

Biography

Carl Gorman

World War II Veteran, Navajo Code Talker, Artist

October 5, 1907 - January 29, 1998

You are born with your culture. My culture is Navajo. That's what you live with. Family, heritage—the roots are deep. —Carl Gorman, Navajo Code Talker (*Power of a Navajo: Carl Gorman, the Man and His Life* by Henry and Georgia Greenberg, 1996)

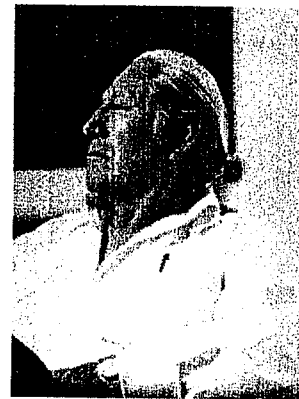


Carl Gorman was born in 1907 in Chinle, Arizona, on the Navajo Reservation. He joined the United States Marine Corps in 1942 and was one of the original 29 Navajos who developed the Navajo code to be used in communication during World War II. Carl explained that because the Navajo grew up with oral tradition passed down from grandfather to father to children, they developed listening skills that helped them quickly memorize complex codes during the war. Carl served on the front lines in four important Pacific battles: Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Tinian, and Saipan.

With a radio in his hands, Carl used the Navajo code to communicate messages for the U.S. military.

After the war, Carl Gorman returned home to Arizona for a short time but went on to study arts at the Otis Art Institute in California. Afterwards, he drew technical illustrations for an aircraft company, painted scenes of his Navajo homeland, and eventually became a college professor at the University of California at Davis. He returned to the Navajo Reservation and worked as an administrator at the Navajo Community College (now Diné College). Carl encouraged students there to be proud of their heritage and to find the right path for their lives.

Carl Gorman received much recognition during his life—for his service as a Code Talker and for his work as a painter, teacher, and someone who strived for many years to preserve the traditional Navajo culture and history. Carl passed away in 1998, a few years before the Navajo Code Talker's service was officially recognized and they were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, but his wife, Mary, and other family members accepted the award on his behalf in 2001.



From National Museum of the American Indian online exhibit *Native Words, Native Warriors*. Top image from the National Archives.