NOTES ON THE COMANCHE SOUND SYSTEM

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The Comanche language has many of the same sounds as English, and a few sounds that are different. This overall similarity has made it possible for many of the Comanche names and terms in this book to be transposed into an orthography that is fairly close to the actual sounds of Comanche. When both a good written representation and a more or less accurate translation of a form exist, we have often, but not always, been able to analyze that form.

The consonants of Comanche are much like their English equivalents—*p, t, k, m, n, w, y, s,* and *h* are much as in English. When it occurs between vowels, *p* sometimes is heard as a sound we are writing with *v*. This sound ranges from its English counterpart to a sound more like *b*. Similarly, a *t* between vowels is sometimes heard as the tap *r* found in words like *rider*. In addition to the above, Comanche has consonants we represent with the letters *kw* and *ts*. These stand for sounds that English has—*kw* is like *qu* in words like ‘quit’; *ts* occurs within words, as in ‘cats’. English does not have *ts* at the beginning of words, but many readers will be familiar with the sound from words such as ‘*tsar*’. Finally, Comanche has the glottal stop, represented with an apostrophe (’), in which the air leaving the lungs is stopped momentarily deep in the throat. English speakers use a glottal stop in words like ‘uh-oh’.

The vowels of Comanche and English are in most cases similar, although English equivalents of the linguists’ rendering of these vowels do not correspond one-to-one with the way the vowels are written in English. The vowels *i, e, u, o,* and *a* are the same as English vowels in this way: *i* stands for the vowels in a word like ‘beet’; *e* stands for the vowel in a word like ‘pay’; *u* stands for the vowel in a word like ‘fool’; *o* stands

XXVI for the first vowel in a word like 'sofa'; and *a* stands for the vowel in a word like 'mall'.

Comanche also has a vowel that does not exist as a "real" vowel in English, although the sound is often heard in unstressed English vowels. The vowel is ɨ, and it sounds like the "uh" sound in words like 'number'.

An underlined vowel represents a voiceless vowel—a vowel that is expressed with a puff of air (but if one watches the speaker's lips one can often see the shape of the vowel). Voiceless vowels become regular vowels when they are stressed. We have not marked stress, because the main stress in a Comanche word almost always falls on the first syllable of the word.

Choctaw "Telephone Squad," at Camp Devons, Massachusetts. Wanamaker Collection W6451, William Hammond Mathers Museum, Indiana University. Left to right: Taylor Lewis, Mitchell Bobb, James Edwards, Calvin Wilson, James Davenport, and Captain E. H. Horner.

Left to right: John Golombie; Czarina Colbert Conlan; Joel Joseph Oklahombi, wearing the Croix de Guerre medal, at Oklahombi's house, May 12, 1921. Photo by W. Hopkins, Idabel, Oklahoma. Archive & Manuscripts Division of the Oklahoma Historical Society. Photo number 4122.

Schlicht Billy, World War II Choctaw Communications Operator, and Choctaw Dancers. Photo courtesy of Judy Allen, editor, *Bishinik*, Choctaw tribal newspaper, Durant, Oklahoma.

Choctaw Medal of Honor awarded to the families of the World War I Choctaw Code Talkers. Medal courtesy of Judy Allen, editor, *Bishinik*, Choctaw tribal newspaper, Durant, Oklahoma. Author's photo.

The Comanche Code Talkers at Ft. Benning, Georgia, 1941. Front row, left to right: Roderick Red Elk, Simmons Parker, Larry Saupitty, Melvin Permansu, Willie Yackeschi, Charles Chibitty, and Wellington Mihecoby. Back row, left to right: Morris Sunrise, Perry Noyabad, Ralph Wahnee, Haddon Codynah, Robert Holder, Edward Nahquaddy, Clifford Otivo, and Forrest Kassanavoid. Photo courtesy of Forrest Kassanavoid.

The Comanche Code Talkers at Ft. Benning, Georgia, 1941. Back row, left to right: Clifford Otitivo, Edward Nahquaddy, Haddon Codynah, Ralph Wahnee, Willie Yackeschi, Wellington Mihecoby. Front row, left to right: Simmons Parker, Forrest Kassanavoid, Charles Chibitty, Larry Saupitty, Roderick Red Elk. Photo courtesy of Major General (Ret.) Hugh F. Foster.

Major General (Ret.) Hugh F. Foster Jr.
Photo courtesy of Major General
(Ret.) Hugh F. Foster Jr.

Private Haddon Codynah installing a guy wire on a telephone pole to keep it from falling over due to the strain of the telephone lines added by the Fourth Signal Company, Camp Gordon, Georgia, 1941. Photo courtesy of Major General (Ret.) Hugh F. Foster Jr.

Private Wellington Mihecoby beside a BD-71 twelve-line manual telephone switchboard, the type normally used at Regimental and Division Artillery Headquarters, Ft. Benning, Georgia, 1941. Photo courtesy of Major General (Ret.) Hugh F. Foster Jr.

Ernest Stahlberg (standing) and camp barber by Fourth Signal Company sign. Augusta, Georgia, 1943. Photo courtesy of Ernest Stahlberg.

Forrest Kassanavoid displaying a Nazi flag he captured at Cherbourg, France, in June 1944. Author's photo, Indiahoma, Oklahoma, January 11, 1996.

Charles Chibitty (left) and Roderick Red Elk at the University of Oklahoma, August 4, 1995. Author's photo.

Forrest and Marian Kassanavoid at the Oklahoma State Capitol, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, November 3, 1989. Photo by Joe Hayes, courtesy of Museum of the Great Plains, Lawton, Oklahoma.

Forrest Kassanavoid and Major General (Ret.) Hugh F. Foster Jr., at Comanche dance, Lawton, Oklahoma, ca. 1990. Photo courtesy of Forrest and Marian Kassanavoid.

Code talkers performing Victory Dance at Comanche Code Talkers Ceremony. Oklahoma State Capitol Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, November 3, 1989. Left to right: Charles Chibitty, Major General (Ret.) Hugh F. Foster Jr., Forrest Kassanavoid, and Roderick Red Elk. Photo courtesy of Museum of the Great Plains, Lawton, Oklahoma.

Code Talker "Reunion," Left to right: Charles Chibitty, Roderick Red Elk, Major General (Ret.) Hugh F. Foster Jr. Albert Nahquaddy, Forrest Kassanavoid. Lawton, Oklahoma, 1990. Photo courtesy of Major General (Ret.) Hugh F. Foster Jr.

Code Talker Recognition Ceremony. Oklahoma State Capitol, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, November 3, 1989. Left to right: Roderick Red Elk, Major General (Ret.) Hugh F. Foster Jr., Forrest Kassanavoid, Charles Chibitty. Photo by Joe Hayes, courtesy of Museum of the Great Plains, Lawton, Oklahoma.

Comanche Tuhwi (Black Knife) Society dance in honor of Comanche and Choctaw Code Talkers. Code Talker Recognition Ceremony, Oklahoma State Capitol, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, November 3, 1989. Photo by Joe Hayes, courtesy of Museum of the Great Plains, Lawton, Oklahoma.

Comanche Code Talker Simmons Parker, ca. 1950. Photo courtesy of Ernest Stahlberg.

Cpl. Henry Blake Jr. (left) and PFC George H. Kirk, Navajo Code Talkers operating a portable radio set in a clearing they have cut in the dense jungle behind front lines. Bougainville, December 1943. Photo courtesy of National Archives (U.S. Marine Corps photograph USMC 69889-A, National Archives #127-GR-137-69889-A).

Roderick Red Elk (left) and his cousin Elgin Red Elk (right) practice sending telegraph messages at Fort Benning, Georgia. Photo courtesy of *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, Columbus, Georgia, c. 1941.

The Comanche Code Talkers in their barracks, Fort Benning, Georgia. Front row, left to right: Charles Chibitty, Robert Holder, Haddon Codynah, Willie Yackeschi, Elgin Red Elk, Simmons Parker. Back row, left to right: Roderick Red Elk, Clifton Otitivo, Wellington Mihecoby, and Morris Sunrise. Photo courtesy of *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, Columbus, Georgia, c. 1941.

Simmons Parker (left) and Charles Chibitty (right) dancing in Fancy-Feather dance attire to entertain fellow soldiers at Fort Benning, Georgia. Photo courtesy of *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, Columbus, Georgia, c. 1941.

Comanche Code Talkers at Fort Benning, Georgia. Photo courtesy of National Archives, Washington, D.C.

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