

The Navajo Code Talker program remained a secret after the war and was not declassified until 1968. It was another 14 years before the Navajo Code Talkers were recognized by the United States Government.

In December 1981, President Ronald Reagan recognized the Code Talkers for their "dedicated service, unique achievement, patriotism, resourcefulness and courage." August 14, 1982, was proclaimed, "National Navajo Code Talkers Day".

In April 2000, Senator Jeff Bingaman (NM) introduced a bill co-sponsored by Senator Daniel Inouye to recognize the Navajo Code Talkers with the highest civilian medal that the United States can award – the Congressional Silver Medal.

Representative Tom Udall (NM) co-sponsored the bill in the house. In December 2000, President Clinton signed the bill into law. On November 24, 2001 the Silver Congressional Medal of Honor was awarded in Window Rock, Arizona

The Governor of the State of Arizona recognized the outstanding contributions of the Native American Code Talkers on May 9, 2002.

Sam appreciates the honor bestowed upon him when he is asked to tell his story. Thank you very much.



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Samuel Tom Holiday

Navajo Code Talker

United States Marine Corp

4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division

25<sup>th</sup> Regiment

H & S Company

Served from 1943 – 1945

Samuel Tom Holiday was born to Billy Holiday and Betsy Yellow in Monument Valley, Utah. The actual birth date is not really known, but June 2, 1924 is the date given by his brother Henry Holiday.

Samuel grew up not seeing a white man until he was twelve years old. "We were scared of the white man; I guess it would be like being scared of aliens now. He and his sister would hide from the government agents that came to pick up kids and put them in the boarding schools. One day while herding sheep he hurt his knee. During his recovery, at the hospital he was "caught" then sent to Tuba City Boarding School. The school enforced English only and if caught speaking Navajo or practicing any traditions they were punished. He would sneak out cookies and cakes from the cafeteria to give to the older students to help him learn English.

After five years of boarding school he went to a vocational school in Provo, UT. Previously on the reservation, Marines were being recruited, when Sam joined. When in school, Sam got a letter telling him to report to Phoenix, AZ in 1943.

Sam was 19 years old when he arrived in Phoenix. After examinations he was put on a train to San Diego, CA, where he entered the grueling challenges of Marine Corps boot camp. "sometimes you could hear people crying at night because the training was hard" he recalls. "We (Navajo) were used to hard times because we live out on the reservation, so it didn't seem so hard for us."

Upon his transfer to Camp Pendleton in Oceanside, CA, he met other Navajos. "There was a whole bunch of Navajo Marines. The first day, a Navajo instructor told me that the reason I was there was to learn the code of the Navajo." He says.

He was assigned to the Fourth Marine Division, 25<sup>th</sup> Regiment, H & S Company from 1943-1945. He served duties on the Island of Roi-Namur, Tinian,

Iwo Jima, Marshall Islands and Saipan. Phillip Johnston, the son of missionaries on the Navajo Reservation, grew up with the Navajos and learned the language fluently. He suggested to the Marines to use the Navajo language.

After all the training, they were all loaded on a ship to Hawaii. They also met other soldiers who were coming in from the war. One day while going out on a ship they were told that they were going to the war. The first action Sam was a part of was on the island of Kwajalein.

The second battle Sam was involved in was on the Island of Saipan. About 50 yards offshore his boat capsized in the water. "I threw my pack off, but it caught on my gas mask which was still hooked to my belt. I was struggling in the water as my pack dragged me down. I was fighting for air. It felt like I was full of water and I was choking." Sam finally reached shore, "I must have gone out for a little while. I recovered somewhat, but I was still dizzy."

During the initial fighting on Saipan a bomb exploded near him and buried him in the sand. "I got up and was feeling somehow, kind of numb-like. I was shaking the dirt, it was black dirt like ashes, off of me. It was all over on me and in my hair and in my ears. I couldn't hear right and there were noises in my head." It was mainly from the close call bomb explosion that permanently damaged Sam's ears.

Sam was always in danger, not only from enemy forces, but from his own fellow Marines. Japanese soldiers would dress themselves in uniforms of dead Marines to infiltrate American lines. Twice he was captured by fellow Marines who mistook him as Japanese. "On Saipan, a Marine pointed a bayonet in my back," he recalls. "I told him, 'Hey wait, I'm a radioman, I'm a Marine.'" On another occasion, he was surrounded by five or six angry Marines who believed he was a Japanese soldier who had sneaked into camp.

Both tense situations required soldiers from his own company to verify his identity. Unlike most languages, Navajo was unwritten and virtually impossible for an adult to learn. Every syllable carries meaning, and sometimes a single word can have four different meanings depending upon intonation. Dialects vary from region to region and even within Navajo clans. In the thick of battle, they would send practically nonstop messages for 15 – 18 hours, passing vital information about enemy fire, troop movement, and the need for medical help. Military historians note that during the first 48 hours of the invasions of Iwo Jima, Navajo radio units sent and received more than 800 messages with 100 % accuracy.

"My language became a secret weapon. I don't know how many Japanese were killed because of my language. Watching the Japanese suffer at the hands of the Americans was sad. These Japanese were just young guys and they looked like Navajos," Sam says. He continues, "The code was so secret, when I was discharged, I was told to never talk about it, not even to my family." The entire Navajo Code project was highly classified, and military historians have found no records to indicate that any message traffic in the Navajo language was ever deciphered.

When he came back from the Marines he worked up and down the West Coast for some time and returned home to become a Navajo Police Officer. He worked at the Monument Valley Tribal Park for several years and then he went to work for the Peabody Coal Company until his retirement.

While he was a Police Officer he met Lupita Mae Isaac. They were married in 1954. Presently, Sam and Lupita have eight children, thirty-five grandchildren and twenty-four great-grandchildren and still growing. Lupita and Sam have always taken children into their home, where several of them have been adopted.