

Choctaw code talkers finally publically recognized

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP)—Tewanna Edwards remembers her late great-uncle as a gentle old man who fed her raisins and laughed as she grimaced while eating them.

She had no idea as a child that the 6-foot-3 Choctaw Indian was one of the first American Indian code talkers.

He was among 18 original Choctaw code talkers who never lived to see public recognition of their war deeds. Legislation signed by President Bush last week authorizes congressional medals to be issued to the Choctaw Nation and family members.

The law also recognizes members of Oklahoma's Comanche Tribe and other code talkers of World War II from tribes across the country.

Code talkers is a term given to Indians who used words from their native languages to transmit strategic messages from the American military in the two world wars. Their work is credited with saving hundreds of thousands of lives and shorten-

ing both wars.

The Choctaws used words like "tali," their word for stone, to describe a grenade; "ittibbi," which meant "fight," used when they needed to warn of an attack, and "iti tanamp," their word for bow, used to describe a "company."

The enemy never deciphered the code and the Choctaws laid the groundwork for the U.S. military using Indians for communications in other conflicts.

They include the Navajos of the southwestern part of the country, whose actions during WW II were portrayed in the 2002 movie, "Windtalkers," starring Nicolas Cage. They were authorized to be recognized through congressional medals in 2001.

For descendants of the original Choctaw code talkers, also being honored by congressional medals is recognition long overdue.

They point out that the young Choctaws enlisted in the military to fight for their coun-

try in 1918, even though they had yet to be given the right to become U.S. citizens.

After war, they were told to keep their communication techniques secret, so they could be used again.

Tewanna Edwards, who lives in Shawnee, Okla., about 35 miles west of Oklahoma City, did not find out her uncle was a code talker until she was in her 20s.

"I was shocked," said Edwards. "He never talked about it. They were sworn to secrecy. He wrote a diary when he was in the trenches in World War I and never mentioned being a code talker using the Choctaw language."

At the time, she said, she could not mentally link the cruel war with her jovial uncle, the large man in his 70s, who liked to sit in his rocking chair, watch Tarzan movies with her when she was 8 years old and laugh when she choked down raisins.

"To me, he was kind of like Santa Claus. He just radiated warmth," she said.

Nuchi Nashoba, who lives in Blanchard, about 40 miles south of Oklahoma City, never met her great-grandfather, Choctaw code talker Ben Carterby, who died two weeks before she was born.

"But granny always kept a picture of grandpa in the house. He was in military uniform."

She says she researched history of the code talkers as a young adult and came to realize the significance of their war effort.

"I have a lot of pride knowing my grandfather was in the war and helped fight for this country," she said.

Clarence Wolf Guts, a member of the Sioux Nation from South Dakota, is believed to be the last surviving code talker from WWII, according to Judy Allen, public relations director for the Choctaw Nation.

Under the Code Talkers Recognition Act, a congressional gold medal will be designed in honor of the 18 original Choctaws and their families will get duplicate silver medals. Also,

bronze duplicates will be sold by the U.S. Mint.

Besides Leader and Carterby, other original code talkers were Albert Billy, Mitchell Bobb, Victor Brown, George Davenport, Joseph Davenport, James Edwards, Tobias Frazier, Benjamin Hampton, Noel Johnson, Solomon Louis, Pete Maytubby, Jeff Nelson, Joseph Oklahombi, Robert Taylor, Walter Veach and Calvin Wilson.

The legislation honoring them was introduced in the House in 2007 by Rep. Dan Boren, D-Okla., who gathered up 300 co-sponsors. Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., sponsored a Senate companion measure. Both passed the Senate with ease.

The Choctaws, members of Army's 142nd Infantry Regiment, 36th Division, have been deceased a long time, but their war acts have become a part of the consciousness of their descendants and tribal members.

"Our people, they are very quiet, but the honor is so important, to have their heroes fi-

nally recognized," said Gregory Pyle, chief of the Choctaw Nation.

Allen, who has done extensive research on code talkers, said the Choctaws came into existence in 1918 at a time U.S. forces were in France and suffering a string of defeats at the hands of enemy forces.

"The Germans were tapping into our phone lines and were experts at decoding our messages. They knew where our ammunition dumps were; they knew where our troops were. We couldn't make a move without the German Army knowing about it.

"A commanding officer happened to walk by two Choctaw men speaking in our native language. It was as if a light bulb went off in his head," Allen said.

What was unique about the Choctaw code talkers, Pyle said, is that "they died with secrets that were never really revealed" in their lifetime so Indian code talkers could be used in future wars, such as World War II.

No early-voting guidance on Indian land

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP)—New Mexico's county clerks are setting up early voting sites in Indian Country at the request of tribes, but complain that they've been given no guidance from the state, as required by law.

"We had absolutely no direction how to do it," said Denise Lamb, director of the Bureau of Elections in Santa Fe County.

The requirement that clerks provide at least one early voting location on Indian lands, if requested, was enacted in 2007.

The law says the secretary of state "shall adopt rules" for that and other early voting mandates.

"It would be nice if that would have been done," San Juan County Clerk Fran Hanhardt said. "It would have been nicer if time frames had been specified."

Secretary of State Mary Herrera said her office has told clerks in training sessions and in advice for clerks on the office's Web site that they should handle early vot-

ing sites on Indian land the same way as any other early voting site.

"Not one county clerk has called and bothered to ask us and say they're confused and how to set it up," Herrera said.

Lamb said clerks have a lot of questions about the requirement—not just what dates and hours early voting sites should be open on Indian land, but also the security of ballots when the site is closed, if non-tribal members can vote at sites on tribal land, how much time a tribe has before the start of early voting to request a site and who pays for it.

"This is supposed to be answered by an administrative rule we never got," she said.

Santa Fe County didn't have to deal with the questions this election because no tribe there sought an early voting site.

The clerks in Otero and McKinley counties are handling early voting sites on tribal land by echoing what's done at other alternative sites.

Otero County Clerk Robyn Holmes will operate a site on the Mescalero Apache Reservation

during the same dates and times as the county's other alternative voting site in an Alamogordo mall.

The president of the Mescalero Apaches requested a site, and the clerk's office negotiated its location in the tribe's Inn of the Mountain Gods resort, starting Saturday.

"I was concerned ... because we had no direction," Holmes said. "There's no law set in place other than we have to have one if they request it."

Rick Palochak, chief of McKinley County's Bureau of Election, said the county will run a mobile site in a trailer in front of Zuni Pueblo's administrative offices from Oct. 28 through Nov. 1.

"We're going to follow the same hours of operation as early voting," he said. "We're not going to deviate at all."

San Juan County has operated two alternative voting sites on the Navajo Nation at Newcomb and Shiprock for years, Hanhardt said. This year, her office received an informal request from a chapter house for a site on the east side of the res-

ervation, but the chapter never followed through with a written request, she said.

"At this point, it's obviously too late" because of the time needed to set up for early voting, she said. Early voting began Saturday at the county's four alternative sites outside the clerk's office in Aztec.

Herrera said her staff went over how to handle the early voting sites during training sessions for county clerks' staff.

"We did give direction to handle early voting sites (on Indian land) the way they're handling other early voting sites, to use the same dates and the same times," she said.

But Hanhardt said clerks whose counties include Indian land are concerned that the secretary of state never put out the rules.

"Are we going to be accused of disenfranchising those voters? ... None of us clerks want that to happen," she said.

Board plans for possible end of UND nickname

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP)—North Dakota's Board of Higher Education has approved a schedule for discarding the University of North Dakota's Fighting Sioux nickname and Indian head logo if two prominent Sioux tribes hold firm in their desire to dump them.

The timeline directs William Goetz, the chancellor of North Dakota's university system, to form a committee within the next two months to discuss the issue with leaders of the Standing Rock and Spirit Lake Sioux tribes.

The panel should meet at least twice with Sioux leaders during 2009, the timeline says. If there is no agreement to allow continued use of the name and logo, it says, UND should begin planning in January 2010 to retire them.

Tribal leaders have said they want the university to drop its nickname and logo. If their stand changes, negotiations between UND and tribal leaders may continue until Nov. 30,

2010, the timeline says.

The document says the chancellor's discussion committee also should continue its work until November 2010, even if UND is planning at the same time to retire the nickname and logo.

Board members voted 8-0 during a conference call meeting Thursday to approve the document. Its goals may be changed if a majority of board members agree to do so, said the board's president, Wahpeton attorney Richie Smith.

Goetz said the discussion committee should have six months instead of two years to arrange meetings with tribal leaders. The shorter time would help "get this issue behind us," Goetz said.

"What's behind that is ... my ongoing concern about the university, the challenges that it is facing with a decision that continues to be undecided (and) lacks direction," Goetz said. "I am particularly sensitive to the environment (at UND), the polarization."

Navajo lawmakers take up veterans issues

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP)—When Navajo lawmakers meet next week for their fall session, they'll consider a measure to award tribal veterans with a medal honoring their military service.

The measure was tabled dur-

ing the Tribal Council's summer session so that it could be reviewed and discussed at a veterans' conference last month.

Council Speaker Lawrence Morgan, who is sponsoring the bill, has said it's a way to show appreciation for veterans who

display acts of heroism, courage and bravery.

"We say we honor our veterans, we say as a Navajo government, as this sitting body, we honor our veterans. At the chapters, public gatherings we always say that. In our prayers we say

that," Morgan said during the council's summer session. "Tangibly, we'd like to give an object that you see to know that they're being appreciated."

But some veterans say they are more pressing issues, including benefits for veterans, housing, running water and electricity.

"We are lacking veterans' benefits on the reservation from the federal government," Jackie Burbank, commander of the Chinle agency veterans group, said this week. "If they can work on that, I would support them. Just giving us the medal is not going to do us any good."

Veterans as well as council delegates also expressed concern about the name of the medal—the Dine Nation Medal of Honor—and said it would only belittle the United States' highest award for valor in military action.

Haskell president under fire

LAWRENCE, Kan. (AP)—The embattled president of Haskell Indian Nations University is standing firm while the university's Board of Regents asks for her dismissal and nearly half of the students have signed petitions seeking her resignation.

More than 100 students and faculty members attended a forum last week in the school auditorium designed to deal with the storm surrounding Linda Sue Warner, president of Haskell, the nation's only federally funded four-year college devoted to American Indians.

Dozens of students spoke out, accusing Warner of trying to increase student fees while doing little to address campus safety or an antiquated computer system.

"The students are calling

for action," said Brenda Councillor, a member of the Student Senate and the author of a petition signed by 400 students calling for Warner's ouster. "I do not follow her leadership." The school has about 1,000 students.

Warner directed questions about her tenure to the U.S. Bureau of Indian Education, which oversees Haskell.

Warner has made changes since becoming president of Haskell two years ago. She has added a new campus research center, implemented a new student health program, signed cooperative agreements with other universities and started work to expand degree options. A new personnel policy was established, and some faculty members were reassigned.



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