their new lands, they would acquire "new habits, new ideas, new modes of life" as they ceased to be "nomads" and became "an agricultural people." In 1868, however, the government changed its policy and informed the Navajos that they were to be resettled on a reserva-

tion in their original homeland and issued sheep to replace the stock Kit Carson's forces had destroyed.²²

Decades later, during the 1930s, Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier decided that many of the sheep on the Navajo reservation should be destroyed.²³ Government studies had determined that the reservation had half a million more livestock than their range could support, and that this excess had produced overgrazing and severe soil erosion. Unless the problem of erosion was controlled soon, Collier feared, the sheep-raising Navajos would experience great hardship and suffering.²⁴

While Collier was concerned about Navajo survival, he was also worried about white interests. He had received reports that silt from erosion on Navajo land was filling the Colorado River and threatening to clog the Boulder Dam. Under construction during the early 1930s, the dam was designed to supply water to California's Imperial Valley and electricity to Los Angeles. The United States Geological Survey had studied the silt problem and located its origin on the Navajo reservation. Unless sheep overgrazing and hence erosion were controlled, the silt would block economic development in the Southwest.²⁵

In order to protect the Boulder Dam from this problem, Collier initiated a stock reduction program on the Navajo reservation. What made the Navajos nervous was the fact that they depended on sheep for their livelihood. "Remember what I've told you," a Navajo instructed his son, "you must not lose, kill or give away young ewes, young mares and cows, because there's a million in one of those. So when anyone who comes to you and tells you to let the herd go. You mustn't let the herd go, because as soon as you do there'll be nothing left of them. The herd is money. It gives you clothing and different kinds of food. Everything comes from the sheep."²⁶

But the federal agents took their sheep. One herder saw Collier's program as a "war" against the Navajos. "I sure don't understand why he wants us to be poor. They reduce all sheep. They say they only goin' to let Indians have five sheep, three goats, one cattle,

and one horse." Another Navajo recalled bitterly: "A great number of the people's livestock was taken away. Although we were told that it was to restore the land, the fact remains that hunger and poverty stood with their mouths wide open to devour us."²⁷

Actually, the stock reduction program was unnecessary as an erosion control program. During the 1950s, scientists would do further research on silt settlement and determine that overgrazing was not the source of the problem.²⁸ But the Navajos had been telling this to the New Dealers all along. They argued that erosion had been reported as early as the 1890s and was related more to drought than to overgrazing. Trying to explain this cycle of dry weather and subsequent erosion to the government experts, Navajos had pointed out that the 1930s were also years with little rain and predicted that the range would recover when the drought ended. They reminded the government bureaucrats: "We know something about that by nature because we were born here and raised here and we knew about the processes of nature on our range."²⁹ This wisdom was carried in a Navajo song:

House made of dawn,
House made of evening light,
House made of the dark cloud . . .
Dark cloud is at the house's door,
The trail out of it is dark cloud,
The zigzag lightning stands high upon it . . .
Happily may I walk.
Happily, with abundant showers, may I walk.
Happily, with abundant plants, may I walk.

Grass had always returned along with the rain, Navajos knew as they searched the skies for dark clouds in the dawn and evening.³⁰

By the time of Pearl Harbor, the federal government's stock reduction program had made the Navajos dependent on wage income: nearly 40 percent of their annual per capita income of \$128

came from wages, mostly from temporary government employment.

Military service during World War II offered an escape from this economic hardship. "I went to war," said Wilson Keedah, "because there were no jobs on the reservation."³¹ Eugene Crawford also saw the marines as a way out of squalor. "One of the recruiters tried to attract me into signing up by saying that becoming a marine would be much better than staying on the reservation," he recalled. "As a marine I could learn new skills, travel, and meet interesting people. What did it for me was the dress uniform on the poster. Crisp white hat and gloves, brass buttons against the deep blue material, boy he looked sharp! I wanted a uniform just like that."³²

Pushed by poverty, the Navajos were also pulled into the military because they possessed something uniquely valuable to the U.S. military — their tribal language. In February 1942, Philip Johnston proposed to the marines that the Navajos be used to transmit military messages through a secure code. The son of a missionary raised on a Navajo reservation, Johnston had played with young Navajos and had become fluent in their language.³³ He explained that the Navajo was "the only tribe" in the U.S. that had not been "infested" with German students during the preceding twenty years. "These Germans, studying the various tribal dialects under the guise of art students, anthropologists, etc., have undoubtedly attained a good working knowledge of all tribal dialects except Navajo. For this reason the Navajo is the only tribe available offering complete security for the type of work under consideration."³⁴ Johnston's proposal was approved and quickly transformed into a program: in May the first group of Navajo code talkers was sent to San Diego for training.

The base commanding officer, Colonel James L. Underhill, gave a speech to the first class of Navajo marines. "The rest of us in the Marine Corps are Americans," he declared, "but our Americanism goes back at most no more than 300 years. Your ancestors ap-

peared on this continent thousands of years ago — so long ago that there is no written record of them. Through your ancestors, you were Americans long before your fellow Marines were Americans. . . . I know that you will fight like true Navajos, Americans, and Marines.”³⁵

“The main reason for [enlisting] us Navajos was our language,” explained Cozy Stanley Brown. “They liked to use our language in war to carry messages. So we were taught how to use the radio. We had to do that in a hurry. I guess that was why they forced us to complete the training in eight weeks. Then, we got together and discussed how we would do it. We decided to change the name of the airplanes, ships and the English ABC’s into the Navajo language. We did the changing. For instance, we named the airplanes ‘dive bombers’ for ginitsoh (sparrow hawk), because the sparrow hawk is like an airplane — it charges downward at a very fast pace.”³⁶ In their signals, many Navajo words were given military meaning: “a-ye-shi” (eggs) for bombs, “jas-chizzie” (swallow) for torpedo plane, “ne-as-jah” (owl) for observation plane, and “jay-sho” (buzzard) for bomber. The Navajo language could not be understood or mimicked by the Japanese military. Many words had sounds that could be heard only by a native speaker, and its verb forms were so complex that they had to be composed by someone who had grown up with the language. The Navajo code talkers had developed what came to be admired by the U.S. military as “the unbreakable code.”³⁷

The Navajos who were selected to be code talkers had to be proficient in both their tribal language and English. Minimally, they had to have a tenth-grade education. The code talker, explained Navajo Jimmy King, had “to spell ‘artillery,’ and then ‘bivouac,’ ‘reconnaissance,’ and then words like ‘strafing’ and some other military terms. . . . You had to know the English language well enough that you could spell whatever you were saying, and the terms accurately so that you can carry on your code talking efficiently and effectively.”³⁸ Accuracy was a necessity. “There are thousands and thousands of lives involved,” said King. “Let’s say bombing, or

strafing, shelling so many xxx yards from a certain point. Suppose he gets one digit wrong. Now, that digit might mean shelling, strafing, bombing of our own men.”³⁹

The Navajos chosen also had to have courage and a high pain threshold. As an instructor, King told his students: “And you think you love your country well enough that you would lay your life down. Supposing you were captured tonight and they had a Sumari [torture], just cutting inch by inch and making you tell what [a Navajo] word meant. And then [you] begin to bleed. The minute you saw that blood begin to run, are you gonna tell? Of course not.”⁴⁰ The code talkers understood the sacrifice they might have to make. “When I was inducted into the service,” said David E. Patterson, “one of the commitments I made was that I was willing to die for my country — the U.S., the Navajo Nation, and my family. My [native] language was my weapon.”⁴¹

But embedded in the deployment of that weapon was an irony. “When I was going to boarding school,” said Teddy Draper, Sr., “the U.S. government told us not to speak Navajo, but during the war, they *wanted* us to speak it!”⁴² Recalling how he was not allowed to speak Navajo in his boarding school, Keith Little said he viewed his code-talking contribution as a fight for Navajo “freedom,” including the cultural right to have their tribal language.⁴³

The code talkers wanted to preserve their identity as a distinct people with their own culture and language, and they also wished to be accepted as Americans. However, to many fellow soldiers on the battlefields, the Navajos did not look American. “In Okinawa,” Roy Notah said, “I was almost shot by soldiers on my own side, who mistook me for the enemy when I came out of a cave. One of my white buddies came out just in time to save me.”⁴⁴ At Guadalcanal, Eugene Crawford was watching soldiers unloading supplies when he noticed a crate of canned orange juice and decided to help himself to some juice. “I walked over to their supply depot and started searching,” he recalled, “when suddenly I felt cold, hard steel in my back and somebody growling, ‘Get out of there, you damn Jap!’ I tried to explain that I was with the Raider unit lo-

cated down the beach, but he pushed that .45 in my back, told me to put my hands up and move out." At the command post, a lieutenant identified Crawford as "one of ours." "It still puzzles me," Crawford remarked, "that they thought I was Japanese."⁴⁵ While fighting at Palau, Jimmy King and his fellow Marines were in the "black, dark" jungle at night, feeling their way around. To identify one another, they used a password. "And I run into one fellow and he asked me for the password," he recalled. "I think it was 'lame duck' — anything that had an 'L' in it. [The Japanese had difficulty pronouncing words with "L" in them, making this letter sound like an "R."] So, I said my password, but he said, 'Say it again.' I said, 'lame duck.' He said, 'You-son-of-a-bitch.' Then he stuck a bayonet right in my back — ready to kill me." King dove into a foxhole, and found a friend, Sergeant Curtis, who shouted, "What the hell is going on?" King quickly answered: "They think I'm a Jap. They want to kill me."⁴⁶

But the Navajo code talkers were in the Pacific because they had been chosen to fight the Japanese. They hit every beach from Guadalcanal to Okinawa. Altogether there were 420 Navajo code talkers, sending and receiving reports from the field commanders. Their secret messages carried information on enemy gun locations, movements of American troops, artillery fire, plane bombardments, and the sites of enemy entrenchments and strategic lookout points.

In February 1945, the Navajo code talkers participated in one of the most important Pacific battles — the fight for Iwo Jima. "It just seemed like the island was burning early in the morning," one of them recalled. "This shelling was coming down just like rain." Teddy Draper never forgot the fear he felt during the beach landing: "There were a lot of machine guns going along all the way around [Mount] Suribachi about 50 feet apart from the bottom to the top. Just flying shells, all over. You couldn't see. And I thought, 'I don't know if I'm going to live or not.'"⁴⁷ During the first hour of fighting, Thomas H. Begay "was scared, very scared." He vividly remembered: "Mortars and artillery were landing everywhere, but I wasn't hit."⁴⁸

The battle focused on Mount Suribachi, a vital observation post for the Japanese defense of the island. On the third day of the battle, February 23, Paul Blatchford was pinned down by Japanese machine-gun fire. "We were flat on our backs, when we saw the flag go up on Suribachi," he said. "All the white boys started yelling, 'Hey Chief, it's all over now!' I said, 'Not here!'" Blatchford could see the American flag waving in the distance, but his unit was still under heavy enemy fire. On Suribachi itself, Navajo code talker Teddy Draper never forgot that moment of victory. "I was close to 100 feet down on the north slope when Sergeant Ray told me to send a message that Suribachi had been secured and at what time and get it down to headquarters. I didn't see the flag go up, but I passed the message when it happened."⁴⁹ The message read: "Naastosi Thanzie Dibeh Shida Dahnesta Tkin Shush Wol-lachee Moasi Lin Achi." When the message was received on a ship, a Navajo translator announced that the American flag was flying over Mount Suribachi.⁵⁰

During the first two days of the invasion, Navajo code talkers worked around the clock, sending more than eight hundred battle messages without an error. Signal officer Major Howard Conner later declared: "Without the Navajos the marines would never have taken Iwo Jima."⁵¹

Finally, the marines had won the battle of Iwo Jima. The fight for this island of only eight square miles was extremely bloody: nineteen thousand marines were wounded and seven thousand killed. The American dead included four Navajo code talkers — Peter Johnson, Paul Kinlahcheeny, Sam Morgan, and Willie Notah. Among the wounded was code talker James Gleason. "Jimmy and Paul Kinlahcheeny were running messages when they got hit," Mrs. Malissa Gleason said. "Machine gun fire caught both of them. Paul was hit right across the stomach, and Jimmie was shot in the left ankle. Paul's last words to Jimmie were, 'Tell my folks.' Jimmie crawled into a shell hole, and that was where he saw the flag being raised on the mountain."⁵²

As Navajo and white soldiers fought together against a common

enemy, many of them came to know one another. "One of my friends was in the same foxhole as I was," said Navajo soldier Sidney Bedoni. "He was a Mormon from Salt Lake City, Utah. He gave me his parents' address and a note to them if he got shot."⁵³ Charlie Miguel recalled how he had learned to drill and handle a rifle in a boot camp, where he found himself among whites for the first time in his life: "Every evening we drank beer, ten cents a bottle, and had nice chow. I got along all right with the white boys. I didn't know much about English, but I got along all right."⁵⁴

The Indian "Hero" of Iwo Jima

Away from his reservation for the first time in his life, Ira Hayes also got along with his fellow white marines. A Pima of Arizona, he belonged to an agricultural people. Before the arrival of Columbus in the New World, the Pimas had developed an irrigation system to bring the water of the Gila River to their fields. But their way of life changed when the United States pursued its "manifest destiny" by declaring war on Mexico. During this conflict, the Pimas became an American ally, supplying food to the troops in the Southwest. After the war, the federal government recognized the Pimas as the "first appropriators" of Gila River water and guaranteed them an annual allocation of water from "the normal flow of the Gila." However, white settlers began to occupy lands upriver and built dams to divert the water to their farms. The lands of the Pimas became dry, and their crops failed; by 1942, economic prospects on the reservation had become grim for young men like Hayes.⁵⁵

Only nineteen years old when Pearl Harbor was attacked, Hayes was employed as a laborer in the internment camp for Japanese Americans that had been set up on his reservation. In the fall of 1942, Hayes joined the marines. The service offered him employment and also an opportunity to fight for his country. Hayes saw himself as a Pima American. Like most members of his tribe, his parents were Presbyterians, and his family name reflected

a long history of assimilation. When the cavalry took a census of western Indians in the nineteenth century, they had given the Pimas English, Scottish, and Irish names.

Hayes's letters to his parents offer a detailed personal account of his life as a marine. In a letter from the training camp in San Diego, he wrote on August 29, 1942: "Gee, this is the first time I had to write. . . . There are quite a lot of Indian boys here. I met Marvin Jones and we are in the same platoon. We are in the same tent with another Indian boy from New Mexico. . . . They gave us a Marine haircut 1 1/2 inches long and you should see me." He signed his letter: "From a guy who's proud he's a Marine and in his country's service."

On September 8, Hayes wrote home about his drill instructors: "One of them is always fooling with me. Asking me where is my tomahawk and bows and arrows. Then he'll start to make fun of the Indians and we'll argue. He's trying to put Marvin and the other Indian boys from Oklahoma and myself on the boxing show Saturday night. He says he's trying to prove that Indians can fight better than most white men." His fellow white marines were curious about Hayes as an Indian. On September 20, he wrote home: "The fellows are swell chums and we lay awake way into the night and they keep shooting questions at us Indians and we have to answer. They don't believe me when I tell them that I can't speak my own language but that I understand it."

In order to regain the dignity of his people, Hayes believed Indians had to make sacrifices in the war. In a letter to his parents, January 28, 1943, he wrote: "I guess you heard about the death of Richard Lewis of Sacaton, who was killed with the Marines in the South Pacific. We Pimas can be proud that he carried the fight straight to the dirty, sneaking Japs. The Indians can expect lots of casualties because there are so many of us in this war." Four months later in the Pacific, Hayes again remembered Lewis in a letter to his parents: "I'm glad you sent me the clipping about the Memorial Service in honor of Richard." He described how he had "wiped tears of pride" from his eyes when he read that Lewis was

the "first Pima Indian killed in the War for the Four Freedoms." Hayes believed the sacrifice had a specific purpose: "Us Indians have so much to be thankful for, and so much to gain in this war."⁵⁶

But the war would require terrible sacrifices on the battlefield. At Bougainville, Hayes and his fellow marines faced the ferocity of the tropical land. A marine described the "jungle" as the "practically impenetrable 'green hell' of popular imagination," varying from mangrove swamps to vine-draped forests with an overwhelming "dark stench." In the overgrown density, fighting was intense, intimate. Ed Castle vividly recounted the firefights: "They were firing from every direction. We didn't get a chance to return their fire for a while until we could observe where it was coming from. We just kept firing at the treetops. One was firing at Hayes and me. . . . I ducked down in my foxhole and hollered over to a friend of mine, Sam Taylor, to ask if he could see where he was shooting from. I gave him the direction . . . and it wasn't but a few minutes until he spotted the discharge from his rifle. Sam shot and brought him down. He was huge! He had campaign ribbons on his chest."⁵⁷

Close-contact combat led to grisly behavior on the battlefield. Marine William Faulkner had to recover some bodies of American soldiers. "When we reached the spot where they were buried," he said, "we found the Japs had dug up the bodies and driven wooden stakes through their arms, chests, and legs, pinning them to the ground."⁵⁸ Marines also mutilated the corpses of Japanese soldiers. They sawed gold teeth from their mouths to make into chains and necklaces; they cut off heads and dried out skulls for souvenirs. "In the mutilations," biographer William Bradford Huie wrote, "Hayes recognized that some of the fendishness came from difference. He doubted his buddies would mutilate Germans in the same fashion. To Hayes the Japs were 'dirty bastards'; to his buddies they were 'dirty yellow bastards.' Not once, in letters or conversation, did Hayes call a Jap *yellow*."⁵⁹

In early 1944, Hayes returned home on furlough. The Pimas gathered to honor and pray for him. "I'm proud of my people," he

told them. "I'm proud I'm a Christian. I'm proud of my parents." He promised: "When this war is over I'm going to repay all of you for the fine things you've given me." Hayes shared a dream of a bright future for Indian-white relations: "I think some fine things are coming out of this war. Everybody is going to understand one another better. White men are going to understand Indians; and Indians will understand white men. I want to tell you I've had some of the best white buddies anybody ever had. They have been friendly and faithful . . . and I know I have friends in them who would die with me."⁶⁰

After his visit home, Hayes was shipped back to the Pacific front, where he participated in the invasion of Iwo Jima. There Hayes had an experience that dramatically changed his life. After the marines had finally taken Mount Suribachi, a small group of soldiers raised an American flag on the summit — an action photographed by Sergeant Lou Lowery. A short time later, when Joe Rosenthal of the Associated Press climbed to the top of Suribachi, he found a movie cameraman preparing to film a staged second raising of the flag. Hayes had not been present when Lowery took his photograph. However, he happened to be nearby when Rosenthal was getting ready to take a photograph of the reenactment. Hayes was carrying a telephone line to be connected to an observation post and was asked to join the soldiers preparing to pose for the photograph. Navajo code talker Teddy Draper recalled what happened. "I was about 100 feet away when I saw the men struggle with that long piece of pipe. I saw the lieutenant look around for an extra man to help, then he yelled, 'Ira Hayes! Ira Hayes!' Then two more of the guys jumped up to help them, and the big flag went up. It was a sight to behold."⁶¹

At this second flag-raising, Rosenthal took photographs and sent one of them on the wire news service. Unaware that the picture actually depicted a staged raising of the American flag on Mount Suribachi, editors of newspapers and magazines across the country published it. Instantly, Rosenthal's photograph became the most famous news image of World War II — six marines, face-

less, their bodies bent forward beneath an American flag unfurled in victory.

When Hayes was identified as one of the flag-raisers, he suddenly became a war hero. Three of the six men in the photograph had been killed in subsequent fighting. Hayes along with Rene Gagnon and John Bradley were flown back to the United States to help lead the Seventh War Loan Drive. Hayes knew the photograph was a fraud. He had not been there for the real flag-raising, and he also tried to make another important correction: the marine at the foot of the pole, who had been officially identified as Henry Hansen, was actually Harlon Block. But Hayes was told by his commanding officer that both men were dead and that he should keep quiet about the matter.⁶²

In Washington, D.C., Sergeant W. Keyes Beech was the official guard for the bond tour. He explained to Hayes: "Chief, this is strange duty for you, and I know how you feel. You got to understand that a bond tour is show business. Show business is make-believe. You make up stories, and it's all right because it's for a good cause. And in this business you're representing the Marine Corps." Hayes asked: "What about this crock o' shit about the flag-raising?" Beech answered: "You let me and the reporters tell that story, Chief. You forget it and smile and nod your head."⁶³

Following orders, Hayes went off on the bond tour, and the reporters told the story. "The tattered American flag once planted on the summit of Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima, fluttered today from the flagstaff of the Capitol," the Associated Press reported. "With full military ceremonies, it was hoisted by the three survivors of the little group of fighting men who carried it to the top of the peak of the volcanic mountain."⁶⁴

The bond drive began with a visit to the White House, where Hayes and his fellow heroes presented a poster of the famous flag-raising to President Harry Truman. From New York City, Hayes wrote to his family on Waldorf Hotel stationery, May 10, 1945: "I can't hardly realize I'm here in the most famous hotel in the world. . . . Tomorrow is a big day. We go to the Roxy Theater in

the morning to make an appearance. Then we go to Times Square to unveil the monument of the flag-raising on Iwo Jima which is 25 feet high. And then the dinner to be held in our honor in the evening. Then we leave for Philadelphia and Boston. . . ." The experience was exhilarating for this Pima lad from an arid Arizona reservation. In Chicago, Hayes attended a dinner in his honor sponsored by the National Congress of American Indians. Assuring Indians that "good things" would come out of this war, Hayes declared: "White men are gonna understand Indians better, and it's gonna be a better world."⁶⁵

But the tour also had irritating and disturbing moments. Reporters asked Hayes questions like: "How'd you get a name like Ira Hayes, Chief? I never heard of an Indian with a name like that."⁶⁶ Such insults angered Hayes and aggravated the distress he felt about his unearned celebrity status. He shrouded himself in silence. Asked to speak at one of the bond dinners, Hayes muttered: "I'm glad to be in your city an' I hope you buy a lot of bonds."⁶⁷ During the tour, Hayes drank heavily and became an embarrassment to the Marine Corps. General A. A. Vandegrift complained to Beech: "I understand your Indian got drunk on you last night?" Shortly afterward, Hayes was abruptly relieved of his bond-tour duty and sent back to the front. The press reported that the "brave Indian" wanted to return to military action in the Pacific.⁶⁸

After the peace, an emptiness filled Hayes. He had hoped his people would be able to take care of themselves on their own land. But the war had made no difference in their lives: their reservation still had little water to irrigate the fields. Unemployed and depressed, Hayes drifted into alcoholic delirium and was frequently jailed for drunkenness and vagrancy. On one occasion, as a "trusty" prisoner in Phoenix, Hayes was working at the airport as a janitor. There a tourist was told that the man with the mop was the Indian hero of Iwo Jima. Upset by Hayes's degraded condition, he called Pauline Brown of the Indian Bureau and complained that Hayes should be in a veterans hospital if he had an alcohol problem. The man then offered to pay the jail fine for Hayes and give him money

until the Bureau could find him a job. Brown bluntly told him: "Hayes' people have lived here three thousand years. What Hayes needs is not money but enough water to irrigate fifty acres of land. . . . While you're sunning your carcass in the Biltmore pool this afternoon, you remember that Hayes needs just about as much water a year as it takes to operate the pool."⁶⁹

Hayes regretted his fame as the Indian "hero" of Iwo Jima: "People shoved drinks in our hands and said we were heroes. I was sick. I guess I was about to crack up, thinking of those guys who were better men than me not coming back at all. . . . On the reservation I got hundreds of letters and I got sick of hearing about the flag-raising and sometimes I wished the guy had never made the picture."⁷⁰ "I want to be out on my own," he explained sadly. "But out in Arizona the white race looks down on my own . . . and I don't stand a chance anywhere."⁷¹

Asked during an interview whether he had known Ira Hayes, Navajo code talker Thomas H. Begay answered: "Yeah, everybody, all the boys knew him. He was a very quiet man. He never got in trouble, didn't drink — until I guess he got back after, he said he was going back to the States for something. And when he got back over here I guess he started drinking."⁷² On November 10, 1954, Hayes was honored at the dedication of the bronze Iwo Jima Monument in Arlington, Virginia. Several weeks later, on January 23, Hayes was found on a street in Bapchule: drunk, he had fallen and drowned in his own vomit.⁷³ An idealistic and spirited young man, Hayes had wanted not only to defend America but also to restore dignity to the Pimas as a native people. In the end, he was a casualty of the war.

Ceremony: War Heroes Return to the Reservation

After returning to the reservation, many Navajo veterans had ceremonies performed on them in order to be purified of their war experiences. George Kirk kept having dreams of enemy soldiers jumping into his foxhole; so he went to see a medicine man for a

ceremony called the "Enemy Way," a symbolic slaying of the "enemy presence."⁷⁴ Coming home after his imprisonment in a Japanese POW camp for three years, Claude Hatch had a ceremony to help him heal from his traumatic battle experiences. "My father passed away shortly before I was liberated," he recalled, "but after returning home my relatives decided to have the Enemy Way ceremony for me because of all the things that had happened to me."⁷⁵ At the end of a ceremony, a medicine man told Samuel Smith: "Now my son, don't tell it no more to anybody, anywhere. That way you won't be bothered in the future."⁷⁶

After his discharge from the marines, Dan Akee reentered high school with the support of the G.I. bill. "But I was sick at night," he told an interviewer. "I was getting nightmares all the time. Every time when I shut my eyes, I would see or hear enemy coming or I find myself yelling." The nightmares kept haunting him for over a year until Akee went "completely deaf." Finally, his father arranged a Gourd Dance. During the ceremony something "unbelievable" happened to Akee. "The first night I heard this drum, and my ear popped out and I could hear again. And from there at this Gourd Dance I gained my weight back and all this nightmare was not bad. . . . And so it was all in my mind, what I had been through. Nearly four invasions. 'Cause in my mind, I think too much about it. And that might be the reason that I was getting these nightmares. So that's the reason why I never did finish my high school. So after I got well, I just got married."⁷⁷

Sidney Bedoni's Squaw Dance ceremony was also an act of spiritual healing, a way to put his past behind him and go on with life. "I took all my clothes off and then went into the hogan," he said. "Leave my clothes out there, my uniform. And then they have that sing for me. Get all washed up and everything. See, all that stuff that's on you, they think it's evil or something like that. They trying to chase them away. . . . That all my mind won't be overseas or anything like that. All my mind will come back to me when they have that Squaw Dance for me."⁷⁸

Keats Begay said that he had a Squaw Dance ceremony per-

formed on him, but he noted that there were some veterans who were still emotionally ill and were "receiving disability income."⁷⁹ Indeed, there were veterans who did not easily recover from the psychic wounds of the war.

One such veteran was described in a letter a woman had written to a marine commanding officer:

I don't know I do rite in writin you this but no harm try. It about Big Bill ———, can he be kept from comin home to he family, he was a fine guy till he got to be Marine, got big Head so many stripes on sleeve and decorate in front, first time come home got heap drunk, was maybe sick, cold not so bad, no want go back, next time staid over got wife take back, and made lie for him, she no like, she scared of him, all time want take car, her need live ¼ mile out of town, she work hard, he all time send for money, talk he got woman, want car is talk, last week sends from town off far, her come after him, she no money, no gas, no go, he cot ride, made hell all time, argue, argue, car, money, he hit her maby broke nose, black both eyes, kick her round, he sure bad umbra, now take car, no paid for, how he pay, she works for his two chilren and one with till school out, and he put other woman fore her for spite. Bill no not me I get this from friends, they say fraid we write, he kill them and her maby. I going away tomorrow, try not let him know where, you get these army police here, maby you say they told. Her land woman for over one year, I sure will back this up.

Mrs. B——

No like bad man buse woman.⁸⁰

Why men like this veteran had become drunken and abusive husbands was explained by Oliver La Farge of the Association of American Indian Affairs. Writing in *Harper's Magazine* in 1947,

he described how a Navajo had returned from the war only to feel he was "in a box" of poverty. The land was too dry for farming, and his welfare check was too meager. "He knew what he was going to do now," La Farge wrote. "He was going to hook a ride into town, sell his coat, buy a pint of bootleg rotgut, and get drunk. He hated what he was doing, but he could not help himself. He could not get out of the box; he could only momentarily forget it."⁸¹

Indeed, the problem for many despondent Navajo veterans was not simply the cultural and psychological difficulty of readjusting to reservation life after experiencing battlefield stresses. There was little economic opportunity on the reservation waiting for these military heroes. A year after the war, the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs reported that the average male on the Navajo reservation was earning less than \$100 a year. The association concluded: "The poor economic situation of the Navajo is beyond belief." The reason for this devastating suffering was revealed in a single set of statistics: the tribal population had reached sixty thousand in 1946, and the reservation lands could support only thirty-five thousand people.⁸²

Although the Navajo code talkers were not victorious in their war for "freedom from want," they had won an important cultural battle: on the bloodsoaked beaches of Pacific islands, they had demonstrated the value of our society's cultural diversity. "We, the Navajo people," declared Kee Etsicitty, "were very fortunate to contribute our language as a code for our country's victory. For this I strongly recommend we teach our children the language our ancestors were blessed with at the beginning of time. It is very sacred and represents the power of life."⁸³