



# Elder Visions

Newsletter of the National Indian Council on Aging, Inc.

Winter 2003-2004

By Rev. Patricia McIntosh

## The Last of the Comanche Code Talkers

**H**addon Codynah, Robert Holder, Forrest Kassanvoid, Wellington Mihecoby, Edward Nahquaddy, Perry Noyobad, Clifford Otovito, Simmons Parker, Melvin Permansu, Elgin Red Elk, Roderick Red Elk, Larry Saupitty, Anthony Tabbyetchy, Ralph Wahnee, Willis Yacheschi, and Charles Chibitty served in the U.S. Army during World War II. Of these men, only Charles Chibitty is left.

During the early part of World War II, our enemies were able to break all the codes we devised to transfer information from one unit to another. Finally, someone remembered that during World War I, the Choctaw language had been used as code. Like Choctaw, Comanche and Navajo were not written, only spoken languages, thus they were completely unknown by the enemy. And, therefore indecipherable. The Comanche and Navajo tribes were called on to use their native languages to help defeat the Axis powers.

Charles Chibitty, of Tulsa, is the last of the Comanche Code Talkers, and I found him to be a willing, congenial host and storyteller.

"I'll tell you one thing. The Japanese and the Germans were real smart when it came to breaking codes," said Chibitty. "They could break any code our armies had except the ones created by the Navajo in the Pacific and the ones we (the Comanche) used in Europe.

"There were three infantry divisions; the 8th, the 12th, and the 22nd, and there were Comanches with each of them at all times. I was with the 22nd all through the war. If one of us became sick or got wounded, they (headquarters) would pull him back and replace him until he recovered. We went from regiment, to battalion, to company, and to the front lines to send messages back when needed. The Comanches altered the meaning of many of our words to fit the situation to make it even harder to decipher should the enemy figure out a word or two. For example, the English word "German" became the Comanche word "Wohonuu" that means enemy. The English word "tank" became the Comanche word "Waakuni" that means turtle.

The first message I sent was 'Fighting is fierce. We need help.'

We all stayed together during our time in the army. We were members of the 4th Division, and 2nd Lt. Hugh Foster was assigned to lead us. He didn't go to France with us, but he remained close and kept in contact, even after the war."

"Five of us were wounded pretty badly while we were in Europe, but none of us lost our lives. I don't know how many Navajo were injured, or if any were killed. Never did hear."

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**Health Update**

**The Flu and You**

The flu can be life threatening for older adults and those with chronic diseases. A flu shot can lower your chances of getting the flu. The time to get your flu shot is NOW (September through mid-February), before the flu season (late December through early March) begins.

Here are some flu facts:

- The flu can be VERY dangerous for people 65 and older.
- The flu can be prevented.
- A flu shot is necessary each fall for people in high-risk groups (those with chronic heart or lung diseases, diabetes, kidney disease, anemia), and their caregivers.
- Medicare covers the flu shot.
- The flu shot is safe. It cannot cause the flu.



The flu shot and pneumococcal vaccine can be given at the same time. If you have any questions, ask your doctor.

Information from "What to Do About the Flu", the National Institute on Aging AgePage. [www.nia.nih.gov/health/agepages/flu.htm](http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/agepages/flu.htm). ■

**Only ten, so don't worry**

**10 Mistakes Old People Make**

1. Driving when it is no longer safe and not using seat belts.
2. Fighting the aging process and its appearance.
3. Refusing to discuss sexual, urinary or other intimate problems with a doctor.
4. Pretending they understand what the doctor is saying.
5. Not guarding against falls.
6. Failure to take medications as prescribed.
7. Seeing too many doctors and not letting one get the whole picture.
8. Waiting for things to get better.
9. Not taking preventive measures like flu shots or breast exams.
10. Not asking loved ones for help. ■

## Comanche Code Talkers

"When I talk about and remember my comrades, I wonder why did it take so long for us to be recognized for all they did? They aren't here to enjoy the recognition I am receiving after all of these years. Many of my buddies suffered serious injury during the war and later, in Korea. We survived. But we were ignored by our government."

Chibitty is always careful to talk about his buddies and mention each by name. "We were family. We not only worked together, but we played together. We were good boxers and there were many matches during our free time. You might say we had a sort of mini-Olympics when we had the time."

The irony is that at that time, the Bureau of Indian Affairs policy was to put an end to the use of native languages. Native American children were forbidden to speak their native languages at school, many of which were government-run.

In Fort Sill Indian School, I was forbidden to speak my language," said Chibitty. "They would punish if they caught us speaking Comanche. It was very sad for us."

In 1940, Chibitty, who was born near Medicine Park in the Lawton area, was a student at the Haskell Indian School in Lawrence, KS. When he went home for Christmas that year, he learned that the army was recruiting Comanches who could speak their language fluently.

"I talked to my mother about dropping out of school to join the army. I was in the middle of my senior year, and mother really wanted me to fin-

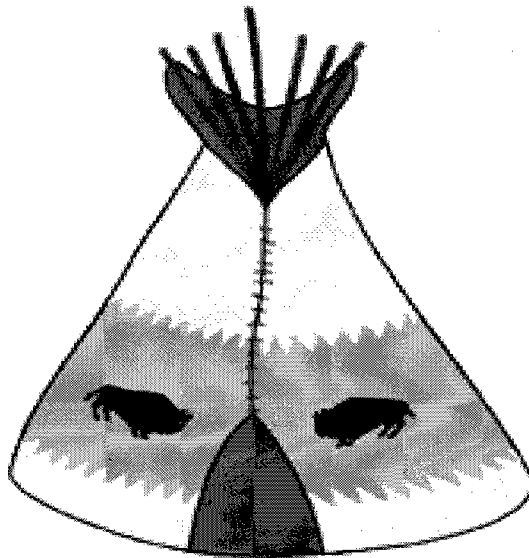
ish school. Finally she said yes, and I enlisted on January 2, 1941.

"My life in the army was not too bad, and I had my buddies. Most of the Comanche Code Talkers and I had gone to school together, so we were already friends. Some of us were relatives. We all wanted to make it back home, and we did. I'm so proud of what God helped me and my buddies do for our country," said Chibitty. He settled in Tulsa after the war and became a glass worker.

For many years, Mr. Chibitty, has talked to school classes, churches, and civic groups about the accomplishments of the Comanche Code Talkers.

"I love to talk to the children. We must not let them grow up without telling them about our history. Our (Comanche) history is very important. Everyone's history is important. If they knew their history, maybe they would feel better about themselves and there wouldn't be so much killing and violence," said Chibitty. "I think a big part of it (violence) is because they don't know who they are."

Chibitty has received many honors, including the Bronze Star, victory medals from three theaters of operations, the Knowlton Award, the Citizens Award for Exceptional Service from the U.S. Department of Interior, and a place in the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes. In 1989, the French government honored the Comanche code talkers, including Chibitty, by presenting them with the Chevalier of the National Order of Merit. One of the honors he's most proud of is an officer's cavalry sword from his tribe. ■



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# A Story from the Northwest

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*At one time in the distant past, a monster that drank peoples' blood was terrorizing the Indian people. The shamans of the tribe were summoned together to see if something could be done to stop this evil thing that was plaguing their people.*

*After much thought the shamans decided that the monster had to be killed so they instructed their best hunters to slay the monster. The hunters did as they were told and found the monster and killed it. As the monster lay dying a mist seem to rise from its body. The hunters were amazed to see that the mist they saw was actually hordes of mosquitoes... so you see, the monster is still with us to this day. ■*

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Precautions that we should always remember even in the midst of winter

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## The West Nile Virus



**W**est Nile Virus can be transmitted by something as typical as a mosquito bite. Although the chances of contracting the virus are quite low, people who live or plan to travel in mosquito infested areas may feel better protected if certain precautionary measures are taken. Birds, horses and humans are susceptible to the virus.

### Symptoms of West Nile Fever

Fever, headache, body ache, swollen lymph glands and occasionally a rash on the trunk of the body are common West Nile Virus symptoms. These symptoms take as little as three to twelve days to show up and a few days to disappear.

One in one hundred and fifty people infected with the virus will experience severe West Nile virus symptoms. Those who are more susceptible to the more serious effects of the virus are the elderly and those with compromised immune systems.

### Preventive Measures

It is obvious to all that mosquitoes are annoying; but how many people are concerned about the health risks associated with mosquito bites? Consider the following precautionary measures to significantly reduce your chances of being bitten by any mosquito including one that is potentially infected.

- Wear long sleeved shirts and long pants when you are outdoors.
- When you are taking an infant or young child outside use mosquito netting over the infant carrier or carriage.
- Make sure to repair broken screen doors or windows to keep your residence mosquito-free.
- Drain sources of standing water in places like buckets, barrels, tires, birdbaths and such to reduce the amount of mosquitoes that breed around your home.
- Wearing lighter colors of clothing may reduce your chances of being bitten; mosquitoes tend to be attracted to darker colors because they are better at absorbing heat and light.
- Repellents containing DEET and mosquito netting are still the best forms of protection from mosquito bites.
- Peak times for mosquitoes are at dawn, dusk, and in the early evening. Stay indoors during these times if you are in a mosquito infested area. ■

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## The 2004 Meeting of the National Councils for Indian Health

The National Councils (Clinical Directors, Chief Executive Officers, Chief Medical Officers, Oral Health, and Nurse Consultants) for Indian health will hold their 2004 annual meeting February 23-26, 2004, in San Diego, California. The meeting site is the Bahia Resort Hotel, 998 W. Mission Beach Drive, San Diego, California. The Clinical Support Center (CSC) is the accredited sponsor for this meeting. Please contact Gigi Holmes at the Clinical Support Center (602) 364-7777, or email [gigi.homes@phx.ihs.gov](mailto:gigi.homes@phx.ihs.gov). ■

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## NICOA Board Chairman Honored

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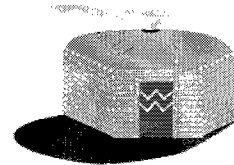
### Mr. Frank Chee Willetto

**O**n November 12, 2003, Frank Chee Willetto (Dineh), NICOA Board Chairman was the honored marine at the Native American Marine Corps Association's annual Marine Corps Birthday celebration in Red Buffalo Hall Kiowa Complex in Carnegie, Oklahoma. Mr. Willetto, 78 years young, looked sharp in his Navajo Code Talkers uniform of gold and red.

After Mr. Willetto was introduced to the marines gathered for the occasion, he told them of his experiences as a young marine serving in the Pacific during WWII. He was only 16 when he joined the marines. During that time, Navajos were being recruited by the marines to serve as radiomen and communication experts due to their language skills.

PFC Willetto took part in the invasions of Saipan and Okinawa, south Pacific islands being held by the Japanese during the war. He was aboard a hospital ship during the closing days of the

war and when the war ended he was honorably discharged in 1946 and returned home to his beloved homeland.



After his military service ended, Frank worked for the BIA Education branch at Pueblo Pintado for 28 years retiring in 1974. Upon retirement, he served on the Navajo Tribal Council representing the Pueblo Pintado Chapter House. In 1999, he was asked to serve as Vice-President for the Navajo Nation.

Mr. Willetto and his wife, Shirley, live on the Navajo Reservation at Crownpoint, NM. He is still very active in tribal politics and ranching. He has served on the NICOA Board for several years and will serve as chairman until the August 2004 Milwaukee, Wisconsin, NICOA conference.

We are very proud that Frank Chee Willetto continues to serve his people. SEMPER FI! ■

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## NICOA New Employee Feature

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### Mr. Pete Little



**P**ete Little began employment with NICOA on December 15, 2003, in the position of REACH Coordinator. He is a member of the Mescalero Apache Tribe.

As a child, he attended Mescalero day school and graduated from Tularosa High. Following graduation, he did a four year hitch in the US Air Force, then attained a Bachelors degree from New Mexico State University and an MSW from Arizona State University.

He retired from IHS in 1999 after a total of 26 years of federal service. While working for IHS, he served in the Phoenix, Alaska, Nashville and Albuquerque Areas in the capacities of Social Worker, Hospital Administrator, Health Planner, Public Health Advisor and Tribal Health Program Director.

Prior to coming to NICOA, he worked at St. Felix Pantry Food Bank in Rio Rancho, NM, and Sandia Pueblo Department of Education. Pete has two daughters and eight grandchildren. He and his wife, Charlotte, reside in Rio Rancho, NM. Welcome aboard, Pete! ■