



Code-talkers, Comanches and the D-Day Landings

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In January 1944, 14 Native American Indians, members of the Comanche tribe, crossed the Atlantic along with other US military personnel and headed for Tiverton, where the US Army's 4th Infantry Division was based. The 14 Comanches brought with them something unique, a secret code, decipherable only by them, which had been constructed out of their own tribal language. The code was deployed six months later during the D-Day landings and many lives were saved, earning the code talkers, as they became known, the title of 20th century heroes as well as official honours from the French and US Governments.

Use of Native Indian languages to produce a secret code began in the first World War, but was ramped up in 1941 when the US handpicked 21 young, unattached, Comanche men to train as radio operators and repair line men, while at the same time giving them free rein to develop Comanche code words for military terms no-one outside the group, including others of their tribe, could understand. This was a challenge, partly because there was no Comanche equivalent for words like *tank*, *machine gun*, *bomber* and *Hitler*. So some creative thinking was required: *tank* became *turtle*, *machine gun* sewing machine, *bomber* pregnant airplane and *Hitler* "crazy white man".

The code was hugely successful. It took a military machine up to four hours to transmit and decode a message, but a Comanche code talker could decode the same message in less than three minutes. The Code was never broken.

And what of the Tiverton connection? One of the Comanches, who had arrived in the town just six months before, sent the first D-Day message after landing on Utah Beach. Translated into English, it read "We made a good landing. We landed in the wrong place".