

Special Veteran, Special Radio, Special Event

A Navajo Code Talker — and the radio he used — put the Navajo code on the air again.

Richard Corrigan, NØRMC

On April 4, 2014, the culmination of more than a year of research, coordination, and testing brought together the last living member of the first platoon of Marine Navajo Code Talkers, a World War II TBX-6 transceiver, and the Marines of the Marine Corps Network Operations and Security Command (MCNOSC). The purpose of this unusual reunion was to dedicate Platoon 382 Hall, the new annex to Code Talkers Hall, which is home to the MCNOSC at the Marine Corps Base in Quantico, Virginia. Platoon 382 Hall is named after the first platoon of Navajo Code Talkers who came together in 1942 to aid the US Marines in the Pacific Theater. Members of the Stafford Area Repeater Association (SARA) and the Marine Corps Amateur Radio Club (MCARC) had the pleasure and honor of participating in this historic event.

Colonel David McMorries, the commanding officer of the MCNOSC, tasked 2nd

Lt Procter, a young Marine officer, to locate any pieces of history relevant to the Marine Navajo Code Talkers that could be displayed at the entrance to Platoon 382 Hall. Second Lt Procter was able to track down an operational TBX-6 radio that was in the collection of New Jersey ham Rob Flory, K2WI. Rob, who has an impressive collection of vintage naval radio equipment, agreed to part with his TBX-6, which was instrumental in making the event an overwhelming success. MCNOSC Operations Chief Robert Gibbons procured the TBX-6 from Rob for display at the entrance to the facility.

Bob Gibbons and 2nd Lt Procter joined the members of SARA on a Saturday morning in July 2013 to determine if there were any members who had experience operating and maintaining radio equipment like the TBX-6, which they brought for everyone to view. Bob went on to explain what was planned for the dedication, and the desire to have an operational radio available as well

as the last remaining Code Talker present for the dedication.

This historic transceiver and the prospect of actually operating it in the presence of a living part of the radio's history were too much for members of SARA to pass up! Ron Startzel, KB5LNC, the current president of SARA, took on the task of making sure the radio and the volunteer operators were brought up to speed in time for the dedication ceremony.

Logistics

Between October 2013 and the April 2014 ceremony, Marines from the Quantico Communications School, members of SARA and MCARC, Rob Flory, and the Pentagon Amateur Radio Club conducted several tests with varying degrees of success. In its original configuration, the TBX-6 transceiver consisted of four components — the transmitter/receiver in one box, a hand-cranked generator, an accessory

Chester Nez — Code Talker

Chester Nez (January 23, 1921 – June 4, 2014) was the last original Navajo Code Talker who served in the United States Marine Corps during World War II. He was born in Chi Chil Tah, New Mexico, to the Navajo Black Sheep Clan of the Sleeping Rock People. He was raised during a time when there were difficult relations between the US government and the Navajo Nation. Nez recalled children often being taken from reservations, sent to boarding schools, and told not to speak the Navajo language. It was from one of these schools, in Tuba City, Arizona, that Nez was recruited into the Marine Corps.

Upon enlistment he was assigned to the 382nd Infantry Regiment at Camp Pendleton, where he joined a group of 28 other Navajo who were assigned to create a code. The Navajo language was chosen because its syntax and tonal qualities were nearly impossible for a non-Navajo to learn.

Nez related that they developed the code by using everyday words, which made remembering the code words much easier. For example, the Navajo word for “shark” was used in code to mean “destroyer.”

In 1942, he was among the Code Talkers to be shipped out to Guadalcanal, where they worked in teams of two — one to send and receive, the other to operate the radio and listen for errors. He was honorably discharged as a private first class in 1945 and returned to serve stateside in the Korean War, afterward being discharged as a corporal.

In 2001, Nez was one of five Code Talkers who received the Congressional Gold Medal from President George W. Bush in recognition of the unique importance of their service to the Allied cause.



Corporal Chester Nez (seated) signs copies of his book, *Code Talker*, as Colonel David McMorries looks on.



This is the transmitter/receiver part of the TBX-6 radio used by the Code Talkers. The transmitter portion is on the left and the receiver portion on the right. [Antonio Fucci, I8000PU SWL, www.radiomilitari.com, photo]

case, and the antenna. The receiver was powered by batteries and the hand-cranked generator provided +500 V plate voltage and filament voltage for the transmitter.

After overcoming hardware issues, propagation, and weather challenges, they began to make reliable contacts, initially using a G5RV antenna and then an AS-2259 NVIS (Near Vertical Incidence Skywave) antenna, all of which allowed successful contacts on 3885 kHz AM to local hams assisting in the test.

After coordinating with Colonel McMorries and Chief Gibbons, a request for the special event call sign N4C, for “Navajo 4 Code Talker,” was processed by the outstanding ARRL® staff. For the event, SARA and MCARC would have the TBX-6 transceiver operating on 3885 kHz AM. The special event station also employed an Icom IC-7100 on 20 meters and an Icom IC-880 operating through Reflector 025 on D-STAR. The N4C operators included Ron, KB5LNC, a retired Marine CH-46 pilot; Larry, W4OPA, a retired Marine Communicator; Cameron, K6CLM, Active Duty Air Force, and Rich, NØRMC, a retired Marine Communicator and the author of this article.

A Special Guest

Though the dedication ceremony was initially planned for October 2013, various events delayed the activity. Finally, in April 2014, the event’s guest of honor, Corporal Chester Nez, along with his grandson, Latham Nez, made the trip from their home in Albuquerque, New Mexico to Quantico. Born in 1921, Corporal Nez was a veteran of the Battles of Guadalcanal, Bougainville, Guam, Peleliu, and Angaur, and was, at the time, the last living member of Platoon 382 (Corporal Nez passed away in June; see the sidebar, “Chester Nez — Code Talker”).

Upon arriving at the MCNOSC, Corporal Nez and his grandson were welcomed by the Marines, who were then treated to an ad hoc history lesson from Corporal Nez. He related how the Navajo code was developed by his platoon, and went on to relate some of his experiences during the World War II Island Hopping Campaign. When the subject of the TBX-6 arose, he was asked how long a Marine had to crank the generator. Corporal Nez quickly responded — “All day!”

During the ceremony, Corporal Nez took microphone in hand and, in the Navajo code, transmitted his first transmission on Guadalcanal, 71 years earlier: “Enemy machine gun nest on your right flank — destroy.” This was probably the last time one of the original Navajo Marines would transmit the code, which was never broken by the Japanese, and he did it on a TBX-6 radio!

The Navajo Marines of Platoon 382 developed the code from the unwritten language spoken only by the Navajo People. There were a total of 421 Navajo Code Talkers during World War II who gave their solemn oath to protect the code they developed. The Navajo Code Talker program was declassified in 1968, and in 2000 President George W. Bush awarded Congressional Gold Medals to the five remaining Marines of the original 29 who formed the basis of Platoon 382.

The TBX-6 Transceiver

The TBX-6 as fielded was a portable tactical HF transceiver operated by three Marines. The transmitter is capable of 9 W on CW or 3 W on AM from a one tube 837 pentode final and is crystal or master-oscillator controlled. Though the TBX-6 is a transmitter/receiver, the transmitter portion and the receiver portion are powered separately. A hand-cranked generator, gasoline engine generator, or a dynamotor powers the trans-



Lance Corporal Tiffany Boyd shows Mr Latham Nez (standing) and Corporal Chester Nez a copy of Corporal Nez’s 1942 platoon photo featuring the original 29 Navajo Code Talkers.

mitter while batteries or a rectifier powers the receiver.

The transceiver was carried by one of the Marines. A second Marine carried the battery and accessory box (headset, microphone, key, receiver cable, and spare tubes) in another canvas bag, while the third Marine carried the generator and antenna. The antenna is a 24-foot guyed whip with a unique connection that is rarely seen by today’s amateurs. The feed line is connected to the transceiver by what today resembles an automotive spark plug connector.

You can download a video of the dedication from the *QST* in Depth web page at www.arrrl.org/qst-in-depth.

Photos courtesy of Todd Headington.

Richard Corrigan, NØRMC, an ARRL member, is a retired Marine Corps communicator. He has been a ham for 25 years and holds an Amateur Extra class license. When he was stationed in Japan, he held the call sign 7J6CEE; when in Australia, he had the call sign VK8CN.

Today, Richard is president of the Marine Corps Amateur Radio Club, WU5MC, and technical director for Stafford Area Radio Association, WS4VA. Richard has a master’s degree in engineering from George Washington University and is employed as a satellite communications subject matter expert for HQMC Director Command, Control, Communications, and Computers (C4) at the Pentagon. He can be reached at 12 Maggie Ct, Fredericksburg, VA 22406, n0rmc2651@gmail.com.

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