



Navajo Code Talker Peter MacDonald Sr. was born on a Navajo reservation in Teec Nos Pos, AZ. born in 1928. At 15-years-old, he lied about his age and enlisted to join the USMC at age 15 in 1944. MacDonald reached the rank of a Corporal and was assigned to the 1st Marine Brigade and then, to the Sixth Marine Division to be with the Marine Corps Headquarters unit. After completing the training, he was stationed at Camp Pendleton, Pearl Harbor and Guam. MacDonald was then deployed to North China, where he was tasked to get all Japanese soldiers, occupying North China, to surrender. When the war in the Pacific ended, he celebrated the war by yelling and shooting small arms into the sky along with other Marines and Naval forces. After returning home, MacDonald had a Navajo ceremony, called "Nidaa", to cleanse him from what he went through.

I was born and raised on the Navajo reservation in Teec Nos Pos, AZ, near today's 4-Corners; I was raised in the Teec Nos Pos area, herding sheep, tending to our cattle and horses; we had a 10 acre farm as well. My mother said I was born in early Spring 1928 while we were moving our livestock from winter camp to our summer camp in May or April. The Federal government (BIA) gave me my birth date to be December 16th. They also gave me my English name; my Navajo name is "Haskashil", my clan: Hashkaahazhoho (mothers clan), born for Bet'anii (father's clan), my nali or dad's father's clan is Tissikaanii and my cheii or mother's father's clan is A'shi hii. All those four clans are related to me no matter where they live and I am to take care of them and they take care of me too. It's called K'e. K'e means love and care for one another..

I had a very good loving family. My father died when I was two years old; I never really remember what he looked like (too young to remember). My father and other male members of the family were rounding up our horses when my father's horse stumbled down a huge rocky

hill. His horse fell and threw him off onto rocks and then rolled over him; he died with kidney failure within days. My mother was the sweetest, loving and caring mother; she never spanked me for I always minded her because she was so loving. I had one older brother, three older sisters, one younger brother and one younger sister. Today all my sisters are gone and it's just my younger brother and I who are still alive. In those early days we all lived together or next to each other as a family unit: father, mother, brothers, sisters, grandpa, grandma, aunts, uncles, and their children or niece and nephews, no one in the family unit knew or spoke the English language. More frequently we consolidate our livestock and work together as a family unit. The leaders of the group usually are the grandpa and grandma. They decide, in consultations with others, when and where to move next. We had summer camp, winter camp, and fall camp. The main reasons for moving from one camp to the next is forage; we move to areas where there would be more forage for animals and plenty of water. Our main camp is usually where our farm is located.

Growing up Navajo was very, very different from today. First of all, we all just spoke one language: the Navajo language. Secondly, we all worked from the time you are four years old till you are given away to be married. All marriages were arranged between the bride's family and your family. You had no say in the matter until the negotiation is completed and dates set for the marriage ceremony. There was no dating before marriage, it was after the ceremony that you and your new wife get to know each other by herding the sheep together. The morning after the wedding ceremony the sheep is let out of the corral for both of you to tend all day long and get acquainted being alone.

There were no weekdays, there were just twelve months; we had no calendars, and none of us had watches. Everyone had a duty: pickup firewood, get water, help plant, irrigate, hoe the field, harvest time very busy, lambing seasons everyone pitched in to help, dehorning cattle, branding, shearing sheep, selling lambs and wool at the trading post, women weaving and cooking. We didn't have clocks, so we worked from dawn till sun down. I worked as a child, but it was not heavy work. Like I said earlier, everyone after four years old had to work to keep the home fires burning.

There were no jails, no courts, no policemen; there was no need for it because we all obeyed the rules put in place for us to live and treat each other accordingly. Consequently, there is no need for law enforcement. Everyone goes by the rules established by the holy ones and if you violate the rules there will be spiritual consequences and you'll need a medicineman to get you back on track to a good peaceful living.

From the time you are four years old, learning starts by storytelling from grandparents, uncles, and parents. We are told how the world was created for our use and how we should live peacefully with each other and all the animals, species, elements like trees, herbs, mountains and sacred rivers; they are alive just as we are. These teachings go on every evening. Every story gets longer as you get older, there will be tests every so often by having you retell that story in the same order and with the same words used to make sure you memorized the story correctly and completely. Every Navajo home went through all those teachings. That was growing up Navajo.

It's not that way today; boys and girls get to know each other at school and they date and in many cases they are the ones who make the decision to be married or not. On other things, there was no unemployment, everyone worked from age four up to the old people.

My mother put me in school at age six. It was a new federal Day School at Teec Nos Pos. I did not know one word of the English language; my teacher didn't know one word in Navajo. Somehow we all started to communicate with our teacher, we were doing the learning and the teacher doing the teaching. Of course there were Navajo interpreters to help with communication. At age 9, my mother sent me to a federal government boarding school at Shiprock, New Mexico. I dropped out of federal boarding school at age 12 after finishing sixth grade to start learning how to be 100% Navajo under the tutelage of my grandfather, the medicine man.

I joined the United States Marine Corps (USMC) in 1944 when I was 15 years old. My clan cousin came home from the military wearing a beautiful blue uniform. I asked him "how do I get one of those beautiful uniforms?" His answer was to join the United States Marine Corps; I told him I like to do that. He asked how old I was, I told him "15 years old." He told me I needed to be at least 17 years old; of course, he was at least three years older than I. Well, I lied about my age and enlisted to join the USMC at age 15. I joined to wear that beautiful blue uniform and fight the war in the Pacific, but it turned out at that moment, the Selective Service Board was automatically routing Navajos to join the USMC.

At the time we joined the USMC, we didn't know Navajos were needed for Code Talker duty; it was a very top secret operation. As a matter of fact, none of us knew there was a Navajo Code program until we went through boot camp, combat training and communication school at Camp Pendleton, near Oceanside, CA. After passing all those training we would be separated from all Marines to go to a top secret location where Navajo Code, which had been developed since early 1942, was being taught to all new Navajo recruits. Going to war to protect our land and our country was something we all wanted to do because our grandparents told us horror stories as to what happened to them in early wars with the newcomers to our country.

Going through training wasn't difficult at all because most of us Navajo were used to working everyday from the time we started to walk, handling heavier duties as we get older so by the time we are 12 years old we can do nearly any adult jobs at home. I made some good friends, most importantly, I was with at least a dozen Navajos all through my service as a Navajo Code Talker, this made it very easy and less homesick or lonely. One friend I made was during my boot camp training; a fair, blond haired kid came to me and asked if I could read his letter from home to him. I was surprised he didn't know how to write his language, because I always thought white people were smarter than us and we were learning to read and write their language. I immediately thought this was a wise guy trying to embarrass me probably thinking here is a "dumb" Indian, etc. So I read the letter to him and he thanked me and went on. The next day he came to me again and this time he wanted me to write or answer his letter. At this point I told him why he was doing this to me; he said he can't read or write because he only went to the second grade. I completely relaxed and wrote the letter home for him. He became a good friend, but more than that, at this juncture I learned that Navajos weren't "dumb" like my anglo teacher used to call us at the federal boarding school. I learned that a "super" whiteman can't even read or write his own language. From that day forward I always held my head up and was proud to be a Navajo and that there was NO such thing as a "super" race.

All Navajo Code Talkers were assigned automatically to the USMC communication unit after finishing the Communication school at Camp Pendleton. I reached the rank of Corporal and was assigned to the 1st Marine Brigade then later to the Sixth Marine Division to be with the Marine Corps headquarters unit along with about a dozen other Navajo Code Talkers, others were assigned to regimental, battalion, or company units. In 1942, the Navy and the USMC, after successfully testing the Navajo Code in actual battle on Guadalcanal in August of 1942, established two communication networks to be used in every major landing; Navajo Communication Network for all top secret and confidential messages...messages you didn't want the enemy to know went through the Navajo Communication Network. The second communication network was the English Communication Network, this one for all other messages...messages you didn't care if the enemy breaks the code or understands the message. These two communication networks worked side-by-side in every major landings in the Pacific.

I was stationed at Camp Pendleton, Pearl Harbor, Guam, and then in North China. Our job in China was to get all Japanese soldiers in North China to surrender, turn in all their weapons and sign a separate peace treaty with them at Tsingtao, China. I was not in the Iwo Jima landing; Navajo Code Talkers within the 3rd, 4th and 5th Marine Divisions participated in that landing. Each division had at least 80 Navajo Code Talkers; therefore, over 200 Navajo Code Talkers were on that landing transmitting all top secret and confidential messages until the Island was secured after 30 days of hell. All together, there were over 400 certified Navajo Code Talkers in WWII. Over a dozen Navajo Code Talkers were killed in action and more than two dozen were wounded; I was not wounded nor seriously injured. I had a clan cousin killed on September 15th, 1944 on the landing of Peleliu Island; I had another friend who totally lost his mind while in North China.

I celebrated the war ending like all other Marines and Naval forces: Yelling and shooting small arms into the sky. After sailing for 30 days from Tsingtao, China, I was discharged from the U.S. Marine Corps in October 1946 at San Diego, California. One thing I will always remember is that war is ugly and war is bad. We should never take for granted our freedom, our liberty, and the peace that we have here in America. Respect and honor the United States flag and all those who defended that "old glory". Remember, "Our flag does not fly because the wind blows it. It flies with the last breath of every soldier who died defending it." We didn't get any special medal or recognition until after the Navajo Code was declassified in 1968, 23 years after WWII ended, Congress awarded us the nation's highest medal: Congressional Gold and Silver medal. President Ronald Reagan and Congress established, by law, making August 14th to be National Navajo Code Talker Day.

After the war, I was 18 years old and a sixth grade dropout and without a trade skill. I was happy to be home alive and just readjusted with the family and tried to find work. I stayed unemployed, except for migrant work pulling carrots and harvesting sugar beets for over a year. WWII GI Bill was great, it provided us with weekly checks for 52 weeks to help us find a job. During this period, I learned that I can use my GI Bill to get an education. I took the GED test and passed it; thereby, from sixth grade on to College and got my Electrical Engineering BSEE degree from University of Oklahoma. I went to work for Howard Hughes in Culver City, California

and became a project engineer for the Polaris Missile Guidance System. Left Hughes and came back to the Navajo reservation to help my people and be close to my mother and family.

I had a Navajo ceremony, "Nidaa", to cleanse me from all the evil contamination of war that I went through. Would I return to the war scene? Not really, because my medicine man, grandfather, told me never to go back to the scene from which you've been cleansed.



