EDITOR'S DESK

thoughts on history

As you read this issue, you will notice a new logo appearing on page 67, at the end of "Code Talkers" by William R. Wilson. In the future, this symbol will be used in each issue to signify that an article complementing the one to which the logo is affixed can be found on the *American History* home page of TheHistoryNet, Cowles History Group's site on the World Wide Web. The article written especially for our website will deal with some aspect of the subject covered in the one published in the magazine itself.

The first such article, "An Ungrateful Nation," was written by George McColm, an agricultural expert who worked with the federal government's Indian Bureau after World War II, witnessing in the process the hardships endured by many Navajo veterans, including the code talkers. During conversations with Mr. McColm about this article, he pointed out to me something that I am sure would surprise most Americans as much as it did me: Despite the distinguished service of 3,600 Navajo servicemen in World War II (nearly 400 of whom gave their lives), these veterans, on returning to the United States, were not entitled to vote.

That injustice was rectified thanks in large measure to Howard Nez, a Navajo war hero who served with the U.S. Marine's Carson Raiders as a code talker and a sniper. A high-school graduate, Nez did not appreciate his status as a "ward" of the U.S. government when he returned to the reservation after fighting his way from island to island across the Pacific. (On Guam, he kicked his way out of a body bag after being—quite erroneously—brought in as dead.) He reasoned that the least the government could do for him when he came home was allow him to vote.

What he discovered, however, was that Reservation Indians like himself, because of their tax-exempt status, were listed by the state of Arizona along with people confined to asylums as among those to whom voting privileges were denied. Nez not only filed suit, but enlisted the aid of a photographer and newsman in order to bring the matter to public attention. The resulting picture and story informed the nation, and perhaps the president of the United States, that a war hero was being denied this basic right of citizenship.

According to Mr. McColm, there is an unconfirmed story that President Harry S. Truman became so incensed on learning of this injustice that he called the governors of Arizona and New Mexico, whose voting requirements were similar, threatening to cut off all federal funds to both states if the situation were not rectified. That call may or may not have taken place, but however it came about, Reservation Indians were permitted to vote for the first time in the elections of November 1948, seventeen years before the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 guaranteed that right. Mr. Nez died last year at the age of 73, having left an important legacy to his people.

In addition to "Code Talkers," this issue features Donald Lankiewicz's revelation that naval strategist and historian Alfred Thayer Mahan thoroughly disliked the sea and his shipboard responsibilities (page 24); Harold Holzer's examination of the "unmilitary" image that printmakers bestowed on Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War (page 28); the story of America's child actors from the 1850s through the 1940s by Diana Serra Cary, one of motion pictures' first child stars (page 36); William V. Writer's account of the courageous battle waged by Dr. Walter Reed and his associates at the turn of the century to find the cause of yellow fever (page 44); and the saga of how Burma-Shave's roadside jingles defied all the odds and became not only a successful advertising campaign, but beloved pieces of Americana (page 52). And, on page 64, we introduce a new department—"Recollections"—in which we will regularly present first-hand reminiscences about people, places, or events that figured significantly in the nation's history.

—Margaret Fortier

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