

Tobias William Frazier, WWI Code Talker

The daughter of Corporal Tobias Frazier was Ruth Frazier McMillian. The following comments are from words she recorded.

“World War I was for the most part, different from World War II. In WWI, it was trench warfare. The English and French in one set of deep trenches and the Germans and their allies in another set, usually only a few hundred yards apart. Each side would climb out of the trenches and charge across no man’s land toward the other side’s trenches, in the hope of breaking through and advancing into the other’s territory. Both sides used telephone lines and crude radios to alert troops of upcoming charges. Enemy telephones were tapped and radio messages intercepted. Germany had experts who knew all common languages, so it was impossible to have a secret.

“Papa sailed for France on July 18th, 1918. The 2nd and 36th Divisions traveled by train and were trucked to the front, east of Reims. They were assigned to the Fourth French Army, which was supporting Pershing’s offensive, and were given the task of breaking the German grasp on the most critical part in the line.

“Near St Etienne, the Germans held fast when the 2nd Division entered the fray. The 36th Division was called in to replace a weary 2nd Division, and at this time the Choctaw language was used as the code, as all other languages were being broken by the enemy.

“He said there was talk among the Choctaws that they could relay messages in their own tongue and this conversation was overheard by an officer. The officer trained fourteen Choctaws to be radio operators. This was rudimentary code, for example, a regiment was called ‘the tribe’ in Choctaw. The Germans were wholly beaten since they could not break the code, and turned this campaign into an outstanding success. This also paved the way for the World War II success of the Navajo Code Talkers.”

Frazier was born August 7, 1892 in Spencerville. He served in Co E, 142nd Infantry, 36th Division. He passed away November 25, 1975