Name _____

THE NAVAJO CODE

During World War II, the U.S. Marines needed a way to send messages that the enemy could not understand. Navajo Marines built one in their own language. Some Navajo words stood for military things: a submarine was an iron fish and a dive bomber was a chicken hawk. Other Navajo words stood for letters, so any word could be spelled out. The Code Talkers learned the whole code by heart. They used it in every Marine battle in the Pacific, and it was never broken. Here are real words from their 1945 code dictionary.

Layer 1: code words

More than 400 military words had their own Navajo code word. Most were things from Navajo life and nature: a submarine was an iron fish and a tank was a tortoise. One short code word could stand for a long English term.

Layer 2: the spelling alphabet

Every English letter had a Navajo word, such as WOL-LA-CHEE (ant) for A. Code Talkers spelled out any word that had no code word, like the name of a small island, one letter at a time.

◆ CODE WORDS FROM THE 1945 NAVAJO CODE TALKERS' DICTIONARY ◆

English	Code word	It means
Battleship	**LO-TSO**	whale
Cruiser	**LO-TSO-YAZZIE**	small whale
Destroyer	**CA-LO**	shark
Submarine	**BESH-LO**	iron fish
Minesweeper	**CHA**	beaver
Dive bomber	**GINI**	chicken hawk
Fighter plane	**DA-HE-TIH-HI**	humming bird
Bomber plane	**JAY-SHO**	buzzard
Torpedo plane	**TAS-CHIZZIE**	swallow
Patrol plane	**GA-GIH**	crow
Tank	**CHAY-DA-GAHI**	tortoise

English	Code word	It means
Bomb	**A-YE-SHI**	eggs
Grenade	**NI-MA-SI**	potatoes
Amphibious	**CHAL**	frog
Island	**SEIS-KEYAH**	seven island
Adjacent	**BE-GAHI**	near
Request	**JO-KAYED-GOH**	ask for
Quick	**SHIL-LOH**	quick
and	**DO**	and
America	**NE-HE-MAH**	our mother
Germany	**BESH-BE-CHA-HE**	iron hat
Britain	**TOH-TA**	between waters

The Code Talkers

About 400 Navajo Marines served as Code Talkers. The first 29 built the code in 1942. At Iwo Jima in 1945, six Code Talkers sent and received more than 800 messages in the first two days without an error. The code was never broken, and it stayed secret until 1968. In 2001 the first 29 received the Congressional Gold Medal and the others the Silver Medal. Many Code Talkers had gone to government boarding schools where Native children were punished for speaking their own languages.

1. **The code had two layers. What were they, and why was it useful to have both?**

2. **Give two reasons the enemy could never break the Navajo code.**