

Choctaw Heros

Submitted by Glenna Creasy

Choctaw Indians have always been at the mercy of their white brothers from the time they first came in contact with each other. However, it has been stated that Choctaws never took up arms against them, but fought beside them. This happened in the most important wars ever fought, the Civil War being unique. In fact, Choctaws changed the tide in the last days of World War I, toward the end of the Meuse-Argonne campaign.

At the time it looked bad for the American troops. The Germans had the upper hand and kept gaining. All messages were in code, yet the Germans managed to break the codes. The telephones were tapped. At least one in each four messages was captured. Then a change of luck occurred which made the difference.

Eight Choctaw Indian soldiers from Southeast Oklahoma were stationed in a battalion surrounded by Germans. When visiting with one another they would speak in their native language - Choctaw. A Captain Lawrence overheard two soldiers one day and developed a brilliant idea.

"Corporal, how many of you Choctaws do we have in this battalion?" Captain Lawrence inquired. After conferring with each other, one of the men told the captain they had eight men who spoke fluent Choctaw. They were Solomon Lewis and Mitchell Bobb, the two the captain had heard talking, and also there was Ben Carterby, Robert Taylor, Calvin Nelson, Pete Maytubby, James Edwards and Jeff Wilson.

Captain Lawrence then wanted to know if any were in the head-quarters company. Lewis and Bobb thought Carterby and Maytubby were there. The captain requested the two stay where they were while he went to a field telephone to verify if Carterby and Maytubby were indeed at headquarters company. They were.

Captain Lawrence then began to put together his plan. The captain told his commanding officer to have Carterby and Maytubby to stand by. "I've got an idea that might just get these Heinies off our backs", he explained. Then, talking to Lewis and Bobb, Capt. Lawrence gave them a message to call into headquarters. "I want you to give the message in your language. There will be somebody there who can understand it".

Bobb was given the message which he conveyed by field telephone to Carterby. Carterby then interpreted the message to the battalion commander. The message was correct and clearly understood. Thus, code-talking was originated.

In no time at all the eight Choctaw-speaking soldiers were transferred around until one was in each field company headquarters. They handled field telephone calls and translated radio messages into Choctaw language and wrote field orders to be carried to companies.

Because this old language was inadequate in the use of modern military terminology, a few improvisations were made. The words, "big gun" were used meaning artillery, and "little gun shoot fast" meant machine gun. Battalions were indicated as "one, two, three grains of corn".

There was no way the Germans could break the codes short of capturing the Choctaws. It probably never occurred to them that the jibberish was anything other than just another code the Americans were using.

According to all sources, within 24 hours after beginning use of the Choctaw language, the "Tide of the battle was turned". In less than 72 hours the Germans were retreating.

This particular tactic was applied near the end of World War I. Records indicate it may not have been used again until Navajos and Navajo language were pressed into service in World War II.

The Choctaw were praised and only recently, were honored for their contribution to the campaign.

Although none of these men are living, in 1986 the Choctaw Nation and Chief Hollis Roberts, honored the "Code Talkers" at the Labor Day Festivities at the Choctaw Nation Council Grounds at Tuskahoma, Pushmataha County, Oklahoma. A granite monument is planned in honor of all Choctaw veterans, many of whom died in World War I and each war since that time.

This also brings out the importance Choctaw Indians place on education. All of these men could read and write, not only English, but Choctaw as well.

"Some men see things as they are and say why? I dream things that never were and say why not?"

-Robert F. Kennedy



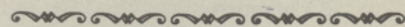
KEEPERS OF THE CIRCLE

By Frank D. Simmons

Keepers of the circle listen to me for I am getting tired, some of you will listen and see, some of you will not understand, but the Doctors and Scientist are putting foreign substance into my veins and they are teaching others to continue destroying me, they are putting things way down into my system and my system begins to get angry, I shake and quiver and hurt people but I don't mean to. I am waiting for your opinion, for you are keepers of the circle, when you took care of me I cried tears for you so that the streams were full of water, the fishes that I put there were many, the things that I put there were for you to use, not to abuse, forests were green and the air was clean, it was your holy place, your cathedral. Please understand, that you are a minority to all of these things that I have put here for you. If you take care of them they will take care of you. More of you will come to live off of me, I will not die if you take care of me, clean up the water, the air and manage the forest so that the fishes and the four legged creatures will survive.

O' keepers of the Circle, please do not give up, for my life depends on you now, just as you depended on me before.

Your dreams that you have, the visions that you see are true, my existence depends on you, for you have been chosen as keepers of the Circle.



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