

Prepared Testimony of Mr. Robin Roberts, U.S.M.C. Retired
To the Senate Indian Affairs Committee
Wednesday, September 22, 2004

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Robin Lee Roberts. I am a member of the Sac Fox tribe of Tama, Iowa and a former member of the United States Marine Corps. For more than a decade, my wife Diana Marie and I have been urging Congress to recognize a group of dedicated Americans – the Native American code talkers – heroes one and all. We have written letters, placed phone calls, and met with members of the Iowa delegation. With this hearing today I believe we are making progress.

I am pleased to state we have significant support from the state of Iowa, our Congressional delegation, and leading veterans and Native American groups. Last Spring, both the Iowa state Senate and the Iowa state House passed a resolution urging Congress to award the Code Talkers the Congressional Gold medal. Senators Grassley and Harkin have been actively engaged in this effort – co-sponsoring the legislation to award these medals and working to get their colleagues to support this legislation.

Enemy soldiers managed to break every code used by American forces and our allies, except the codes devised by Native Americans. As a result, the Native American heroes were the eyes and ears of every unit they served, as forward observers, scouts and radio operators. These courageous Code Talkers endured the extreme conditions of battle in some of the most dangerous terrain of the war. They did their duties without questions and without regard to the safety of their own lives.

More than 18 tribes sent men to serve as Code Talkers – from the Choctaw, Comanche, Cheyenne, Cherokee, Osage and Yankton Sioux in WWI to the Chippewa, Oneida, Commanche, Meskwaki, Hopi and others in subsequent conflicts.

Bound by commitment and honor, the Code Talkers returned from the war and kept the secret of their activities. With humility, they ignored the important role they have played in these wars and resumed their normal daily lives. Too many of the Code Talkers have taken these secrets to their graves. In 1968, the United States military de-classified the use of Native American Code Talkers. For the first time, family members, fellow tribal members, and the entire world understood the vital role these men had played on behalf of their country. That is not enough.

It is important to remember, these people were sons, fathers, brothers, uncles, grandfathers and friends. It is critical that the families know that we honor the sacrifices made on behalf of our country and we salute their bravery and ingenuity. These warriors saved tens of thousands of lives and stymied enemy initiatives and attacks. They were the most wanted men among all units as the enemy hoped a capture would allow them to break the code. Though some were eventually captured, they kept their honor and still held to their sworn secrecy.

So let us honor these brave men and show their families that we value their service and commitment to our country by awarding them the Congressional Gold medal. They went above and beyond the call of duty on behalf of the United States and now I ask the Congress to do the same for them. Thank you for the chance to speak on behalf of these brave soldiers. *Semper Fidelis.*