

Navajo Nation mourns the loss of Navajo Code Talker Joe Vandever Sr.

Written by Staff Reports

Friday, 14 February 2020 08:08



WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. - Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and Vice President Myron Lizer offer their heartfelt condolences to the family and loved ones of U.S. Marine Corps Navajo Code Talker Joe Vandever Sr., who passed away Jan. 31 at the age of 96 in Haystack, N.M.

"The Navajo people have lost another great warrior who sacrificed more than we'll ever know to defend our country. On behalf of the Navajo Nation, we offer our prayers and heartfelt

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condolences to his wife, children, and many other loved ones,” Nez said.

According to his family, Vandever passed away due to health complications. He was born on Feb. 5, 1923 into the Red Running Into the Water People clan, born for Two Who Came to the Water clan. He was married for 73 years to his wife, Bessie D. Vandever, who passed on Sept. 24, 2019.

Vandever enlisted with the U.S. Marine Corps in Santa Fe, N.M. on March 26, 1943 and was honorably discharged as Corporal on Jan. 22, 1946. He served in northern Solomons, Bougainville, Emirau Islands, Guam, Marianas Islands, Okinawa, Ryukyus Islands, Occupation of Japan, and Occupation of China.

“Navajo Code Talker Joe Vandever, Sr. was a great warrior and a compassionate family man,” Lizer said. “In every aspect of his life, he was a loving person who cared greatly for his people. Today, I ask our Diné people to keep his spirit and his family in your prayers as we give thanks for his life and his legacy.”

Survivors include his sister Mary Vandever Delgarito; sons Gary, Tracy, Obie, Joe Jr., and Lester Vandever; daughters Beth Nez, Phegie Vandever Slim, Sheila Vandever Nez; 36 grandchildren, 55 great-grandchildren and one great-great grandchild.

He was preceded in death by his parents Emma and Walter Vandever; his wife Bessie D. Vandever; son Anthony Vandever; and grandsons Charleston, Antonio, and Travis Vandever.

Flags were ordered to be flown at half-staff on the Navajo Nation from Feb. 3 - Feb. 6.

A memorial service was held Feb. 5 at the El Morro Theatre in Gallup. In attendance were Lizer and his wife Second Lady Dottie Lizer and hundreds of Navajo citizens, family members, and loved ones .

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During the service, Lizer presented a proclamation and a Navajo Nation flag to the family of Code Talker Vandever, and offered condolences on behalf of the Navajo people.

“As we mourn the loss of Navajo Code Talker Joe Vandever Sr., we also honor and remember all his great sacrifices for our Navajo people and the entire country. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family, friends, and community members as they lay him to rest,” Lizer said.

During the service, Vandever’s grandchildren, Eric Nez, Shaylee Vandever, Petrina Vandever, Shelby Vandever, and Petulia Vandever, shared precious memories, teachings, and disciplines of their grandfather and grandmother.

“Our Cheii and Shimásání (grandfather and grandmother) encouraged us to be the best we can be and to contribute to the Navajo Nation and the world. He stressed the need for each of their 91 grandchildren to speak and value our Navajo language. He said our language and culture identifies who we are and it will protect us and make us stronger. We will greatly miss our grandparents,” grandson Eric Nez said.

“We thank God for the life of Navajo Code Talker Joe Vandever Sr. In every aspect of his life, he was a loving and compassionate person who cared greatly for his people, his children, and grandchildren. His service and contribution to the Navajo Nation and country will be greatly missed and forever cherished and honored,” President Nez said.

The burial for Navajo Code Talker Joe Vandever Sr. was scheduled for Feb. 6 at 1:30 pm at the Santa Fe National Cemetery in Santa Fe, N.M.

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