Speaker 1: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program, keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Nicki Donnelson: Although the interests of Native Americans have often not been protected, these native people have fought on behalf of the US military in every major war. Being from a military family himself, and growing up around powwows, Dr. William Meadows became interested in the military experience of the indigenous people very early in his career. Meadows, Professor of Anthropology in Native American Studies at Missouri State University, is my guest today on the Missouri State Journal. As he interviewed a Comanche veteran who was in his seventies at the time, the man mentioned his role as a code talker in World War II. This sparked an interest in finding out how many more tribes were involved in code talking. Meadows explains the unique role of code talkers.

William Meadows: Native American code talkers were used in both World War I, World War II. A code talker is a Native American that uses their native language to send military communications with another member that speaks the same language that they do, or at least a close dialect. Then they, of course, turn around and translate it into English, where it can be handed off to another officer. For the rest of the world, these were largely unknown languages at this time. Then, some of these, they formed special code words. Natives already had terms for firearms and things like that, but not like different calibers of them, artillery, tanks, planes, landmines, this type of stuff. They created these bodies of a very rich descriptive code terms that only they would know and inserted that into the everyday language. It became an unknown language that was yet further coded.

Now, the advantage of it is that these could be sent over the air. You knew somebody was listening to them, but you didn't care, because they had nothing to compare them to. They're not based on mathematical principles like codes or ciphers. I could send a message in a minute and a half, probably it could be translated, written back out, handed off, our encryption technology during these wars could take anywhere from an hour and a half up to four hours, depending on the length of the message to formerly encrypt it, send a code, and then decode it. In four hours, a battle can be over or things can change. This gave us one of the greatest tactical advantages we had of having eyes in combat that could communicate with command locations that was faster than any technology that existed.

Nicki Donnelson: Much of what the general public knows about code talkers contributions has only been exposed in the last 20 years. This coincides with Meadows publications and the production of the film, Windtalkers. In fact, Meadows testified before Congress in 2004, which contributed to the passage of the 2008 Native American Code Talkers Act. This act awarded congressional medals for all code talkers of both world wars. To gather evidence, he used oral histories, interviewing as many of these veterans as possible and military records.

Meadows evaluates more than how the tribes communicated. He also explores ceremonies, myths, stereotypes, and racism that they experienced. He's written many books and articles on the subject, but he does it to make sure these contributions don't get erased from history. The warrior ethos, he says, contributes to the desire for the Native Americans to celebrate veterans more than many other societies. This is another reason they continue to fight for recognition, for these incredible contributions to war efforts.

William Meadows: This was something they realized themselves, it was very unique. These are languages that they had that nobody else had. They provide something very, very unique that was also based on their culture at a time when they're trying to be forcefully assimilated. The boarding schools didn't want them to speak their language, government missionaries wanted everybody to assimilate into mainstream non-Indian society. So, they were resilient to hang onto these languages, made a contribution. We have several cases, clearcut cases, that show in this situation, this is how this saved lives, kind of thing.

Now, we're never going to know how many lives were saved or what combination there, but they clearly did make a contribution. Of course, there've been basically passed over for many, many years. World War I, it was almost 70 years before they were recognized, and World War II, less so. But to give them their due respect

Nicki Donnelson: That was Dr. Bill Meadows. I'm Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

Speaker 1: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at (417) 836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org. For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at (417) 836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.