

The Navajo Code Talker's Dictionary

When a Navajo code talker received a message, what he heard was a string of seemingly unrelated Navajo words. The code talker first had to translate each Navajo word into its English equivalent. Then he used only the first letter of the English equivalent in spelling an English word. Thus, the Navajo words "wol-la-chee" (ant), "be-la-sana" (apple) and "tse-nill" (axe) all stood for the letter "a." One way to say the word "Navy" in Navajo code would be "tsah (needle) wol-la-chee (ant) ah-keh-di- glini (victor) tsah-ah-dzoh (yucca)."

In a simple, memorable way, the military terms tended to resemble the things with which they were associated. For example, the Navajo word for tortoise, "chay-da-gahi," meant tank, and a dive-bomber, "gini," was a "chicken hawk," (a bird which dives on its prey). Sometimes the translation was more literal, as in "besh-lo" (iron fish) which meant submarine; other times it was metaphorical, as in "ne-he-mah" (our mother), which meant America.

Most letters had more than one Navajo word representing them. Not all words had to be spelled out letter by letter. The developers of the original code assigned Navajo words to represent about 450 frequently used military terms that did not exist in the Navajo language. Several examples: "besh-lo" (iron fish) meant "submarine," "dah-he-tih-hi" (hummingbird) meant "fighter plane" and "debeh-li-zine" (black street) meant "squad."



Navajo Code Talkers Peter Macdonald (left) and Roy Hawthorne participated in a ceremony Nov. 10, 2010, at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M. to pay tribute to veterans and to celebrate Native American Heritage Month. (U.S. Air Force photo)

<http://www.af.mil/shared/media/photodb/photos/101110-F-7195M-173.jpg>

THE MARINE HYMN

Jimmy King, a Navajo instructor, translated the Marine Hymn into Navajo:

We have conquered our enemies	Nin hokeh bi-kheh a-na-ih-la
All over the world	Ta-al-tso-go na-he-seel-kai
On land and on sea	Nih-bi-kah-gi do tah kah-gi
Everywhere we fight	Ta-al-tso-go en-da-de-pah
True and loyal to our duty	Tsi-di-da-an-ne ne-tay-yah
We are know by that	Ay be nihe hozeen
United States Marines	Washindon be Akalh Bi-kosi-la
To be one is a great thing.	Ji-lengo ba-hozhon
Our flag waves	Ni-he da-na-ah-taj ihla
From dawn to setting sun.	Yel khol-go e-e-ah
We have fought every place	Day-ne tal-al-tso go enta-she-jah
where we could take a gun	Tal-tso-go entas-se-pah
From northern lands	Ha-kaz dineh-ih be-hay-jah
To southern tropic scenes,	Ado ta aokhek-ash-shen
We are known to be tireless	Do ni-din-da-hi ol-yeh
The United States Marines	Washindon be Akalh-bi Khos

... THE LAST VERSE IS SUNG LIKE A PRAYER ...

May we live in peace hereafter	Hozo-go nay-yeltay to
We have conquered all our foes,	A-na-oh bi-keh de-dlihn
No force in the world we cannot	Ni-hi-keh di-dlini ta-etin
conquer,	
We know of no fear	Yeh-wol-ye hi-he a-din
If the Army and the Navy	Sila-go-tsoi do chah-lakai
Ever look on Heaven's scenes,	Ya-ansh-go das dez e e
United States Marines will be	Washindon be Akalh-bi Kosi la
there Living in peace.	Hozo-g-kay-ha-tehn