

# AMERICAN WARRIORS



Songs For  
Indian Veterans

## AMERICAN WARRIORS

### Songs for Indian Veterans

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*"[When painting my face for a powwow] mostly I like to use red.*

*They say red belongs to the side of the heart, 'cause it makes you*

*humble. Whenever you put on paint, it's like showing the spirits that*

*you're ready for anything, that your heart is good, that you're going to*

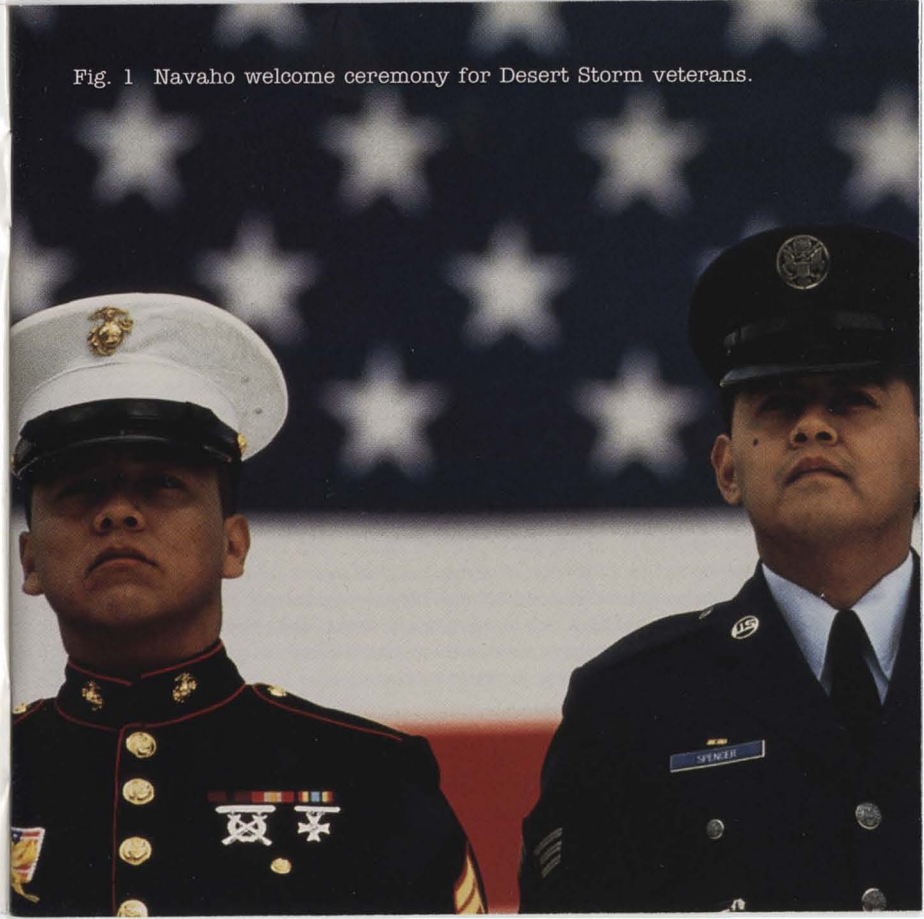
*fight for your family or whatever you believe in, so this is what we've*

*used symbolizing paint, that you're a warrior, and that's what a warrior*

*means, to be ready for anything and to fight for what you believe in."*

[Richard LaFernier, Red Cliff Ojibway,  
from "Naamikaaged: Dancer for the People" video (Smithsonian Folkways 48004, 1996.)]

Fig. 1 Navaho welcome ceremony for Desert Storm veterans.



Nineteen ninety-five marked the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, a conflict in which tens of thousands of American Indians enlisted in all branches of service to fight, and, in many cases, die for their country. Despite their exemption from the draft — citizenship did not extend to Indians until 1924 — they had volunteered as well in World War I and would in the Korean, Vietnam and Gulf Wars (fig. 1). In fact, with every new opportunity to serve, Indian people have stood ready to resume their ancient and traditional role of warrior, to protect their families and what they continue to see as their land, their country.

By the end of the 19th century the figure of the American Indian warrior began to fade and lose its importance. With the context for the warrior's existence at an end, those who had distinguished themselves in combat, either against former Indian enemies or the white man, began to die off and their accomplishments in battle were relegated to tribal memory.

But the outbreak of international hostilities beginning with the first World War provided Indian men once again the opportunity to regain their former warrior status by enlisting in the Armed Forces. By 1990, their numbers had increased to nearly 200,000. Thus the context and mechanism for many former practices associated with Indian warfare were revived on reservations: send-off dances were held for departing soldiers; servicemen were welcomed home from abroad (fig. 2) in centuries-old ceremonies used to reincorporate those who had successfully returned from battle.

The honor accorded Indian veterans of American wars is nowhere more evident than in today's powwow, which begins with a Grand Entry. This parade of dancers enters from an opening on the east side of the dance ring and circles the central arbor of singers at the drum, moving "sunwise" (clockwise).

The parade is led off by rows of veterans carrying flags representing the various conflicts they served in. The oldest (intertribal) wars are memorialized with "Indian flags" — long staffs terminating in crooks, with rows of eagle feathers sewn on strips of cloth fastened lengthwise to the poles. Many of these date back to wars from the 19th century; some of them are family heirlooms, brought out on these occasions and considered the common property of the warriors from that family. Often the various United States military medals earned by family members over the years are pinned to an Indian feather flag. This Indian flag is in fact a vestige of the feathered "coup stick" (see front cover), which formerly could serve as a weapon but was also brought into battle and implanted in the ground, signifying a point behind which members of the warparty were not allowed to retreat. Or, like regimental colors, the flag would be carried into combat by one of the bravest warriors, who ran back and forth with it during a fight, offering a target for the enemies but defending the banner with his life.

Behind the Indian flags in the Grand Entry are a variety of American and Canadian flags, representing more recent conflicts and veterans' organizations: the black and white POW-MIA flag, symbolizing the Vietnam War, and the most recent addition, the green Saudi flag to signify the Gulf War. Most non-Indians at a powwow, aware of the poor economic conditions of Indian people and the prejudice shown towards the first Americans, are surprised at such an exhibition of "patriotism" until it is explained that Indian people honor these flags because they consider North America to be their country, and the enlistment of servicemen to represent their warriors going into battle to serve their people and protect their land.

Indian people are painfully aware that their contribution to the defense of the country has gone relatively unnoticed by the larger society. How many Americans, for example, recognize that one of the servicemen shown raising the



flag in the Iwo Jima Memorial was a Marine, Ira Hayes, a member of the Pima tribe? Recently an Indian veteran visited Arlington National Cemetery looking for Indian graves but was discouraged to find only a nameless plaque generically acknowledging Indian participation in our national wars.

*(A portion of the proceeds from the sale of this recording will be donated to a fund creating a national memorial in the nation's capitol honoring Native American veterans.)*

### **Background**

The War Dance and Roots of the Powwow.

Because warfare was so central to much of North American Indian cultures, a large body of ceremonial song and dance was associated with it. Even the earliest reports from explorers in the American interior mention this fact. For example, the English explorer Jonathan Carver travelling in the western Great Lakes area in 1768 described "The War Dance" as follows:

*It is performed...amidst a circle of warriors; a chief generally begins it, who moves from the right to the left, singing at the same time both his own exploits, and those of his ancestors....Every one dances in his turn, and recapitulates the wondrous deeds of his family, till they all at last join in the dance.*

(Jonathan Carver, *Travels Through the Interior Part of North America*. London, 1781, pp 269-71)

As a European unaccustomed to the lively, often improvisatory style of New World dancing, Carver went on to describe some of its details, highlighting what he considered its "savage" aspect: "They throw themselves into every horrible and terrifying posture that can be imagined, rehearsing at the same time the parts they expect to act against their enemies in the field....To heighten the scene, they set up the same hideous yells, cries, and war-whoops they use in time of action."

The considerable time Indians spent preparing for and carrying out warfare was accompanied by song and dance: formerly, there were songs of recruitment for a war party, a song brought back by a war messenger, songs for dances preceding departure on the warpath, pledge songs sometimes to accompany ritual actions demonstrating bravery (such as eating dog meat), and a final send-off song of departure. Singing continued while on the warpath: there was the song of the war party leader, dance songs in the nightly camps, songs to prepare protective medicines to put on weapons and the body, and songs to be performed in the pitch of battle. Each warrior had his own dream song for protection and had at the ready his personal death song, should he become mortally wounded.

When a victorious warparty returned from battle, an elaborate rite of passage symbolizing reincorporation into the tribe (see fig. 2) and cleansing of contamination through contact with death and blood took place in the Victory or Scalp Dance. During this dance warriors would recount their exploits in song by performing songs with texts commemorating details of the battle. These songs, together with the scalps affixed to long poles, would then be taken to other villages and "danced" with as well, as part of the general tribal celebration. Typical of such songs is one composed in May 1858 after a successful Ojibway raid on the camp of the Dakota chief Cagobens on the Minnesota River. Frances Densmore, in 1909, recorded an 89-year-old former warrior, reaching back half a century in his memory to retrieve the song. Its words state, "At Cagobens' village the men are weeping; at Cagobens' village the women are weeping." Like many such victory songs, the text is meant to humiliate the enemy and draw attention to his defeat. A similar song commemorating Custer's defeat by the Sioux and Northern Cheyennes in 1876 has the words: "Custer's wife is long awaiting his return. She is crying, looking this way." Another, the words "It is not known where Custer lies. They are crying, searching for him." [See as well Edgar Redcloud's "Lakota Little Bighorn Victory Songs" (track 3), and "Four Hochunk (Winnebago) Service Songs" (tracks 8-11).]

The practice of reciting one's warpath exploits in the war dance was old and widespread in North America. Henry Timberlake, a young lieutenant from Virginia, described a Cherokee warparty in 1762 returning with four Shawnee scalps. They circled the townhouse sounding the "Death Hallow" and entered for a war dance, in which each warrior in turn recounted some detail of the expedition. He would then place a donation on a buckskin for the honor of recounting his deeds, and the proceeds would be distributed among the poor.

Most songs which warriors took into battle were of a protective or prophylactic nature. These songs were integral to the medicine power needed to survive, and each song had been obtained through fasting. In his biography of the Crow warrior, Two Leggings, Peter Nabokov writes how these songs functioned:

*If a particular [Crow] medicine song proved to benefit its owner, less successful warriors paid much for its rights. Before he ever received his own songs, Two Leggings gave a buffalo's hindquarter to Bear and his wife. In gratitude the renowned old warrior permitted the youth to sing his personal war song: "Friend, we will go there. I would like to have plenty. I have plenty." "We will go there" expressed the singer's request that [his] sacred helper accompany his coming raid. "I would like to have plenty" spoke his hopes for that raid, and "I have plenty," his assurance that those hopes would be realized.*

(Peter Nabokov, *Two Leggings: The Making of a Crow Warrior*, New York, 1967, pg 55)

Indian people have continued to compose protective battle songs for warfare in this century. Typical is the Ojibway Air Force Song, (see **Honor The Earth Powwow**, Rykodisc 10199) received in a dream by the father of a World War II airman fighting overseas. Its text, similar in function to the Crow song above, was meant to assure a successful return from battle: "Flying around in the sky, I know that I will come to land safely on earth."

With the onset of World War I, an opportunity for Indian people to re-enter the world of combat led to a virtual explosion of song composition. Former War Songs, some dating from the early 19th century, were revived and their texts slightly changed to suit the new situation. One Winnebago song used in the days of fighting U.S. soldiers began to be performed once again, the only change being the substitution of the word "German" for what had formerly been simply "white man."

Many of the elements of what was formerly the war dance have survived in the powwows of today — from attire, to songs, to dance steps — and much of the repertoire of the singers consists of War Dance Songs, some of them quite old. This is one reason why Veterans' Songs are so important, and why veterans lead off the Grand Entry with their flags.

One need only compare the Grand Entry itself with many of the Indian military "parades" of tribal past to see the roots of today's powwow. A typical Flathead procession from the 19th century leading up to the war dance proper was described as follows:

*[A] parade ceremony often took place in the morning before the [war] dances commenced. Men, women, and even children participated in it. The procession formed outside of the camp circle to the north and entered the circle from the east. All the people were mounted [on horseback], and riders and mounts were decked in the finest possible style.... The people described four circles sunwise around the inside of the camp circle, each time going at a faster gait. At last the men broke into a fast lope toward the dance house, the women following and striking their hands against their lips, calling "Ei! Ei! Ei! Ei!"*

(J.A. Teit, *The Salishan Tribes of the Western Plateaus*, Washington, 1930, pg 393)

The recordings on **American Warriors** were selected from a variety of sources to give an overview of Veterans' Songs covering nearly a century of



recorded sound. The repertoires represented can be said to extend to an even wider timeframe: the earliest sound recordings made on wax cylinders by elders contain songs they had learned when young and active as warriors. Some of these songs might be dated as early as the 1850s.

## The Tracks

### 1) **War Paint/Soldier Boy** 4:08

"War Paint" is the spoken statement of a young Ojibway dancer, Richard LaFernier (see above), describing his use of face paint in dressing for a powwow. He explains that the red color he applies is chosen to represent the warrior tradition and what it means to him.

"Soldier Boy" is performed by the Black Lodge (Blackfeet) Singers, members of the Kenny Scabby Robe family. Kenny, his wife Louise and 12 sons are all singers. Originally from Canada, they now live on the Yakama Reservation in the State of Washington. The Black Lodge Singers are one of the most popular ("hottest") northern Plains groups on the "powwow circuit" today and have recorded 14 albums for Canyon Records of Phoenix, Arizona. Other than the generic phrase "soldier boy" the song is sung in Blackfeet.

### 2) **In The South The Birds Are Flying** 1:48

This song was collected by ethnomusicologist Frances Densmore in 1910 on the Lac du Flambeau (Ojibway) Reservation in northern Wisconsin, using an Edison Home Phonograph wax cylinder machine. The singer, Eniwube, was a traditional medicine man who had learned this song as a youth and was 90 and blind when he recorded it. It is a protective war song, received in a dream when the youth fasted and was visited by his guardian spirit, the Thunderbird. The song would be performed when the warrior faced danger during battle.

### 3) **Lakota (Sioux) Little Bighorn Victory Songs** 5:02

These five songs were recorded by Edgar Red Cloud in 1972 on the Pine Ridge Indian reservation in South Dakota. Edgar (d. 1976) was the great-grandson of the famous Chief Red Cloud of the Teton Lakota Nation (fig. 3). The Chief had



Fig. 2 Victory dance — a rite of re-incorporation — on the Pine Ridge (Oglala Lakota) Reservation, South Dakota, September 14, 1945, showing military banner, World War II Lakota serviceman, and war mothers.

fought in the Battle of the Little Bighorn (River) in 1876, along with other famous Lakota leaders, such as Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull. In this famous battle the Lakota and Cheyenne decisively overwhelmed the United States Army forces under the command of Lieut. Col. George Custer. The entire cavalry force of 210 soldiers, including Custer, was killed compared to only 32 Indian warriors.

As still is customary with Indian people, a number of Victory Songs were composed by the Lakota to celebrate Custer's defeat. These songs were then used in dances celebrating the victory and have been passed on in oral tradition as important pieces of Lakota history. The words to these songs are typically taunting in nature, deriding the callousness of Custer in underestimating the Indians' strength despite warnings.

The words of the five *waklegli olowan* (literally, "They-came-home-victorious-after-killing-enemies" songs) as performed by Edgar Red Cloud in Lakota and their English translations as given by Calvin Jumping Bull are as follows:

- a) *Ehantan ecamu kta ca. Pehin hanska* ("Long Hair" = Custer) *owakiyake kun toke oyake sni ye laka pehin hanska.* (I have already intended to do it. I have told "Long Hair" about my intentions. I suppose he didn't tell anyone about it. "Long hair.")
- b) *Pehin hanska, natan yau canne he wicotaya yausni. Nihunke lasni yelo.* ("Long Hair," when you decided to attack, you should have brought more soldiers, because with what you have you are not very strong [Army] weak.)
- c) *Misa waziyata natan wai ca ekta wici ceyhe lo hena ecamu welo.*  
(I also went up north to fight, so I made them weep. That is what I have done.)
- d) *Paha najin yo, paha najin yo. Katinyeya hibu welo. He silelya he nuke.*  
(Stand and strike, stand and strike. They come onward attacking. You are no good, and there you will lie.)

- e) *Pehin hanska, oyakilhanpi kun leci. Yunke leci yunke sotomniyan yunke lo.*  
("Long hair," you are looking for him over here. He lies over here. He lies amidst the haze of smoke.)

(For additional songs about this battle, see *Scalp Songs from the Little Big Horn*, performed by Wilmer Mesteth, available through Oyate Records, 3907 Minnekahta, Rapid City, SD 57702.)

#### 4) **Carnegie War Mothers' Chapter (Kiowa) Veterans Songs** 5:08

During World War II, a radio program entitled "Indians for Indians Hour" was broadcast over the University of Oklahoma radio station, WNAD, in Norman. Popular among the large number of Indian people living in the state, as many as 75,000 Indians listened to it weekly. It was conceived by Don Whistler, an elected chief of the Sac and Fox tribe, who was its master of ceremonies until his death in 1951. Each week a different group of Southern Plains singers — Kiowa, Osage, Comanche, Wichita, etc. — was invited to perform traditional songs between announcements from Whistler about upcoming events of interest to the Indian audience, such as dates of local powwows or war victory celebrations for returning servicemen held in city parks or on farms belonging to Indians. The present selection includes the introductory comments of "Keshkekosh," the MC, and singing of Veterans Songs by the Kiowa War Mothers Chapter Singers. The song is introduced by David Apekaum, who stresses that Indian people are the only ones to honor their warriors in song.

#### 5) **World War I & II** 4:14

Another song by the Black Lodge Singers enumerates the sequence of foreign wars in which American Indian warriors have participated during the 20th century: World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and Desert Storm.



6) **Canadian (Lakota) Flag Song** 3:44

7) **American (Lakota) Flag Song** 4:01

At the conclusion of the Grand Entry, while all powwow dancers are still in the ring, the MC requests the singers to perform a Flag Song to honor the banners which veterans have brought into the arena. Flag Songs are characterized by their slow, stately drumbeat accompaniment. This Canadian Flag Song was performed by the Sioux Valley Singers of Griswold, Manitoba, at the 1971 Fort Qu'Appelle summer powwow on the Standing Buffalo Reserve, Saskatchewan. Because both Canadian and American Lakota were in attendance, at the ceremony this was followed by the American Flag Song with singers from the Ft. Kipp Sioux Singers of Montana drum joining them.

The Lakota Texts and their English translations are given by Calvin Jumping Bull as follows:

**Canadian Flag Song:**

*He unciyapi kin he wacinmayan ca, he wiyokihela kin wahanconka waye lo, he hanniyen he milazota kahwog hwogya najin yelo.*

That Queen (Canada) that depends on me, I use that flag as a shield, it always stands drifting in the wind behind me.

**American Flag Song:**

*Tunkasilayapi tamokoce kin tewahila na blihemiciye yelo. Tunkasilayapi tawapaha kin maka ihankeki hehan kini najin kte lo.*

United States of America, the country I love. I am courageous. United States of America, its staff (flag) will always remain standing forever til the end of the world.

These beautiful, stately melodies are performed by the singers in the customary style of the northern Plains: sung at full volume and placed high in the singers' voice range, with tense vocal cords. These recordings also show the important

role of Indian female singers on the Plains, duplicating the melody an octave higher, their voices having a very nasal, piercing quality. Occasionally one hears their ululations, a vocal sound of approval often called "lulus" by Indian people. These loud, high-pitched, protracted rhythmic sounds produced by Indian female singers can also be heard near the end of the Kiowa selection (track 4).

Flags have always had symbolic importance in military traditions (fig. 3). Brought out for parades and honoring ceremonies, they are also displayed in commemoration of fallen soldiers. Symbolising the power and spirit of a nation, flags often were valued war trophies taken from an enemy — hence the children's game "Capture the Flag" (fig. 4).

8-11) **Four Hochunk (Winnebago) Service Songs —**

**Army** 3:13, **Navy** 4:43, **Marines** 4:19, **Air Force** 3:04

Performed in succession by the Winnebago Sons (lead singer: Joe Greendeer) of Baraboo, Wisconsin, the Army, Navy, Marine, and Air Force songs honor each of the four main branches of service. Traditionally, the sequence is performed each Memorial Day weekend at powwows near Black River Falls, Wisconsin. Veterans from each of these services and members of their families are invited to dance when their song is sung. After they have made a few rounds of the dance ring, others are invited into the arena to dance behind them.

The warrior tradition is particularly strong among the Hochunk. Formerly a returning victorious warparty was reincorporated into the village community with dance, song, and general celebration. Having come in contact with blood and death, the ceremonial welcome was considered a sort of spiritual cleansing and healing, while at the same time it honored those who had fallen in battle.

The Winnebago Sons drum was founded by four of Lyle Greendeer's sons about 1970. The words to the Service Songs as sung in their Native language are given by Kenneth Funmaker, Sr. as follows:



### Hochunk (Winnebago) Army Song

Kora cexi howenā  
Hocāk hocicīṇa wiwašigya hanī nažinera  
Herušgara cexi howenā

Kora, they went through a hard time.  
The Hochunk boys stood holding a flag  
Herušgara, they went through a hard time!

### Hochunk Navy Song

Teja najeja howe ūnīhairca  
Hocāk maṇape njeja herenā  
Teja najeja howe ūnīhairca

They were travelling around on the other side of the ocean  
They were Hochunk warriors that belonged to the water  
They were travelling around on the other side of the ocean.

### Hochunk Marine Song

Hišjakirujigra  
Hocāk Maṇapera wanī ūinenā  
Okinawara naṇišerenā

Japanese,  
The Hochunk soldiers took care of you,  
and took Okinawa away from you!

### Hochunk Air Force Song

Honācege hunā hihenā  
Hicakoro maṁi saṇigeja howawajina  
Iwojima xijikere hana  
Honācege hunā hihenā

Fig. 3 Portrait of Oglala Lakota Chief  
Makhpya-luta, or Red Cloud (1822-  
1909), wearing a vest with beaded  
American flags.

I have said that he came willingly  
My friend, I came from the other side of the clouds  
I made Iwo Jima into a puff of smoke  
I have said he came willingly.

### 12) Menominee Vietnam Veterans Song 7:12

The Smokeytown Singers of Neopit, Wisconsin, were organized in 1973 by Myron Pyawasit when he was 19 years old. The group's name was his creation and inspired by a former practice of Woodlands peoples. Long before the days of aerosol insect repellents, Indian people would build a fire in a small pail and add wood chips to create a smudge or heavy smoke to keep insects away. Myron remembers how one summer night he noticed that everywhere in his small village of Zoar these smokey fires were burning, so he nicknamed his community "Smokeytown" — thus the name of his drum.

Myron composed this veterans song to honor those Menominee servicemen who served in the Vietnam War. The text in Menominee as given by Myron, its composer, is as follows: *Vietnam naenawehtaw nimiron, naenatakusimino, waewae-nen* (meaning "brave warriors from Vietnam are dancing, we are proud of you, thank you").

### 13) Indian Boys from Desert Storm 4:34

Another song by the Black Lodge Singers to honor those serving in the most recent American conflict. Today in the Grand Entry, along with American, Canadian, and veterans organizations' flags, someone who served in the war to drive the Iraqis from Kuwait carries the green Saudi Arabian flag with its Arabic inscription. The words in Blackfeet and meaning in English are as follows: *ni-stu-nan ni-tsi-ta pi-kowan isa-ko ma pi i iskoo ta wa Desert Storm*, (our Indian boys have come back from Desert Storm).

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Computer Editing: Charles Stella  
Editing and Equalization done at Studio X, Sonoma County, CA  
Design: Steven Jurgensmeyer  
Photography: Figures 1 & 4 — Joel Grimes; Figures 2, 3 & cover — National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution (2: catalog #55457; 3: negative #3238c; cover: negative #77-15)

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Special thanks to:

Canyon Records, Don DeWitt, Robert Doyle, Don France, Kenneth Funmaker, Sr.,  
Marc Gilman, Ives Goddard, Judith Gray, Joel Grimes, Oren Hatton, Jake Homiak,  
Lawrence Hooper, Calvin Jumping Bull, Fredric Lieberman, Cheryl McEnaney, Jason  
McCormick, Jens McVoy, John Nichols, Kenny Scabby Robe, Sheila Shigley, Keith Secola,  
Brother C.M. Simon, S.J., Jeff Sterling, Bruce Wallace

*Mickey Hart is a veteran of the United States Air Force.  
Thomas Vennum, Jr. is a veteran of the United States Army.*

Front Cover Illustration: Anonymous Cheyenne pictograph drawing from the late 1870s showing an Indian warrior about to stab an American cavalryman with a coup stick.

Fig. 4/booklet back cover: Navaho World War II veteran Sgt. Jimmy E. Dixon, holding his company photograph and wearing a captured Japanese Imperial flag — a war trophy — as a headband.

**Soldier Boy** (made by Kenny Scabby Robe)  
**World War I & II** (made by Elgin Scabby Robe)  
**Indian Boys from Desert Storm**

(made by John Scabby Robe)

From the album:

*Veterans' Honor Songs by the Black Lodge Singers*  
(CR-16214)

Black Lodge Singers (of White Swan, Washington, members of the Blackfeet tribe unless otherwise noted):  
Kenny Scabby Robe, Louise Scabby Robe, John Scabby Robe, Shawn Scabby Robe, Thomas Scabby Robe, Myron Scabby Robe, Irwin Scabby Robe, and Lonnie Sammaripa (Yakima-Ute).

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**Canadian Flag Song** (made by Sioux Valley Singers)  
**American Flag Song** (made by Fort Kipp Singers)

From the album:

*Fort Kipp Sioux Singers at Fort Qu'Appelle*  
(CR-6079)

Sioux Valley Singers (of Griswold, Manitoba): led by Donald Pratt.

Fort Kipp Singers (of Montana, members of the Sioux tribe): Ben Gray Hawk, Matt Black Dog, James Black Dog, Clifford Young Bear, Jerry White Cloud, Archie Bear Cub.  
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## INDIAN COMBAT COMMUNICATORS

The complexities of American Indian languages made them useful in wartime for secret military communications. Beginning in World War I, Choctaw and Comanche servicemen transmitted messages to each other in their Native tongues, which were unintelligible to the enemy. By the second World War, Native speakers of other Indian languages were similarly conveying military information. The most famous of these were the *Navajo (Marine) Code Talkers*.

Ironically, many Navajo had been turned down from enlisting in the services since they spoke no English. In 1942, however, recruiters visited the boarding schools on the Navajo reservation to select "combat communications specialists." The initial group of 29 members — eventually expanded to 420 — were trained in standard methods of communication, such as Morse Code and semaphores, but had the additional task of constructing a Navajo Code. The Code included 211 words used frequently in military transmissions and an alphabet to spell out additional words. As the vocabulary grew, the code proved faster, by far, than standard encrypted communications.

The Navajo Code was never broken by the Japanese. Its use proved decisive in many battles in the Pacific. For instance, the invasion of Iwo Jima was directed by *Navajo Code Talkers* with teams operating non-stop for 48 hours, transmitting over 800 messages without error.



Fig. 4





- 1) War Paint/Soldier Boy 4:08
- 2) In The South The Birds Are Flying 1:48
- 3) Lakota (Sioux) Little Bighorn Victory Songs 5:02
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