

Carl Gorman

1907–1998



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Carl Gorman was a Navajo “Code Talker” whose coded language helped the United States to defeat Japan in World War II. He was also a celebrated Native American artist and cultural historian.



As you read the biography below, think about how Carl Gorman’s native language was an asset to the United States during wartime.

Carl Gorman was born on October 5, 1907. His native name was Kin-Ya-Onnybeyeh. He lived on the Navajo Reservation in Chinle, Arizona.

Gorman was a member of the Black Sheep Clan. His father was a merchant-rancher and trader, while Gorman’s mother was an artist who crafted Navajo weavings. Together, Carl Gorman’s parents founded the first Presbyterian mission at Chinle.

At the age of 34 Gorman joined the U. S. Marine Corps. He and 28 others were inducted into the Corps on May 4, 1942. These recruits were given a secret mission after they completed boot camp. Gorman and the other Marines had been chosen to be Code Talkers.

The Code Talkers’ primary job was to transmit information on tactics and troop movements, orders, and other vital battlefield communications over telephones and radios.

Code Talkers spoke their native Navajo language. They were **encrypting** military information so that the Japanese would not understand it. Gorman and the others were performing secret work, identifying military locations and vessels. The Code Talkers even used a code within the Navajo language: bird names were given to aircraft, while fish names were



Photograph by Kenji Kawano

VOCABULARY

encrypting coding words as to be secret or unintelligible

used for ships. Beginning with a mere 200 terms, by the end of the war they had developed a coded language of 600 words. The Japanese never broke their code. The work of the Navajo Code Talkers helped the United States to defeat the Japanese during World War II. A monument to the Navajo Code Talkers was dedicated in Flagstaff, Arizona in 1995.

After the war, Gorman studied at the Otis Art Institute in California. He became a technical illustrator and later started his own silk-screen print business. In 1969, Gorman became the first faculty member at the University of California, Davis to teach Native American art. Later, he became a founding member of the Native American Studies department at the university.

In honor of Gorman, the C.N. Gorman Museum opened at the University of California, Davis in 1973. His artwork has been displayed in many national and international galleries.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What did the Navajo Code Talkers do?

2. **Recall** How many terms were initially in the Code Talkers' code? How many words were in the code by the end of World War II?

ACTIVITY

3. Create a logo for Carl Gorman. Use symbols, shapes, or animals to convey an aspect of Gorman's life that you find significant.