

## Impact Statement

Yanabah Jackson, Grade 8.

**Chester Nez**, 2024.

Graphite, pen and pastel on paper, 12 x 19 inches.

Kirtland Middle School, Fruitland, NM

Unsung Hero: Chester Nez

I chose Chester Nez as my unsung hero out of the list of heroes because he had a big impact on many different people including me. When I was younger, I used to think Navajo people weren't known. Until, one day I was at a memorial for our family's veterans. That day I learned about one of my grandpas being Navajo code talkers and their importance during World War II. So, I started to study and learn about them and that's when I found Chester Nez. One main thing that stood out to me about him was that he was the first 29 code talkers and his quote. "Somebody's got to go. Somebody's got to defend this country. Somebody's got to defend the freedom." This inspired me because I want to join the military or army one day.

When I researched Chester, the main things I was looking for were how he was before the war, during the war, and after the war. Chi Chil Tah, New Mexico was where he was born on the Navajo reservation in 1921. He grew up surrounding the "Checkerboard" region of New Mexico, but his family frequently moved to other places for the sheep and their grazing. As sheep are a big part of Navajo culture. Sadly, Chester's mother passed away when he was young. So he was mostly raised by his father, maternal aunt, and his grandmother. Though, in the 1930's a large part of Chester's herd was killed and it was very devastating for them. Nez then spent several years in a boarding school in Fort Defiance. Boarding schools back then were mostly used to strip the language and traditions of the Native Americans. They would often physically hurt them just for speaking the language. One of the punishments was they used to wash their kid's mouths out with soap if they even spoke a word of their native language. His early life interested me because of the boarding school. My dad, his siblings, and my grandparents went to boarding schools and I like listening to their stories.

While Nez was in high school, he was drafted and taken to boot camp. After training, he was taken to a new Navajo Communication School where he and some other Navajo men made a code so complex the Japanese couldn't even break the code back then. Though it was hard to understand, for the Navajos it was easy to memorize.

After the war, Nez went through some struggles with traumatic stress. As a result, he wasn't at a ceremony called "The Enemy Way." This was to help them process their

experiences and restore their balance in life. Later, he was supposed to come back to fight the Korean War overseas but was denied.

What I was trying to represent in my drawings was how it was during and after the war. On the left side, it was him when he was younger. I drew the radio and a damaged American flag. Then on the right side, I drew the honorary medal and a newspaper. Doing this project was fun, but somewhat hard to do. Working with chalk pastels can be challenging because some stuff can blend in with a color you don't want, which can be hard to fix. But other than when I get the drawing back, I'm going to give it to my older sister to keep. She loves Chester Nez.

I'm grateful knowing that these men fought for our freedom and were a big help for World War II. Also knowing that the language is still being used and taught today gives me more comfort and hope for the future of our people, the Navajo People.