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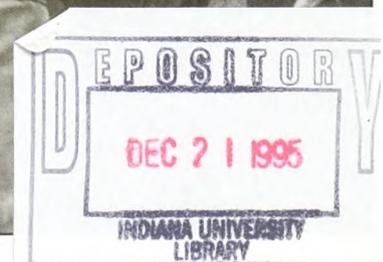
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The Signal Corps
in World War II

Signal Corps
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Comanche codetalking on D-day

by **Renee Jones**

D-day's Omaha and Utah beaches saw first use of the Comanche code for tactical voice security.

In 1940, William Karty, a Comanche Civilian Conservation Corps camp director, moved his wife's idea for an all-Comanche "codetalking" unit through the bureaucracy — resulting in 17 Comanches being sent to Fort Benning's 4th Signal Company, 4th Infantry Division. There they met 2d Lt. Hugh Foster, just out of West Point and assigned the mission of developing a system so the Comanches could communicate with each other without the enemy or other Comanches understanding them.

Comanche, however, was an unwritten language. First Foster made up an English military vocabulary for describing such things as weapons, units and landmarks. The Comanches, after consulting among themselves, told him what words in their language were to be used as equivalents. Foster then created his own phonetics; his green government notebook became the "codebook."

By the time of Pearl Harbor, Foster and the Comanches had

perfected 250 words, which the Comanches had memorized. The Comanches then began a two-year odyssey up and down the United States' East Coast, finally going to the United Kingdom for training geared toward invading Nazi-occupied Europe.

Upon their D-day landing, the Comanches began their communications-security work. Spread out to work in teams with field regiments, they coded messages back to division headquarters, where another member of the group received and decoded them. Messages were on troop strength, movement and weaponry.

Sometimes superencryption was used when the English message they had to encode in Comanche was itself already encoded: "We're on second with two outs in the bottom of the fifth." All through this, no errors were noted.

Among the memorable messages they encoded, Roderick Red Elk remembers BG Theodore Roosevelt Jr.'s "We have landed safely." The Comanches also encoded a series of directives from Gen. George Patton which succeeded in destroying a German tank.

The Comanches were commu-

nicators and codetalkers all through the D-day invasion, the liberation of Paris and the Battle of the Bulge. Some were wounded, but none were killed; several received Bronze Stars.

In 1989, the last three Comanche codetalkers — Red Elk, Charles Chibitty and Forrest Dassanavoid — received for the tribe the Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Merite from the French government and, in 1992, a U.S. Defense Department certificate of appreciation.

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(Editor's note: Other Native American codetalkers included members of the Choctaw and Sioux tribes, serving in various capacities. Besides the Army's Signal Corps, the Navy's Marine Corps used Native American codetalkers in the Pacific theater.

For instance, the Sioux were assigned to reel-cart teams with the 3d Field Artillery Battalion (Horse). Their team was known as the All-American Team; most of its members were full Sioux, one was part Native American. In the Ardennes battle, afraid the Germans knew the U.S. codes, Pvt. Simon Broken Leg and Pvt. Jeffrey Dull Knife spoke Sioux to each other across their Signal Corps links.)