



NAVAJO CODE TALKER

CARL GORMAN

Honored as a Historymaker 2005
Transmitted Messages in Code during WWII

The following is an oral history interview with Carl Gorman (**CG**) conducted by Pam Stevenson (**PS**) in September 1980. The interview begins with Mrs. Gorman (**MG**) chatting with her husband while combing his hair in the traditional way.

*Transcripts for website edited by members of Historical League, Inc.
Original tapes are in the collection of the Arizona Historical Society Museum Library at Papago Park, Tempe, Arizona.*

MG: Well, actually, if some old-timey Navajos happen to see this...

CG: That's all right.

MG: I said, if some old time Navajo see me doing this with elastics, they'll say, that's not traditional.

CG: She uses elastics to put it in more firmly.

PS: What's the traditional way?

MG: In the traditional way, they do it very tight, but they tie it without the elastic. I find this much easier for me this way.

CG: Yeah. Some, some men, they tie their own hair. And ladies tie their own hair. I give them a lot of credit. I saw a little boy tying his own hair yesterday at the fair.

MG: Well, when my husband has to go make a lecture some place, and stay a night or two, make sure it's real tight. And then he tells me he sleeps with his knot between the two pillows. I'm not sure I believe him, but...

PS: What's the significance of the cotton yarn? Was that used before the rubber bands were invented, is that it?



MG: Yes. White cotton is the traditional. You just have to tie it. Hold the hair with your hands, and, you know, tie it tighter which I find a little difficult for me. My hands don't always behave. Here you go.

PS: Why don't we start out...maybe you could just tell me about how the Code Talkers got started.

CG: When the Second War started in 1940, 1941. You know, when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Well, then the war started. And in 42, one day we heard over the radio that they wanted 30 Navajos for special duty in the Marine Corps. Right in that period, you know, they were laying all the Indians off. I was working for the government at that time and of course, I was laid off. And me and another boy, another Navajo boy, I told him let's go join the Marine Corps. They want 30 of them. So we did.

CG: We went to San Diego, and there we went through the regular boot training, as any of the other Marines. And after they got through with us, they told us then that they were going to use our language for a code.

PS: You didn't know that.

CG: We didn't know this. So they told us to set up a code in Navajo. And, of course, they helped us. The communicator from the Marine Corps helped us to know what to do.

First we coded the alphabet from A to Z. And then we started to code a lot of the war material that was used at that time. I guess they still use it. We had about 300 war material words that were named: all code. And from there on we started.

PS: Well, what did you think of the idea when you first heard that they wanted to use Navajo as the code?

CG: We didn't think much of it. We said probably they will use us just a little here and there. But, nevertheless they sent us overseas. We started in Guadalcanal with the first one. And there they found out that it worked. You know, it was much faster than sending codes. They were sending codes at that time. They had a cylinder that they went by. You spun the cylinder and then got alphabets on it. Wherever the alphabets stopped, that was your code. Well, anyway, they started using the Navajo code and language. They said it was more accurate and faster. That was the main reason it was used.

So it just kept getting better and better until we hit a place at Iwo Jima. They really used it there. And one of the majors who was head of the communications (his name was Major Connor I think) made a statement saying that if it wasn't for the Navajo Code Talkers, the Marines would have never conquered Iwo Jima. So I think we helped. In that way, we helped shorten the war, using our Navajo language.

PS: Do you have any special events that you remember that happened to you while you were doing this?



CG: Well, when the war started, we started from Guadalcanal...1st and 2nd Marine Division. And, things were really going fast. You know. Anyway, everything was just happening so fast that we didn't know. Most of the time, we were sleeping in the mud. It was raining all the time in Guadalcanal. So weather was one of the things that we had a rough time with.

And, of course, we were under bombardment all the time from the airplanes. Nighttime, especially nighttime. They would just fly over and drop bombs on us.

PS: Must have been pretty frightening. Did you ever wonder if you'd ever get back home?

CG: Towards the last it really got me. Every time they would warn us that some bombers were flying over. And then we just couldn't hide anyplace. You just had to stand there and watch and wait for them. I would be so nervous when they announced that.

PS: Were all the Code Talkers together most of the time?

CG: No, we were put into different companies and divisions both regional and headquarters. Where any communication was being used, they had a Code Talker.

PS: Do you remember any particular messages you sent? Any particular kind of messages? Anything that was special that you did?

CG: Well, my part wasn't so special. Everything seemed to be by numbers. All you had to do was just say numbers in Navajo code. Then they'd translate that back into English numbers. So, that was the part I really was in. Sometimes some of the Navajos that sent the message said the code was night. You know nighttime, you had a special code. They were sent over to different company. Daytime and then nighttime they used that particular code for safety.

PS: I was reading a story about one of the Code Talkers that was captured by the U.S. Army, or something. That they thought he was Japanese. Did that happen?

CG: Yes, that was true. That happened on Guadalcanal. He was with the 1st Marine Division. They were one of the first. When they were shoving off the Army landed there, unloading all their gear. You know lots of canned goods. And, he said that when he came back on the beach he saw a can of grape juice, and orange juice. And he really wanted to drink orange juice. He was dying for one. So he just walked up there and tried to help himself. And this Army person set a gun in his back and took him to the Provost Marshall. And there he said to go kill him. So they started taking him. And he just said, "I belong to the Marine Corps. I just...my outfit is just a little ways from here." He finally convinced them. They took him there, and when they got there, all these officers were just gambling. You know, gambling using Japanese money. They asked them if this man was their man. One of the officers looked at him and said, "Yeah," and went on gambling. And I guess he didn't like that, so he said, "Okay, let's go back. Provost Marshall



say we have to kill you.” They started to take him back, but this officer jumped up and told him, “Wait a minute! Can’t you tell Japanese from an Indian? He’s working with us”. And he let him go. He didn’t say he was a Code Talker. He just said he was one of the Marines.

PS: Well, it was a secret then, wasn’t it? What you guys were doing?

CG: Oh, yeah. It was a secret until 1968. The secret was lifted. They found out a better way of sending code language. Now they scramble a lot of different nationalities, different languages into an IBM machine. What comes out is their scrambled code language.

PS: They’ll never use the Navajo code again.

CG: I don’t think so. Unless they scramble Navajo language with other Indian languages like Hopis or Zunis. That really would be fool-proof.

PS: When you joined the Code Talkers, was that the first time you’d ever left the reservation?

CG: Yeah, well that was my first time that I went away a long distance from my home. Overseas. After we got our training in San Diego, they shipped us out to New Zealand. And there we used to train nighttime all the time. Just nighttime.

PS: Must have been quite an experience to get that far away from home so suddenly.

CG: It was. It was. But it was war and we just had to go along with it.

PS: Did you ever have any problems of being misunderstood, and being thought you were Japanese? Was that a common sort of thing that they didn’t know what to make of you?

CG: Maybe so. We had the same skin color as the Japanese. And we probably acted like the same Oriental people. But the order was out from the Marine Corps I heard, but I don’t know how true that is. It was that if one of the Code Talkers ever was captured, the Marines were given the order to kill the Code Talker right there so that a Code Talker wouldn’t fall in the hands of the Japanese. Another thing, we had Marines guarding us day and night. Every place we’d go, there was a guard that went with us. Even when we went to the toilet, he had to come along. So, we were pretty well guarded towards the last.

PS: So they could make sure you couldn’t get captured?

CG: We were a special group. But, we never realized it until after the war was over. We came back and we thought, oh, God. The war’s over. We were glad that the war is over. And then they started to talk about us and what we did. And we just said, “Oh, yeah, we were in the Marine Corps as a Code Talker.” They didn’t know what a Code Talker was. So, we had to go out and explain what we did. And it just got to the



point where a book was written about it. Lee Canyon, you know that Public Information or Public Relations man, here at Window Rock. He was in the 4th Marine Division then. He really got behind us. He said he had seen the Code Talkers in action.

PS: Seems like you didn't really get much recognition for what you did till just the last few years.

CG: About being a Code Talker? It was kept sacred, secret until 1968. And then they started talking and writing about it, and putting out publicity about it. They wanted the President to give them a citation. But so far we never had any kind of citation from the government. I mean, from the President.

PS: Was it 1969 that you got the medallion?

CG: That was when the Fourth Marine Division did. It wasn't from the government. See, when you get a Presidential Citation, that's about the highest honor you can get. And that's what we wanted. If they didn't want to help us, at least give us some kind of citation.

See, they have other veterans. They build them homes or whatever they ask. Lend them money. But not the Indians. Especially the Code Talkers. We helped them really win the war, but they seem to forget us.

PS: Do you feel that way?

CG: I...well...most of the Indian veterans are feeling that way now. We did our part; and then, in return, they're helping other veterans. Non-Indian veterans are being helped. But not the Indians.

PS: What does it mean to you to have been a Code Talker?

CG: Well, the more I think about it, in our case the Code Talkers we really helped to shorten the war. And that's one of the things that I think I'm proud of. I was a Code Talker in that particular way.

PS: Why don't we talk a little bit about some of the things you were telling me the other day in your office about the Navajos being misunderstood; and some of the problems of young people not understanding their heritage and, and things like that.

CG: Well, according to the old-timers, they could talk to their people. And talk about a lot of things about Navajos. You know. Like how to teach the philosophy of the Navajos. They taught that to younger Navajos. How to live their culture. How other people should respect our culture, and things like that. But now, today, other people have come in....like the missionaries. They have really changed the culture on the cultural part by telling the younger Navajos that their culture is no good. Theirs is the best. See? And, not just the missionaries, but there are other groups that are doing that today. Kind of dividing the thinking of the younger Navajos. Just like yesterday, everything the elders of the Navajos were really proud of like that general that was in the parade. They were happy.



But there was one young Navajo there. He was standing around cussing and saying that the Marine Corps was no good. And things like that, you know. Where does he get this kind of information? Who's teaching him that? I don't think the Navajos or his parents ever said that to him. He got that kind of teaching from outside.

PS: I was going to ask about when you came back from the war, from the Code Talkers, what did you do?

CG: I went to an art school on the coast. It was one of the best art schools they had: the Otis Art Institute. With the GI Bill I was getting 75 dollars a month. And 75 dollars a month was nothing. But, nevertheless, I stuck with it. Three or four years, I studied art. And then I got a job with Douglas Aircraft. In that particular time they were experimenting. They had government contracts on missiles. And they were paying good money. So I made good money. And at the same time I kept going to the art school learning as much as I could about art. And altogether I went seven years to an art school. Come to find out one day I was thinking that seven years and I haven't learning everything about art. I was reading about Michelangelo one time, and one of his sayings was, "Art is a lifetime study." He was 86 when he died. And he said he didn't learn everything about art. It was a life-time study. So it's true. You can't learn everything about art. I'm still learning.

PS: What are you doing today?

CG: Well, right now I'm working with the college. We are working on the curriculum. Some of the things that we have done, some of the things that we have worked on were the herbs. Navajos use herbs a lot in their healing and their health. So we have worked on that. I'm also working on the cultural aspects of Navajo to be put in book form so that students can read about their own culture.

PS: Are you working with the Medicine Men to...

CG: When you say Medicine Man, it's the wrong quotation about people who are educated in the Navajo Way. A Medicine Man is, and before you finish the paragraph, it says that he is a witch doctor. He practices witch doctoring on his patients. And he rips them off like that. You know. But we don't call our Medicine Men, Medicine Men. We call, we call them the Singers. The Singer has the role of interpreting the different ceremonies that he has learned. He might have learned about five different ceremonials...and that's pretty high. He also has the role of being a historian. And also he has a role of being a philosopher, a teacher and a counselor. These are some of the roles that make the Navajos look up to him in this respect. Probably the best one is about him interpreting some of the Navajo ceremonials. In the Navajo ceremonial, they say the history goes with the ceremonial. And if you want to know the history of the Navajos, you have to go see one of these Singers; and he'll tell you the stories, certain stories, and you have to pull out the history, or the philosophy or whatever it is, out of the ceremony.

PS: How do we find one of these Singers would be willing to talk to us about this?



CG: Oh, you could find him. You have to approach him in the Navajo Way.

PS: What is the Navajo Way?

CG: Well, the Navajo Way would be... Lots of these say writers, anthropologists, or people want to know something about our students. They're writing a thesis or writing the story about Navajo. Could you tell me this, etc., etc? Then they run right up to a Navajo, and they expect the Navajo to tell them about the ceremonial.

Like, the other day there was a student from Germany who said, "I want you to tell me who is the hero in the Navajo mythologies." I said, "They have a lot of heroes. I don't know. What hero do you want to talk about?" Then she was surprised. "They don't have only one hero?" I said no. But see, like that, they don't understand.

PS: Are you yourself a Singer?

CG: No. I never was. A lot of people think I'm a Singer but I'm not. Especially when I got out of the service, I had such a crew cut. I started letting my hair grow. And now I have to tie my hair. And on the strength of that.... I'm glad they think I'm a Medicine Man or a Singer. I'm not.

I have worked with Medicine Men as you call them. Singers, herbalists and what they call a diagnostician. Diagnostician is the one that diagnoses your case; and then from there on he'll send you to an herbalist. An herbalist is really the one that's a Medicine Man. He gives you herbs and then you get well. And then, if it's a serious case, the Singer gets involved in the ceremonial. In that way, he helps you get well with the ceremonial and the herbs.

PS: Some people invited us to go to a Squaw Dance or an Enemy Way Ceremony. Can you tell us a little bit about what the purpose of that is?

CG: Well, Enemy Way is a story mostly dealing with mind if your mind is not your friend any more, especially in wartime. When you go into war then your mind really is affected. It's called Enemy Way.

A lot of these veterans went overseas. Probably they killed some enemies. Probably they saw enemies. Probably they saw enemies get killed and things like that. And when they came back, it bothered them. It bothered them to the point where they got nightmares or dreamed about it; so it affected their mind. And that's where the Enemy Way Ceremony comes in.

PS: Is the Enemy Way the same as the Squaw Dance?

CG: Well, it's the same, yes. The proper name is Enemy Way. When the Anglos came in and watched



they let girls dance with men. So, they just call it Squaw Dance because a girl and a boy are dancing. And it is kind of a derogatory when you call the girl a “squaw.”

PS: Some people have told us you don’t want to go to a Squaw Dance. They say everybody’s just drunk there. Other people have said that it’s a very serious ceremony...

CG: It is serious. It was serious at one time. But, now it’s true that a lot of people just go there to have a good time. That’s all. They don’t think about the patient, or the true meaning of the Enemy Way Ceremonial. The idea is to help the patient that’s sick; not to get drunk and get into fights. So, lots of these people are doing that. Not, not a lot of people.

PS: But it still is used traditionally? It has a serious part to it, too?

CG: Yeah. If they look at it, or study so they know something about it. The idea is to get the patient well with this Enemy Way Ceremonial.

PS: Do they use a sand painting in that ceremony?

CG: Not in the Enemy Way. They do in Mountain Way Chant. Mountain Way Chant is where they used sand paintings. And Yei Bei Che Dance. These are big dances, too.

PS: When are those done?

CG: Well, the Yei Bei Che dances are done only after the frost comes in. But not until the snow gets really deep or gets really cold. And, it’s the same way as the Mountain Way Ceremonial.

PS: Done in the wintertime?

CG: The Fire Dance. It’s done in the fall.

PS: Oh, the fall. The first frost.

CG: Yeah. After the frost.

PS: At the museum, at the college there they have a lot of sand paintings. And yet I had heard that sand paintings were not supposed to be preserved. They were used in the ceremony, and then they were destroyed. How can they....

CG: Well, sand painting is done in the hogan or home. Uh. The reason is that it’s a race. The reason why it’s a race is to make more room for the patients. Other ceremonials are being done in that hogan. It’s a small space. So you just can’t make sand painting and let it lie then. People will walk on it. So, they put



that sand together, after it's finished. After the patient gets through. The patient and the Medicine Man get through with the sand painting, it's gathered together, put it in the sack, and taken it outside. It's not the, uh, it's not the...just for that purpose, it's done. See? Lots people think that Navajos say the the sun must never set on a sand painting. It's bad luck. But, it's not. It's just for space purposes.

PS: You say mostly the sand paintings are done for the fall and the winter ceremonies?

CG: Well, they have what they call the summer sand paintings, and fall sand paintings. There's some sand paintings that could be done all year, any time of the year, from winter or fall, see. Three different types. Some sand paintings are only done in the fall time, like Yei Bei Che Dance or Mountain Way Chant. That's only done in fall time. But, they got summer sand painting that's done in summertime. Some of the stories can be told only in the wintertime.

PS: Let's see. Can you tell us a little bit about the Navajo beliefs? I've heard that this area with the four mountains is the Navajo homeland. How did the Navajos come to be in this area here?

CG: Well, according to the anthropologists, we came from the North. But they never say from where we came. We just crossed the Bering Strait, came down here, and killed everybody that was in our path. But not according to the Navajo history.

The, the Navajo history says that we were planted here by the Holy People from the beginning of time. It's a long story, you know, when you study, the evolution of time.

The evolution of time in sand painting is black first, then blue, then yellow, and then white. See, this is the evolution of time since the earth was created. When the earth was created, the earth was all black. There was no sun: just water and darkness. That's why they painted black in their sand paintings. It is the symbol of the beginning of time--Genesis. And then, as it moved on, it got blue and then finally yellow, and then you see light. And then white. That's today. So, that's the way they talk about the history of the evolution of time.

PS: How did the Navajo people come through those different worlds? Different colors?

CG: Well, the Navajos don't write. See, the Hindus wrote about the oldest religion that they have in the world. It was written. See, they wrote about the history of their early religious philosophies. And then Darwinism, Buddhism, Islam, and then Judaism. See, it just kept growing. Finally you got Christianity.

And all these other old histories of religion are forgotten. They hardly talk about them. Just the Christianity. So, you have to study the religion. One thing, the Navajo religion, believes in duality--Man, woman. Female. Day and night. Everything is in duality. The same way the early religion of Darwinism. That's in duality, too. That's why they call it Ying/ Yang. So, making these comparisons, it seems like the Navajo religion is about as old Darwinism. They say that we were planted here. But other people say that we migrated from Europe. Asiatic and Mongolians. All that. But I don't think so. According to the history



of the Navajo they talk about the evolution of time and when the earth was created, it was all black. They always talk about ants and insects. They were a more in the form of spiritual things. That what they mean. If you really studied the Navajo religion...it's wonderful. You'd be surprised. You'd learn a lot studying the Navajo religion.

PS: I was reading some about it, and they were talking about coming up with the Insect People and then...

CG: Yeah. But, again, it's misinterpreted. When the Navajos talk, Ha gii néé dáá...what they mean is the beginning of time. It sounds like they came up from underneath the earth, which is not their interpretation. The beginning was when the earth was created.

The Chinese, when they write, start from the right on the paper. And they go down. From right to left. The Europeans and all these different nations and the American start from the left and start writing. From left to right, see. But the Navajo, when he's talking about anything, he starts from the bottom up. That's why ha gii néé dáá, the beginning of time, that's what he means, see. There's a linguistic interpretation on that. It doesn't mean that we came from underneath the earth. It's the beginning of time. That's what they mean.

PS: And one of the things I've read that talk about the four levels of moving up....

CG: Again, see, that's evolution. They're talking about the evolution of first language, second language, and third language. It's all history. An event took place in say the first world, the black world. And then the event that took them into the blue world, and that's what they are talking about. History.

PS: What was the event that actually brought you up to this world then?

CG: This goes back from the black world to the yellow world. Every time there's a catastrophe or some sudden damage, or cataclysm that happens, then they go into the next world. And, that's when it happened. See. It just kept going forward. So, from the third, the yellow world into the white world, they had a big flood. The big flood is what made them migrate into the white. Of course a lot of people were killed. This doesn't mean they're only talking about the Navajos. They're talking about the Earth People. All the Earth People. See? A lot of them were drowned when this catastrophe happened.

PS: What about the story of the Monster Slayer?

CG: Well in that period again they were just symbols of evil things. And they're talking about duality. There's good and bad. Monsters are bad. They do a lot of bad things and then they have to be destroyed so they don't get the best of human mind. And that's all it is. It's a teaching.

PS: The stories then are just ways of teaching?



CG: Yes. The same way about the coyotes. It says the moral of the story is that the Coyote represents a human being. The way they talk about coyotes, when they associate with what they call the Holy People, is either good or bad. He always makes good suggestions; and when they take his suggestion, everything comes out good. But sometimes he gets tricky. He fools people, and then he gets the worst of it. See, that's the trait of a human being. So that's what it's really telling us about the symbol of man. He's the symbol of man.

PS: Can you tell me the story about the coyote?

CG: Well, there are several stories about coyotes.

PS: What's your favorite one?

CG: Well, I've got several of them. One is that one day he was out walking and met the fawn with his little ones. They all had nice brown spots on their bodies. He asked the mother, "What do you do to your kids that they have nice spots on them?" "Oh, they're born that way." "Oh, no," he said, "I don't believe that." So, the mother deer finally got tired of it, and said, "Oh, yeah. You find a big cave and you put your kids back there and build a big fire. Every time the spark flies, it'll hit one of your little ones. And then it'll form that brown spot.

So, he went home and he put his little coyotes back there. And he said, "I'm going to change you. I'm going to make you look beautiful like those little deer." He built a big fire there, and he kept looking in there. Finally he came to find out that he had killed all his little ones. He drug one out, and the little one was dead. So he really was mad at the mother deer. The moral of the story is you can never change. You are born the way you are; like, if you're born as a Navajo, you stay Navajo. You can't change to a white man or a black man or a Chinaman. You are a Navajo. That's what the moral of the story is.

Today, you know, a lot of the Navajo young kids dye their hair and think that they want to be white. They like to be white people. But they never could change. I went through that experience.

CG: You know most of the hippies don't like war. So what they did teach is war is no good. Some of the young Navajos are picking that up, and when you talk about the war, they say, it's no good. War is no good.

PS: And how do you feel about it?

CG: Well, the war is necessary. If somebody punched you in the nose, you're bound to fight back. Or if somebody tries to take your land away. What are you going to do, just stand there and let them take your land? It's a matter of survival. You have to...especially the Indians. We fight back. The American way is to fight back with words, which is about the easiest way. But you're still fighting, you know, over different opinions. You just can't say yes, you know, to everything.



PS: Some people have told us that they think that maybe some of the American ways are really hurting the Navajo people; such as the government coming in here, everybody taking everybody else to court and suing people all the time, and the welfare programs that a lot of the Indians....

CG: I don't think so. Some are good, some are bad. I wouldn't say that it's all ruining the Navajos. There are some white people that say, oh....like the use of DNA. They're just ruining the Navajos by helping them. They have won some good cases.

PS: What about some of the welfare programs and the government assistance. Some people have said that instead of raising sheep now, people find it's easier to just go and pick up a check.

CG: Well, some are doing good and taking advantage of it. Just like among the non-Indians. I read about some of these welfare people get more than one check. They use more than one name. Get as many checks as they can. I guess Navajos don't do that. But eventually they might want to do that. But it's helping. There's a lot of Navajos. You get way out beyond the hills there. There's lot of Navajos that are still stock owners and cattle owners. So I don't know what they're talking about. Navajos give out their sheep and just rely on a relief check. Some do, yes. But not all of them.

PS: Do you think that the modern American ways, the paved roads, and electricity, people going to college and becoming professionals--can those things survive along with the traditional ways and the old?

CG: I don't think it'll survive. See, we're in the stage where everything has changed. Everything is today like the highway with food and drinking. Everything. And we just have to get along. Eventually, probably at the end, the Navajo, if they hang on to their culture will come out ahead, But if they try to live like the rest of the people that put on us to live that way, if they win out then probably it'll be the end of the Navajos. But a lot of the Navajos don't think that way. They think the Navajo Way is the better way and the only way. Not the white man's way.

PS: What do you think?

CG: I think if we hang on to our culture, we'll win out.

PS: You've sort of answered it, but I was going to ask you. I'm asking everybody I talk to about how they see the future of the Navajo Nation.

CG: The future of the Navajo is up to the young ones now, and how we train and teach them. We let other people teach them the way and they say our culture is no good, our religion is no good, and the Navajo philosophy is no good; then naturally they'll change. But if we stick to our culture, stick to our language and stick to our philosophy, we'll survive.



PS: Do you think schools like Navajo Community College and Rough Rock and some of those schools, are going to help do that?

CG: If they really teach the Navajo culture, the Navajo philosophy and the Navajo language, then yes.

PS: Are they doing that?

CG: Well, I guess so.

PS: Well, you're there to help them do it, aren't you?

CG: Yeah. I don't sit in their classes and listen to them. See, I'm doing other things besides that.

PS: Okay, I think that's everything I wanted to ask you about. Is there anything I didn't bring up that I should have?

CG: I don't know. I don't know what else we can talk about.

(Interviewer asks Mr. Gorman about a medal)

CG: This medal was given to us....well, it was given to all the Code Talkers from each division: First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth and Sixth. When the 4th Marine Division had the reunion in Chicago in 1968, I think it was, I represented the 2nd Marine Division, and this was given to me by the 4th Marine Division.

PS: Was that the first time you'd gotten any real public recognition?

CG: That's right. From there it started. Lee Cannon was the president of the 4th Marine Division. And he saw action. He saw Marines Code Talkers working on Iwo Jima. And he thought it was interesting, and started asking questions.

PS: Were you there?

CG: No, I wasn't there. I was knocked out on Saipan.

PS: How were you knocked out?

CG: Oh, from a concussion.

PS: What happened?



CG: A bomb landed right close to us. We were bringing back some wounded Marines from the line and they were shelling us. And a big shell landed. It wasn't too close, but it was close enough that the concussion knocked us out. Both of us.

PS: Were you in the hospital then?

CG: Yeah, I was in the hospital for a whole year up in Oregon.

PS: Must have been pretty serious.

CG: Well, war is serious.

PS: Did you get any medals or anything?

CG: No.

(Mr. Gorman puts on his Code Talker hat)

CG: Yeah. This is our color. The Code Talker. Turquoise cap.

PS: Why did you choose turquoise?

CG: Oh, I don't know. I guess they think Navajos like turquoise.

PS: You use it when you march in parades?

CG: A white man was telling a group of Navajos that in heaven the streets are paved with gold, and in every corner they got diamonds stuck there, you know, and things like that. And finally one old Navajo said, "Wait a minute. Have you got any turquoise up there?" They said, "No, turquoise was never mentioned in the bible." And he said, "You're talking about a white man's heaven. Not Navajo heaven. That's just a joke." Don't take me serious.

PS: Your wife was telling me that you were the oldest of the Code Talkers.

CG: I think I was. There was this other Code Talker who died....Oscar (last name unknown). I think he was about the same age.

PS: Were any of the Code Talkers killed during the war?

CG: Some, yeah.



PS: Sounds like you came pretty close.

CG: Well, lot of times I got close enough, but I never got hit.

PS: You ended up in the hospital.

CG: Well, you know, the bullet isn't as bad as the bombs from airplanes or artillery.

(Now Mr. Gorman is describing a picture of his grandfather as a silversmith)

CG: They had their own blower. Yeah. They just had to do it by hand. Henry Ford started the idea of the assembly line. So Navajos used this idea. One Navajo cut the silver out, or pounded the Mexican money out. Next one would cut the...anyway, down the line like that.

PS: Is that what they used Mexican money a lot for?

CG: During the early days. Yeah. In the early days they used a lot of Mexican money. I mean, that's all they used.

PS: That's where they got the silver.

CG: Yeah. And they say it doesn't tarnish. You could tell silver that's made out of Mexico money. It won't tarnish. But today lot of silver they call it the German silver. You know, it just gets dark.

PS: You were telling me some of these things the other day when I was here.

CG: Well, yeah. Those are some of the Navajos names.

PS: Is that some of the things that you do in your job here?

CG: No, We were talking about giving the proper name on these maps. And that...like that Cudei, New Mexico. I was telling you that cooties are a type of lice.

CG: This photograph...I found it. I was coming back from Phoenix one day, and I dropped in at Little America in Flagstaff. I found that picture of my grandfather when he was young.

PS: You hadn't seen it before?

CG: No, I hadn't seen it, and I was really surprised. They were selling that for 25-cents each. So I bought about two dozen. They said, "Why you want to buy so many of them? You're the first one that came in bought..." I said, "This is my grandfather." I told them the story about him. He came back here and was one of the leaders in the early days.



PS: What was your grandfather's name?

CG: His name was beshlagai il'ini altososigi. When he was young, they used to call him he Slim Silvermaker. But after he got older, he got big. Paunchy like some of the Navajos are today. They get paunchy when they're still young. But he has really a powerful history behind him.

PS: Why don't you tell us a little about him?

CG: Well, He told us that when he was a kid, he walked to Fort Sumner when the Navajos were moved in 1865 or 64. And there was a concentration camp for the Navajos way up in the eastern part of New Mexico, where one of the outlaws was killed in the early days. But anyway he walked. He said, "I walked To Fort Sumner. In 1868, they let them go. And he said, "I didn't walk back. I run back to my country." There was his story.

PS: Do you remember him? Was he still alive when you...

CG: When I was really small boy, my dad had a trading post in Chinle; and he used to visit, his daughter, my mother. He used to tell some really fantastic stories.

One day he came and he said, "A bear chased me. And, there was the bear just chasing me around." (In the early days, the Navajos used to carry 45 or a 44 revolver.) H was being chased by a bear and he was trying to get out of that place. Then, all of a sudden, his sleeve got caught. The revolver hooked on his sleeve, but he pulled it out. "The bear stopped," he said. So he grabbed the revolver and shot the bear.

PS: How did he happen to have that picture taken?

CG: I really don't know. I guess some photographer in the early days took his picture. That, picture was taken at the Chicago World's Fair, about 1905, I think it was. Some unknown photographer took that picture.

PS: What was his English name?

CG: Well, all his children are named Peshlakai. Their last names are Peshlakai. Like Fred Peshlakai, Frank Peshlakai, Carl Peshlakai and Mary Peshlakai. He had a whole gang--a lot of children. My mother was Alice Pushbike before she was married to my dad, so that that was his English name.

PS: Were there a lot of the survivors of the Long Walk alive when you were a boy that you remember talking about it?

CG: Not too many. I don't think there are any left. Several years ago there were two Navajo who were



twins. At that time they claimed they were 104 years old. So they were about the last Navajos who were alive at that period. This has been about 10 years ago.

PS: They didn't talk about it.

CG: Oh, they talked about it. But it just went in one ear and came out the other ear. It didn't faze me, or I never thought about people being treated like that in the early days.

PS: You must have seen a lot of changes here since you were a boy though.

CG: Well, when I came back, yes. I, I left and I lived among the how you call the English name of...the society. When I came back, I kept watch and I kept noticing a lot of changes being made. Even now. So, I don't know whether it's good or bad.

PS: When you were a boy were things a lot more primitive here? Less paved...

CG: Well, they didn't have no paved roads. I remember we used to ride from Chinle to Gallup on dirt roads. And boy, when you get caught in the rain, you might as well get out and just build a fire and stay there till the road dried up. Now you just buzz right through on the pavement.

PS: Was that in wagons that you would ride up here? On horseback?

CG: Wagons, yes. You know, from Chinle. I went to school in a mission school, way east of Gallup. My dad used to take us back in the wagon to Gallup. They used to pick us up from that mission place. They'd wait for us in Gallup. It's about six miles out of Gallup. So, we, uh, we used to travel like that.

PS: What did you think the first time you left Chinle and went all the way over there?

CG: We had more fun playing while the wagon was being driven by four horses. We enjoyed it.

PS: You weren't sad about leaving your family and stuff?

CG: Well, I was when I went to school...the first time my Dad left me over there. And boy, I thought it was the end of the world. I was left all by myself. And, I cried all night, next day all day. But it didn't do any good. But, eventually I just slowly got used to it. That was one of the biggest mistakes probably the government ever made. Taking kids away from home and getting them to try and forget their culture I guess. And we had to stay away from our family for nine months or 10 months. And then it was two months of vacation. And, most of us went home providing our parents came over there to pick us up. But, my dad had a Model-T Ford. He used to drive to Gallup and pick us up.



PS: What made you decide to come back to the reservation?

CG: I don't know. Navajos got a saying that your home is where your naval...where they cut ...what do you call it?

PS: Umbilical cord.

CG: Umbilical cord. See, when the Navajos cut it, they bury it. And then the person is supposed to come back. That's your home. So I guess that's what happened to me

But, uh, I made a lot of money off of the reservation. And, I had a lot of good friends. I still have good friends, out of Navajo country. And back and forth. In other words, I understood the culture of the non-Indians; and also my own culture, the Navajo culture. It's just like standing on two foundations. I just liked both cultures.

(Mr. Gorman commenting on more pictures)

PS: That your grandfather and your grandmother?

CG: Yeah, the grandmother. See the belt she's wearing? Today, one of the granddaughters still has that belt. I had that enlarged and I gave it to my son...My grandfather was one of the leaders in the early days. He was a great talker.

PS: Is there anything of significance in these pictures? Of historic nature. In other words, what is he holding?

CG: That's a Concho belt and a bridle. I inherited that bridle. I've got it now.

PS: Why did he go back to Chicago?

CG: To the World's Fair.

PS: Why did he go to the World's Fair? What did he care about that?

CG: Well, I guess the government, the BIA, took some Navajo silversmiths to put them on exhibit over there. He didn't go there on his own.

PS: Did he ever travel anywhere else besides the World's Fair?

CG: I don't know That's the only thing that I know. I was told that he went to the World's Fair.



PS: You don't know if he went to Washington, D.C.?

CG: I don't know. I don't know.

PS: What does it say on the back of this picture?

CG: Well, it says, "Navajo silversmith. Navajo artisans began working silver during the Spanish colonial period. This smith proudly displays a heavy stamped Concho belt and a silver ornamental bridle with his tool kit. He wears a Concho belt and silver beads with a naja crescent. This is a Warrick Collection Museum. New Mexico. Santa Fe. 1880."

