



**Chester
Nez**

Marine Corps

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Jan 23, 1921 - Jun 4, 2014

BIRTHPLACE: Gallup, NM

SOLDIER DETAILS

HIGHEST RANK: Corporal

DIVISION: Marine Corps, 382nd Platoon

THEATER OF OPERATION: Pacific

SERVED: 1942 -

HONORED BY: The Eisenhower Foundation

BIOGRAPHY

One of nine children, Chester Nez was born at Cousin Brothers Trading Post on the Navajo Nation, about 15 miles southwest of Gallup, NM. His family isn't certain of his birth date, but government officials have set it at Jan. 23, 1921. Nez grew up at Chichiltah - which translates to "among the oaks" - on the Navajo reservation where he tended the family's sheep herd and lived a traditional Navajo boy's life until, at age 9, he was sent to Tohatchi Boarding School. By the time he was 18, Nez had attended boarding schools in Fort Defiance, Ariz., Gallup and Tuba City, interspersed with "vacations" back home on the reservation. He was in the 10th grade at Tuba City Boarding School when the (Marine Corps) recruiters came to the school. They were specifically looking for Navajos. The students didn't know they would be Code Talkers when they were recruited. In 1942, Philip Johnston, a World War I veteran and non-Native American who grew up on the Navajo reservation and spoke fluent Navajo, proposed that the military base a secret code on the complex language. After demonstrating to the military that Navajos could quickly encode, transmit and decode an otherwise undecipherable three-line message in 20 seconds, the Marine Corps brass authorized the recruitment of Navajos to create and implement the code as soon as possible. Nez and other new recruits were bused to Fort Defiance and sworn into the Corps in May 1942. From there they went to Camp Pendleton in California for basic training, and then 29 of them were selected and assigned to the 382nd Platoon. After boot camp training was over they sent us to Camp Elliott, and that's where they started doing the code. Form there the Marines headed for the Pacific theater. The Code Talkers worked in teams of two, one sending coded messages by radio while the other cranked the radio's internal generator and watched for the enemy or returned fire. After a few hours, they would switch. Nez left active duty in 1945 and went into the Marine Reserves until he was reactivated for the Korean conflict in 1951. He left the military in 1952 with the rank of corporal and soon enrolled at Haskell Institute in Lawrence, KS., now known as Haskell Indian Nations University, where he earned his GED and met his future wife, Ethel. The couple married in 1953 in St. Michaels, Ariz., and raised three sons and a daughter.

They eventually divorced, and Ethel died of a heart attack in the early 1990s. Nez retired in 1974 after a 25-year career as a painter at the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Albuquerque, NM. Courtesy of WW II uncovered and frenchfuneral.com.