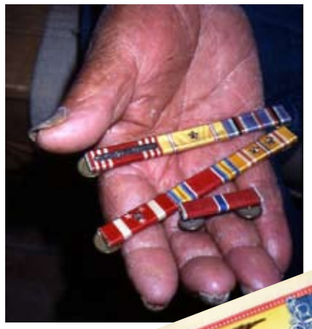
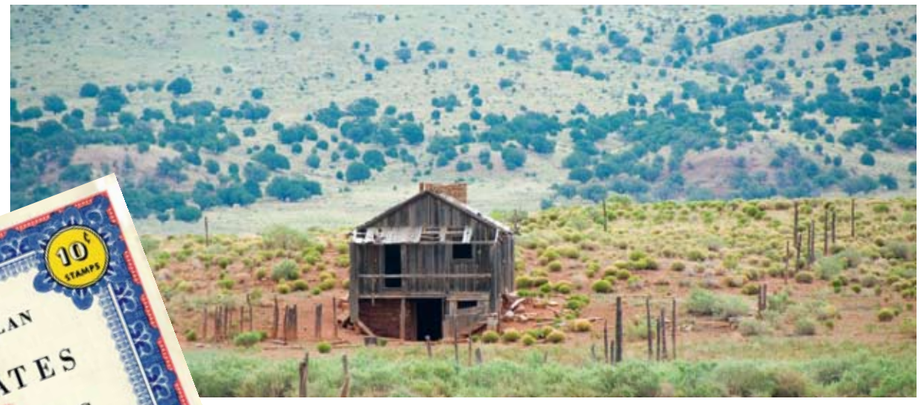
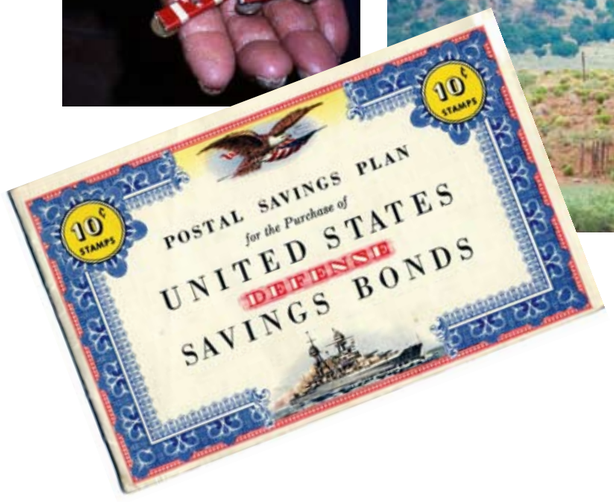
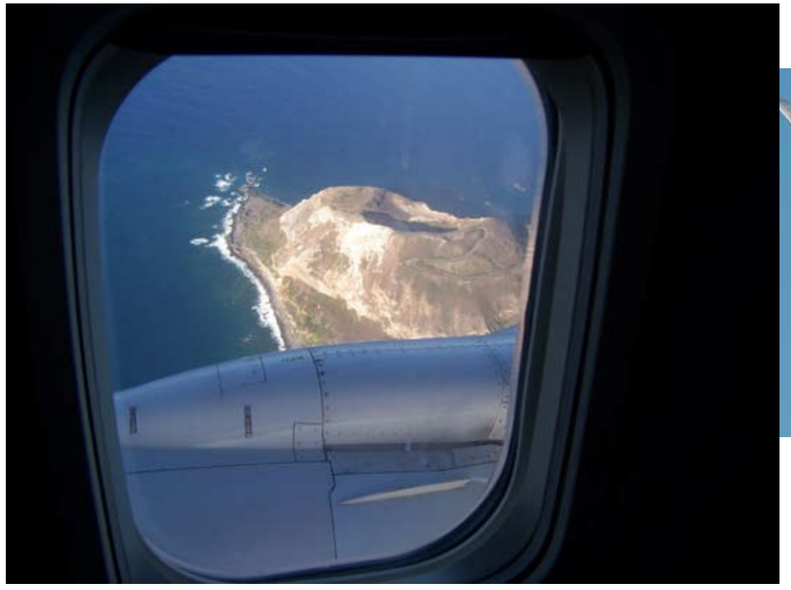
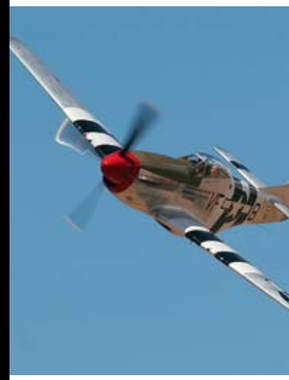










(Sojourns

Iron Fish, Hummingbird

The Native American code talkers who passed messages back and forth during World War II, defying translation by enemy interceptors, were not simply communicating in their native languages.

Instead, a Navajo code talker would receive a message composed of apparently unrelated Navajo words and would unravel its meaning by first translating each word into its English equivalent. Then he would isolate the first letter of each of the English words and sequence them into an English-language message. Not all words had to be spelled out. In the original code, Navajo words were assigned to about 450 frequently used military terms that did not exist in Navajo. For example, *besh-lo* (iron fish) = submarine; *dah-he-tih-hi* (hummingbird) = fighter plane; *debeh-li-zine* (black street) = squad.

Most English letters were represented by more than one Navajo word. *Wol-la-chee* (ant), *be-la-sana* (apple), and *tse-nill* (axe) all stood for the letter A. One translation for the word Navy in Navajo code was *tsah* (needle) *wol-la-chee* (ant) *ah-keh-di-glini* (victor) *tsah-ah-dzoh* (yucca).

Information from www.history.navy

Facing page: Sam Antonio, 2006. Portrait by John Running

Among Hopi Indians, the call to serve presented the young men with a dilemma. "The Hopi way of life," said Leigh Kuwanwisiwma, director of the Hopi Cultural Preservation Office, "is peaceful coexistence with everyone. But at times you have to defend yourself."

Some Hopi men eventually saw combat, parachuting into Normandy and hitting the beaches in the Pacific. Others chose to resist the draft, believing their religious convictions prohibited them from serving in the military. The resisters were sent to a federal prison camp near Tucson to build the Mount Lemmon Highway. Roger Nasevaema of Hotevilla refused to compromise his principles and spent nine years in prison.

Sam Antonio and I take seats facing each other across the counter. He begins by naming five of the other Acoma Indians who fought with him on Bataan. He has outlived them all. "They're all gone," Sam says, and recalls one who died at the infamous Cabanatuan prison camp. "I remember everything that day. They put me on the graveyard detail digging holes three feet deep. It was raining that day. And I saw him coming on a litter, and they just dumped him—no decent burial for those poor bastards. I saw him, that Indian boy, and knew that was him, that was Pete Vallo. Down he went."

We need to back up, I suggest. So Sam begins again on a December day in 1941, eight hours after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. As a member of the 200th Coast Artillery, Battery A, he had been sent to defend the Philippines before hostilities began. It was morning when he heard airplanes overhead. Sam took a seat in the mess hall at Fort Stotsenburg next to Clark Field, the largest airbase in the Philippines. The soldiers were on full alert, but most of the B-17 bombers and P-40 fighters were still parked wingtip to wingtip. A perfect target.

"That's when we heard those bombs go off—bloomity, bloomity, bloom! Everybody started out the door—bread and baloney flying everywhere!" Sam laughs at the memory. "Out the door we went, and boy we could see the dust everywhere. They were bombing, and they knock out our airplanes, and everything was burning. We went and hide." Scattered over the airfield were the bodies of the wounded and dead. "Later on they sound the bugle to assemble. They told us we're at war now with Japan."

Two weeks later the Japanese army invaded, and General Douglas MacArthur made the decision to withdraw his forces to the Bataan Peninsula. To buy enough time to prevent a possible invasion of Australia, MacArthur ordered them to fight on. Rations were cut in half and then cut again. "People were starving," Sam recalls. "We had to eat the horses and the mules. Day and night we had to fight; we never rest. Sick or not, you just had to fight. On Bataan we were all surrounded; there was no way we could get out."

After four months, the soldiers were finally cornered at Mariveles on the end of the peninsula. The scene was a nightmare of continuous explosions, smoke, and spreading panic. They could do no more. "We never surrender," Sam says, making a distinction important to him. "General King was the one who surrendered us." Even then Sam refused to lay down his arms with the other troops. General MacArthur had ordered them to fight to the end, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt had promised to send help. Amid the chaos of the final hours on Bataan, Sam decided to find a way to reach the island fortress of Corregidor across two miles of open water.

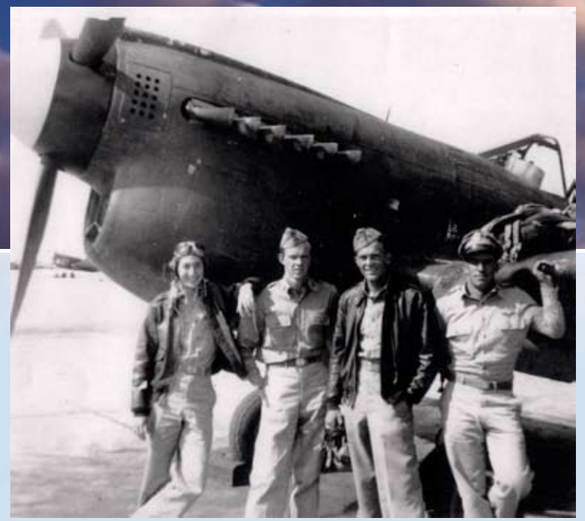
"They had been telling us, 'Help-is-on-the-way!' " He chuckles. "And I figured, Well, help should be here pretty soon. Me and José Cata from San Juan Pueblo, he was an Indian boy, I told him, 'Let's go to Corregidor!'

"He said, 'I can't swim.'

" 'I didn't ask you if you could swim! Let's find something and get over there.' "

They commandeered an outrigger canoe called a banca before the enemy had secured the coast. Without paddles, they were forced to use their hands until they found sticks. "Jokingly we said, 'Be careful, these sharks might grab your hand.' " He laughs again. Unknown to Sam at the time, the decision to evade capture saved him from the Bataan Death March.

"We never surrender," Sam says, making a distinction important to him. "General King was the one who surrendered us."

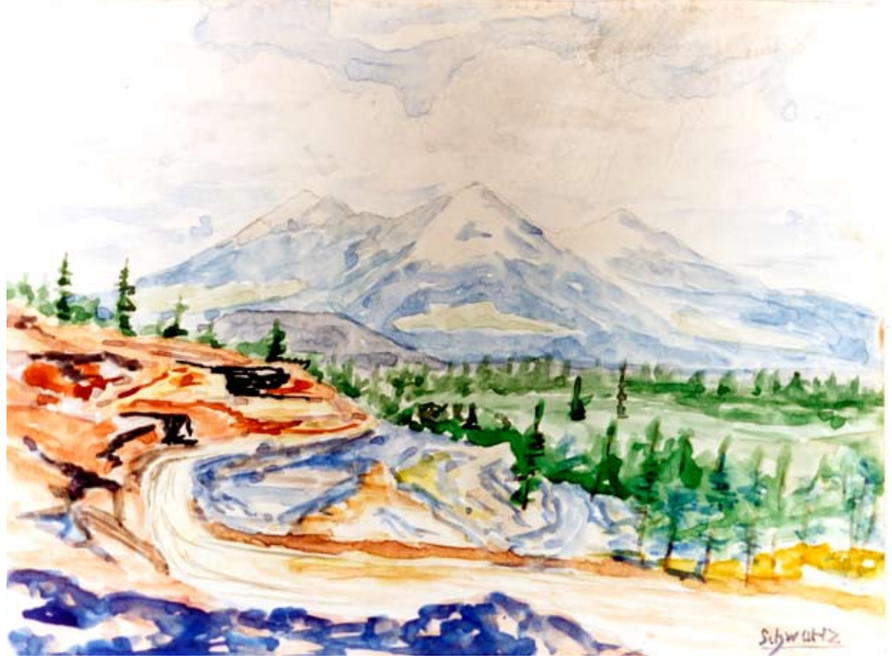


Far from Cactus Flat

BY LYMAN HAFEN

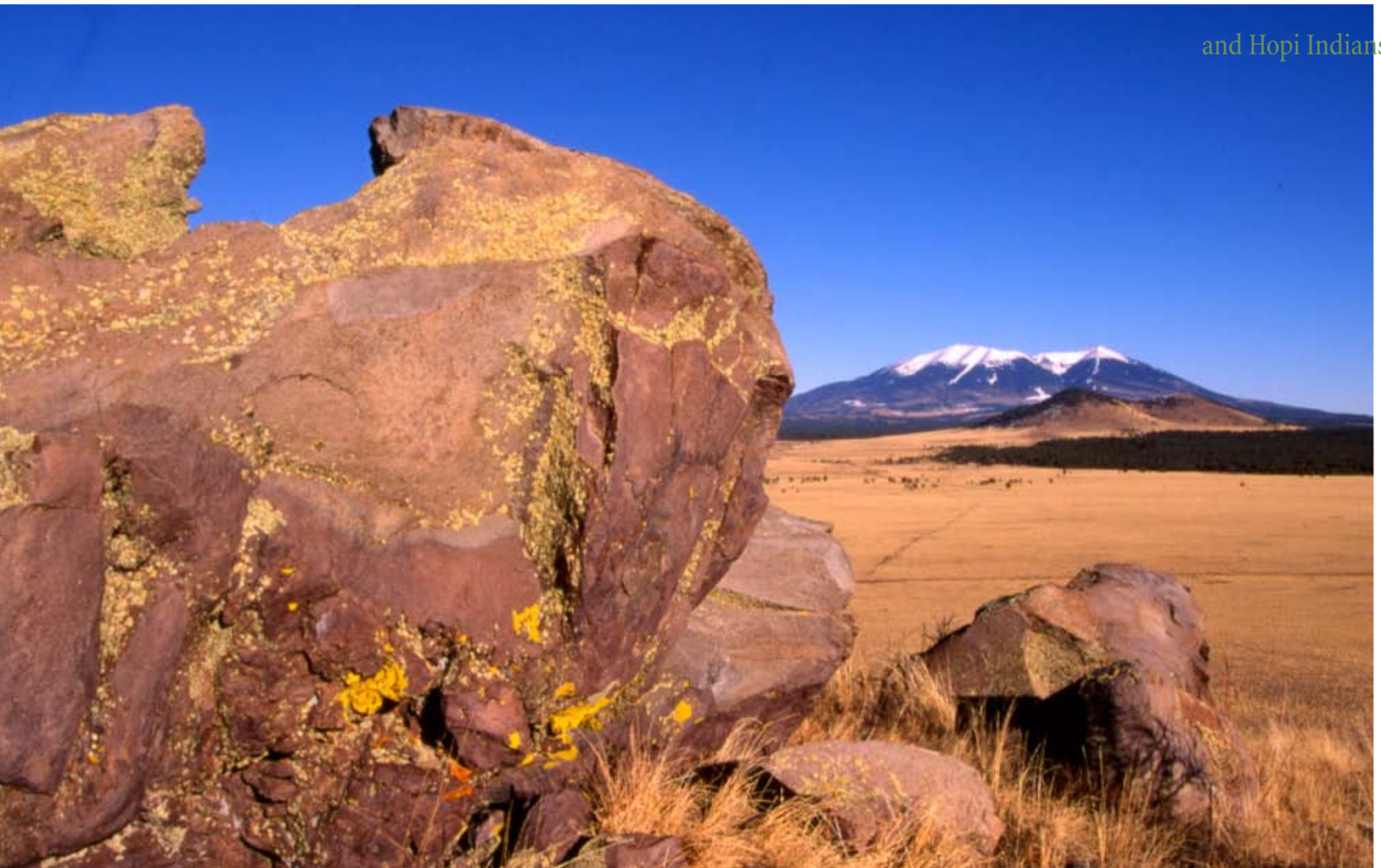
MT. TRUMBULL, ARIZONA MID-JUNE, 1944

Midday had settled hot and listless upon the homestead. High in the blue a red-tailed hawk floated and tottered on air that rolled off the Hurricane Rim like the puff from an open oven. The slack dry breeze whispered down through the blackbrush and cactus, and crawled across the long flat toward a lonesome adobe house on the hill. It sighed through the screen of the open kitchen window and fluttered the sweat-matted hair of a woman who sat erect and solemn at the table, a dishtowel clenched in her knobbled fingers. She looked out through the window and over the juniper slope where the lone hawk circled. Her long gaze stretched down across the cactus flat and on beyond the white school house a half-mile in the distance and up the road to where it finally vanished from sight at the crest of McCain Hill.



A watercolor of the San Francisco Peaks painted by Austrian prisoner of war Schwartz during his internment at the camp near Flagstaff, Arizona. He gave the painting to Glenn Tinnan, a locomotive operator at Navajo Ordnance Depot. Schwartz, as with most Austrian prisoners, felt at home in the mountains along the southern of the Colorado Plateau; below, basalt rock at Government Prairie with San Francisco Peaks in the distance. Photo by Tom Bean

Today, scarcely a highway sign or plaque marks the sites where enemy soldiers labored in prisoner of war camps across the West during World War II. But at one such camp in northern Arizona, a colonel who strictly observed the Geneva Conventions, a POW workforce from the mountains of Austria, and a corps of Navajo and Hopi Indians helped the United States win the war.



Prisoners of War on the Colorado Plateau

BY JOHN S. WESTERLUND

THE ACCOUNTS OF ABUSE IN THE ABU GHRAIB PRISON that surfaced in 2003 launched renewed discourse on the history, intent, and implementation of the Geneva Conventions—a series of treaties first signed in 1864. Expanded a half-dozen times, the 1929 Conventions dealt with treatment of the wounded and prisoners of war.

With the exception of the Civil War, the Indian wars, and Iraq, Americans have a history of humane handling of prisoners of war (POW) that dates back to the American Revolution. World War II was no exception. Almost all enemy soldiers in the United States were eventually repatriated in excellent health within a year of the war's end. The war was unusual, however, simply because 425,871 POWs were interned in this country—the largest foreign "force" ever on American soil.