By Chance:  
The Story of the  
First Code Talkers

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Choosing a National History Day (NHD) topic was initially overwhelming because there have been so many events that have changed the course of history. I knew I had to limit myself to one topic and had to consider the annual theme of NHD, “Triumph and Tragedy.” I eventually landed on the Choctaw Nation Code Talkers of WWI.

Ever since I was little, I have been interested in secret codes and even made up my own codes for fun. I am Choctaw, and this makes me proud because not everyone can look back on their heritage and have ancestors who made such a lasting impact on history.

I had to dig deep to find an NHD topic that related to my specific tribe and that had to do with the idea of codes. I had heard of the Navajo Code Talkers of WWII, but after investigating, I found there were actually code talkers who were Choctaw. I starting to get excited because this topic was just what I was looking for! It included the idea of a secret code and was specific to my native tribe. Once I choose this topic, I began my research.

As with most topics, an online search was a good place to start. From the beginning, I found many websites and pictures. I had to know, “Who were the Choctaw Code Talkers, and what did they do during the war?” I slowly started to understand more about them. When I got a feel for the basics, I started background
research about the Choctaw tribe. I learned more about the Trail of Tears and how after finally settling in the state of Oklahoma, the Choctaw children were punished for speaking their native language. I eventually ended up in Durant, OK, at the Choctaw Nation Headquarters. I had set up an interview with Judy Allen, Historic Projects Officer for Choctaw Nation. She gave me a tour, spent time answering questions, and was most helpful in supplying sources that would round out my research.

With all this underway, I had to decide how to present my information for NHD. From an early age, I have enjoyed making short films. Starting with my dollhouses as props, over the years my iMovie skills have progressed to the point I felt I could be successful at creating a documentary. I was eager to start and knew this project would take a lot of work to honor the topic.

Throughout my project, keeping the theme for NHD, “Triumph and Tragedy” as the focus was actually easy because my topic fit so naturally. The triumph was that the Choctaw men, with their codes, helped the Allied Forces win WWI. Their tragedy was the unfair treatment of Native Americans at that time and the fact that they were not recognized for their valor until after their deaths.

Hopefully this project will bring recognition and honor to those valiant men who made such an impact on our nation’s history.
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources


This was a picture of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. With this letter, President Andrew Jackson moved thousands of Indians from their homeland.

Allen, Judy (2019, February 1) Personal interview.

I interviewed Judy Allen of the Choctaw Nation because of her great knowledge of the Choctaw Code Talkers. She gave very valuable information and I feel that her interview was a great edition to my documentary.


Judy Allen supplied me with a PowerPoint that was about the Choctaw Code Talkers. The PowerPoint included pictures and facts about the Code Talkers that I used in my documentary.


This is an image of the 142nd Infantry of World War I. Within this image, there are a couple of Choctaw Code Talkers in the group.

This picture gave a glimpse of what the Choctaw Indians and all the Indians went through during the Trail of Tears. This picture shows that many Native Americans had to trudge along a long path, leaving most of their belongings behind.


This was a picture taken in 1871 that showed a small school at Fort Sill. Even though it may not be a Choctaw school, many Native Americans who were moved into Oklahoma were also forbidden to speak their Native language.


This website has a picture of a wounded Choctaw soldier. With this picture, there is meaning. This shows that while serving his country, this young man was injured in battle.


This picture was very useful in that it actually showed a Choctaw Code Talker creating a code. This picture was beneficial to this documentary because of the detail in the picture.

*Choctaw Nation Historic Projects.* “*Choctaw Code Talkers: They Served, They Sacrificed.*” Pg.6

Judy Allen gave me a magazine that had a lot of facts about the Code Talkers. I used a specific story that was told by Code Talker Albert Billy in my documentary. His story is fascinating and tells how the Germans were confused about what language they were hearing over the phones.

This picture is one of the most famous of all the pictures taken of the Choctaw Code Talkers. In it are six of the nineteen recruited Code Talker soldiers.

Copeland, Larissa, Congressional Gold Medals awarded in honor of WWI, WWII Code Talkers, BISKINIK, Durant, OK, December 2013: 1-2

This newspaper article gave an insight on how the Choctaw Code Talkers were rewarded for their heroic deeds.


This was a picture from World War I of the iconic figure of Uncle Sam. This picture helped recruit many citizens into the U.S Army during 1917.


This is a picture of a map that shows France in 1914. This map was useful in that it showed where many key cities were during the first World War. Many code talkers created messages carried across battle lines in France.


This is an image of the Choctaw Nation Medal of Valor. It is the highest award that the Choctaw Nation gives to a heroic person.

This was a picture of an original document that showed a small portion of the state of Oklahoma. This picture showed the state being divided into smaller territories for different Native American Groups who were moved from Mississippi and other states in the eastern part of the United States in the early 1830's.

Medal of a Knight of the Order. National Order of Merit (France).


This picture is of the Knight of the National Order of Merit medal. This award was given to the Choctaw Code talkers as recognition for their military achievement during the first World War.

Page 2- Dancing Rabbit Creek. 1830. Access Genealogy,


This image is of the original manuscript for the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek. This document granted the Choctaws land in exchange for their territory.

Postcard With Illustration of the Allies Flags. 1917. BBC Schools, BBC,

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1/25405395.

This is a picture of all of the flags of all the countries that were joined in the Allied forces. Together, they won the Great War and conquered the Central Powers.


This was a letter to another Commanding Officer stating how well the Choctaw soldiers performed in their military duty.

This is an image of the Congressional Gold Medal. This one in particular was given to the Choctaw Code Talkers in recognition for their military achievements during World War I.


This picture was useful in this documentary because of the visual significance it gave. It showed small school girls who were going to an Indian Boarding school where they were punished for speaking their native language.

*Three Lions/Getty. These are German soldiers in a trench in France during World War I where they spend a quiet moment reading and writing before the fighting recommences. The Telegraph, www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-one/10683313/WW1-German-soldier-recalls-moment-he-bayoneted-foe-to-death.html.*

This visual has a deeper meaning than meets the eye. This picture shows that even during one of the hardest times, and in one of the hardest wars ever fought, these soldiers still continue to participate in the simplest of activities, including reading.

*Tongue Twister Ready, The Oklahoman [Oklahoma City], Dec 21, 1941:60 print*  

This article told about one of the Choctaw Code Talkers, James Edwards. It gives a first-hand interview with him about his work as a code talker.


This image is of the Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008, which was signed by President George W. Bush October 15, 2008. This document recognized all Native American Code Talkers during World War I and II.

*U.S. Army. Cherokee and Choctaw Code Talkers from World War I at Fort Benning, GA. North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural*
This picture shows a group of Choctaw and Cherokee code talkers over the first World War. This image was taken by the U.S Army while the code talkers were stationed at Fort Benning.


This is an image of three men from World War I. Two of the men are code talkers. The code talkers of the World Wars were highly appreciated because of their distinguished military work, helping the United States create codes that many of their enemies could not decipher.


This newspaper article gave many detailed quotes in regards to the Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony honoring the Choctaw Code Talkers. Some of these quotes were used in this documentary.


This was a picture of a boarding school called Wapanucka Academy in Johnston County. This boarding school was one of the many schools for Indians where they were sometimes mistreated for the use of their native language.

On this website, there are two pages that give information on the reorganization that was given to the Choctaws. This document dates back to 1920.


This picture was the emblem for the 36th Division which consisted of men from Oklahoma and Texas during the World Wars and is also still used today.


This article had a picture of the Honorable Discharge given to each and every Choctaw Code Talker. This article also had a picture of the soldiers as well.


This website has multiple pictures that are very useful. One shows a soldier with dogs while at battle. One shows the original pictures of three men from the Choctaw Code Talkers. The last one shows a relative of a soldier holding his picture with pride.

“Yank Indian was Heap Big Help in Winning the War,” *The Stars and Stripes*, May 30, 1919, pgs. 1 and 3.

This is a newspaper article that talks about how the Choctaw Code Talkers helped win the war with the use of their unique native language.

*Judy Allen from the Choctaw Nation supplied me with a historic magazine about the Choctaw Code Talkers. She also supplied me with a PowerPoint. I used pictures, quotes and other information within each of them. I want to rightfully credit the sources she gave me.*
Secondary Sources


This source gave a quote from the letter of President Andrew Jackson. The quote stated that the Indians would be moved from the west of the Mississippi. This letter was written in 1830 and removed all Indians from the southeast in the United States.


This is a video that shows clips of the United States military during and after the first World War. This video showed clips of many U.S civilians celebrating the arrival of troops going into the war and after their return home.


This documentary on the Choctaw Code Talkers was a great source of information. It gave personal interviews from the Code Talkers’ relatives. Even though the relatives were not there to personally meet their family code talker, they still shared their personal opinions and the information passed down by their family members.


This website was a valuable source for this project. It gave information about the Battle of Forest Farm which was one of the most important battles the Choctaw men faced and where their language came into full use. Also, this website gave biological information about some of the Choctaw Code Talkers.
“Choctaw Indian Code Talkers of World War I.” *Remember The Alamo!*,

This website was very useful because of the information it gave, specifically the information about each of the nineteen Choctaw men who served in the military to create the codes. The background given on each of the men helped to know their personal stories and what their life was like before getting put into the military.


This website showed insight on the ceremony that took place where the families of the Choctaw Code talkers received the Congressional Gold Medals. These medals are the highest ranked medal given to a U.S civilian.


This was the Congressional Act recognizing all of the Native Americans who served in all the World Wars. It also stated the significance of the code the Choctaws created because the Germans could not decipher this code after breaking all of the Americans’ other codes.


The US mint website gives information about the Choctaw Nation Congressional Gold Medal. The website shows the front and back design as well as giving information on the designers of the medal.


This article was short but gave quick and thorough background on the First World War. The article told about the exact location of the Choctaw Code
Talkers and where they were placed when they came to France. It also gave information concerning how the Choctaws created the code.


This website spoke specifically about the boarding schools that existed in Choctaw Territory.


This was a video that was used in this documentary as dramatic music. With this song playing while pictures are being shown, it is intended to bring about emotions that make you reflect on all the Choctaws did and sacrificed for our country.


This article from History.com was very useful to the creation of this documentary. This article not only gave information on how and what the Code Talkers did in the war, but also gave background on where the Choctaw Native American tribe came from and what it was like to be forced to move from your homeland.

Lcarsdata. *A Red X or Cross Symbol*. 10 Mar. 2007. *Inkspace*

This picture is of a red “X.” With this picture, it was added to a calendar to show a certain day during the month of October 1918. This picture was placed on October 26, which was the day the Choctaw code was most useful.


This video showed what life in a trench was like for many soldiers during World War I. The video gave original clips for this documentary from World War I.

This picture was useful for this documentary because the Trail of Tears was an important mark in history for the Choctaw people, and this picture gives a glimpse of the terrible journey.


This book gave a lot of detailed information about the ceremony held for the Choctaw Code Talkers. They received France's highest award given to a citizen. It gave information about when, where, and much more background information on the award as well.

"NATIVE AMERICAN CODE BREAKERS OF WWI." *HISTORY*, www.history.co.uk/article/native-american-code-breakers-of-ww1.

This journal from HISTORY.com was useful in that it showed the significance of the code that was created by the Choctaws. It gave some background information on how the language used before the arrival of the Choctaws was ineffective because the Germans continued to break and transmit the codes, knowing the exact locations of where the Allied Forces were.


This website was useful in that it talks about the Choctaws’ experience during the Trail of Tears. This information was beneficial to use in this documentary as a way to help show all the Choctaws had endured throughout history.


This calendar was used in this documentary as a guide to show viewers exactly when October 26, 1918 was. During this day, the code the Choctaw
Code Talkers created was put into full use, and this day was when the Allies gained full attack on the Germans.


The song "Over There" was originally written by George M. Cohan. This song was published originally in 1914 during the first World War to help the Red Cross. It was played during the second World War as well as shown in this video. This song has been used for many military occasions, not just the World Wars.


This was probably one of the most valuable sources. This article told the story of how the Choctaw Code Talkers were found by chance. This article helped with the creation of the title of this documentary and also gave a lot of the information used as well.


This was a journal that gave the background research needed for this documentary. It gave information concerning the first World War, how it started and ended, and some of the significant things that happened in between.


This video was used in this documentary. Not all of it was used, just a few seconds when Harry Reid recognized the Code Talkers and how when our Nation needed them most, they fulfilled that call.

Even though this book didn't say much about the Choctaws in particular, it gave a quote from the Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony that was quite useful.

*The Star Spangled Banner (Piano) · Jaqueline Schwab, Baseball A Film By Ken Burns - Original Soundtrack Recording*. Produced by John Colby and Ken Burns, composed by Francis Scott Key, Warner Music Group, 1994. [Youtube](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkYx82fU82s).

This is an audio recording of a piano version of the "Star Spangled Banner" written by Francis Scott Key. This is the national anthem of the United States of America.


This journal from a news website helped describe and gave information about the "War to End all Wars."

“THEY SERVED ~ THEY SACRIFICED ~ 19 Young Choctaw Soldiers ~ the First to Use Their Native Language to Confuse the Enemy, Making a Marked Difference in the Outcome of World War I.” [Homepage | Choctaw Nation](http://www.choctawnation.com/history-culture/people/code-talkers).

This article from the official Choctaw website lists many facts on how the Choctaw Code Talkers represented the United States and their tribe during World War I. They created unbreakable codes that the Germans could not crack, while helping the Allied Forces win World War I.

*They Served They Sacrificed, Choctaw Code Talkers Telephone Warriors, Choctaw Nation Historic Project, Special Publication of the Choctaw Nation Commemorating 100 years: 1918-2018.*

This publication had biographies and pictures of all of the 19 original Choctaw Code Talkers. It included stories told by the men themselves as well as important dates.
"They Served, They Sacrificed." *Choctaw Nation Historic Projects*, 2018 pg 1-16.

This was a magazine from the Choctaw Nation that gave information about the Code Talkers from World War I. In this magazine, it gave information ranging from personal stories, interviews, pictures, dates, and more about how these 19 Choctaw Code Talkers served their country.

**This map shows the paths of the 5 Civilized Tribes and their routes to Oklahoma.**

*National Geographic Society, National Geographic, www.nationalgeographic.org/thisday/may28/indian-removal-act/**.

This map shows the paths of the Five Civilized Tribes who migrated to Indian Territory, now called Oklahoma. With this map, the routes of the tribes are much clearer.

**This picture is of the Cherokee Indian Tribe on the Trail of Tears in the 1830's.**


This picture shows some of the conditions that many Native American Tribes had to endure during the Trail of Tears. They had to go along a path of over 2,000 miles, not always during sunny times, but cold times as well.

**Uba Isot Taloa. Original Song Composed by John Newton, 2010.**

*Youtube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cw76jUiNboM.*

This is a video of the song "Amazing Grace" that was originally written by John Newton. Many Choctaws have sung this song in their Native language, as in the video. This song in Choctaw shows the real identity of the Choctaw people and their heritage.


This was an article from the Oklahoma History website. It listed the names of the first Choctaw Code Talkers. This article also gave a brief overview of how the Choctaw Code Talkers helped in the war and the dates of when certain events took place.

This was a book that was all about the First World War. This book included pictures, diagrams, maps and much more.


This was a magazine article from the website BBC.com. This magazine article gave valuable information about the creation of the code made by the Choctaw, and it also offered quotes from relatives of the Code Talkers and experts.