



American Indians in the Military – A Warrior Spirit

Anpétu wašté yuhá yo - In the Dakota language this means to have a good day.

Thanks for your interest in learning about American Indian issues. In this brief lesson, you will learn about American Indians and their unique contributions to the US military. In particular, you will have a chance to read about the untold story of the WWII Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux code talkers. You will also have an opportunity to learn about tribal flag songs.

American Indians serve in the US armed services at a higher percentage rate than any other group. There are currently over 31,000 American Indians serving in the military. As one way to honor their service, a new [National Native American Veterans Memorial](#) was unveiled in Washington, DC and dedicated in November 2022.

You may have heard of the Navajo code talkers of World War II, but did you know that members of several Montana tribes were also code talkers during the war? Could you keep a secret for 60 years? Many of these code talkers did and that is why some people have never heard of them before. The US Congress passed the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008, which required the Secretary of the Treasury to strike Congressional Medals in recognition of the dedication and valor of Native American code talkers to the US Armed Services during World War I and World War II. Unique gold medals were designed for each Native American tribe that had a member who served as a code talker and were presented to tribes in November 2013.

Here is the press release about this historic event from the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux tribes:

U.S. Congress Presents Gold Medal to Native American Code Talkers - Fort Peck Tribes

WASHINGTON, DC – Leaders of the U.S. House and Senate honored Native American code talkers in a Congressional Gold Medal ceremony held in Emancipation Hall of the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center. The medal – Congress’s highest expression of appreciation – was awarded in recognition of the valor and dedication of these code talkers as members of our Armed Forces during World War I and World War II.

The term "Code Talkers" refers to Native Americans who used their tribal languages as a means of secret communication during wartime.

- Code talkers used their native language to create secure, secret communications that enemies could not decode, ultimately saving service members’ lives.
- The American military’s first reported use of Native American code talkers dates back to October 1918.
- Thirty-three tribes from around the country will be recognized and more than 200 silver medals will be presented to individual code talkers and the families of those deceased. Code talkers were sworn to secrecy and many of them kept the secret of their participation until they died.

There were 49 identified enrolled members of the Assiniboine & Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation who were WWII Code Talkers. Our Code Talkers were members of Company B, 163rd Infantry Regiment, 41st Infantry Division, Poplar.



At the conclusion of World War II, before demobilization of the Armed Forces, those that had participated in the Code Talker Program met and unanimously agreed that all who participated in the Code Talker Program in WWII would never knowingly or willfully ever speak of their experiences as Code Talkers. For that reason, the participation by the Assiniboine & Sioux, as Code Talkers in World War II remained unspoken and untold... until now.

For more information regarding the dedication ceremony, check out these two news articles:

[Ceremony salutes WWII code Talkers – Great Falls Tribune](#)

[Code talkers](#) – Minot Daily News

Visit the [United States Mint website](#) to see what the medals look like.

Do you want to learn more about the Montana code talker connection? Then check out this new book about the Sioux code talkers by Andrea Page - [Sioux Code Talkers of World War II](#)

This [recent article from Junior Scholastic](#) provides some good background information regarding code talkers.

Cultural Connections

Each tribal nation has their own unique flag that represents their sovereign government. This [publication](#) has images and descriptions of the tribal flags of the Montana tribal nations. Just like there is a national anthem for the US flag, each tribe has their own version of a national anthem for its flag. In addition, tribes also have ceremonies and songs to honor their veterans and you will often see the tribal flag at these events. For example, during a grand entry at a powwow veterans will carry in tribal flags, the US flag, and the Montana flag, and then traditional songs are offered up to honor the flags and the veterans.

The following video clips are about songs to honor the US and tribal flags. In two of the video clips, you get to hear flag songs from the Northern Cheyenne and from the Lakota. Listen to the songs and learn what they mean. Could you identify a common theme with the Northern Cheyenne and Lakota flag songs?

[Northern Cheyenne Flag Song - Lame Deer Version](#)

[Lakota flag song and lyrics – St Joseph’s Indian School drum group](#)

This brief video clip features Blackfeet connections to songs. Watch the video and pay specific attention to the section about honoring warriors with songs. What does the young man say about his dad and the Blackfeet language? [A Day in the Life of a Tribal Drummer](#)

We hope this lesson provided you with an awareness of the contributions of American Indian veterans to our country and that you learned about some of their unique cultural traditions.