



The Navajo Nation
Yideeskáądi Nitsáhákees

DR. BUU NYGREN *PRESIDENT*
RICHELLE MONTOYA *VICE PRESIDENT*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Aug. 14, 2024

CONTACT: George Hardeen, Public Relations Director

Email: george.hardeen@navajo-nsn.gov

Cell: 928-810-9174

Navajo President Buu Nygren, Speaker Curley, Chief Justice Jayne honor three remaining Navajo Code Talkers, says *Diné bizaad* must be preserved

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren, a three-star Marine general, a congressman and a long list of dignitaries paid homage to three remaining Navajo Code Talkers and the storied memory of 400 others who used the Navajo language as a secret weapon during World War II.

“Our language is sacred,” the President told 600 people in the Navajo language at the Navajo Nation

Fairgrounds Wednesday during a day full of Navajo Code Talker Day celebrations events.

“Say thank you to our three remaining Code Talkers as they are aging,” he said. “Their hearts will appreciate the ‘thank you.’ As Navajo people, we always say what we say is very sacred and holy. So the

message I was conveying in Navajo was that wherever our three Code Talkers are, we want to say thank you to them, and the Holy Beings will relay that message to them into their hearts.”



Former Navajo Tribal Chairman and Navajo Code Talker Peter MacDonald told of the valor of Navajo Code Talkers and ingenuity of the Navajo code they developed and used in the South Pacific. He was among three remaining Code Talkers to be honored by proclamation by President Nygren, Speaker Curley and Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne during Navajo Code Talkers Day on Aug. 14, 2024. Joining them on stage was Vietnam Veteran Henry Tsosie.

Of those three – John Kinsel, Sr., 107, Thomas Begay, 99 and Peter MacDonald, 96 – only former Navajo Tribal Chairman Peter MacDonald could attend.

“Over 200 Navajo Code Talkers participated in the Iwo Jima landing,” Chairman MacDonald said.

“I want to thank all of you here today to honor those 400 Code Talkers,” he said. “We used a weapon that the enemy could not decipher, a weapon not even Navajos here on the reservation would know what in the world we were talking about in the Navajo code.”



Keynote speaker Lt. General Michael S. Cederholm, Commanding General of 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, visited with President Nygren before meeting with the Young Marines at the statue of the Navajo Code Talker in the Navajo Nation Veterans Memorial Park. The Young Marines is a national youth education and service program for young people ages 8 through 18. It emphasizes leadership, discipline and citizenship and promotes physical fitness and drug resistance. It is operated by the Young Marines of the Marine Corps League.

President Nygren, Navajo Nation Council Speaker Crystalyne Curley and Navajo Nation Supreme Court Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne commemorated the day by signing a proclamation to declare Aug. 14, 2024, as Navajo Code Talker Day.

The Navajo Code Talkers, all veterans and those now serving in uniform are due respect and honor for their courage, sacrifice and dedication to preserve freedom and democracy for all, the proclamation states.

“We call upon all citizens to celebrate the sacred Diné language as a living language for future generations of Navajos,” it reads.

By the end of World War II, the Navajo code was up to 800 Navajo words. It remained classified until 1968, and Navajo Code Talkers kept their secret long past that decade.

Keynote speaker Lt. General Michael S. Cederholm, Commanding General of 1st Marine Expeditionary

Force, explained that the initial concept for Code Talkers was born in France during World War I. He said Choctaw, Cheyenne, Comanche, Cherokee, Osage and Yankton Sioux soldiers were recruited to transmit messages that relayed troop movements and tactical plans.

That led to immediate gains on the battlefield during World War II, he said.

“Code Talkers served in the U.S. Army in historic battles in Europe and North Africa to include Utah Beach during D-Day,” Lt. General Cederholm said.

“I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the resourcefulness of our Army brethren and the global scope of the Native American contributions to winning that terrible war and returning peace to our great world today,” he said.

Today’s event truly honored the remarkable accomplishment of the Navajo Code Talkers, he said.

“Through their selfless sacrifice, through their heroism, their ingenuity established a legacy that is woven into the very fabric of our nation’s history and into our uniforms, and indelibly linked with what it means to be a United States Marine,” he said.

The initial 29 Navajo Code Talkers developed an unbreakable code using the rich and complex Navajo language, Lt. General Cederholm said.

“The code they created gave the Marine Corps a critical capability to communicate as they closed with and destroyed the enemy in historic battles such as Guadalcanal, Bougainville, Tarawa, Peleliu, Saipan and Iwo Jima,” he said. “They served in all six Marine divisions, Marine Raider battalions and Marine parachute members, transmitting information on enemy troop movements and tactics, official orders and other information vital to the Marine Corps success on the battlefield.”



Arizona's District 2 Congressman and Navy SEAL Eli Crane visited with active duty and veteran servicemen and women from four military branches in Window Rock during Navajo Code Talkers Day on Wednesday.

Arizona's Congressional District 2 Congressman Crane, said he dropped out of school following Sept. 11, 2001, to join the U.S. Navy.

After trying twice, he was accepted into Navy SEAL training and was assigned to SEAL Team 3 and served with the late, renowned sniper Chris Cobb of "American Sniper" fame on his last deployment.

“Our country and our state are free in great part to the skill set and fortitude of these men,” Congressman Crane said. “I, along with every American, am grateful for these patriots who served our country in a profoundly unique and significant way. I'd like to personally offer my gratitude to the Code Talker we have with us today. It is humbling to be in the presence of these great men.”

With more than 300 veterans registered for today's Code Talkers event, Speaker Curley reached out to the many Vietnam veterans in attendance to offer

them the greeting that was denied them 50 years ago.

“Welcome home,” she said. “Thank you for your service and for our Vietnam veterans. Many of you are here with hurting hearts. The grieving process is something that just can't go away one day, next year, five years, 10 years. So my heart and our prayers are with you. We shed those tears with you, and we share those memories with you.”

Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne acknowledged the long tradition of ordinary Navajos rising to become protectors of the Navajo Nation.

“From time immemorial, before even 1868, even before we signed the Navajo treaty, we had warriors,” she said. “We became involved with fighting for our freedom, and we are here today.”

###