

Navajo leaders celebrate Code Talkers at museum groundbreaking

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TSE BONITO, N.M. – On National Navajo Code Talkers Day, President Jonathan Nez, Speaker Seth Damon, Chief Justice JoAnn Jayne, Vice President Myron Lizer, Marine Corps Reserve Commander Lt. General David Bellon, U.S. Representative Tom O’Halleran, and Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty were joined by former Navajo Chairman and Navajo Code Talker Peter MacDonald Sr. during the groundbreaking ceremony of the National Code Talker Museum in Tsé Bonito, N.M.

During World War II, the Navajo Code Talkers answered the call to defend the United States of America using the impenetrable code based on the Navajo language that is widely acknowledged as a deciding factor in the war effort. In 1982, former U.S. President Ronald Reagan designated Aug.14 as “National Navajo Code Talkers Day.” For over 25 years, the Navajo Code Talker program was classified, and many of their stories were untold.

“We pay tribute to all Navajo Code Talkers for their courageous service in World War II and beyond. At the time of their enlistment, they were young Navajo men who answered the call of duty and unknowingly built a legacy for the Navajo people. Their contribution to the country is recognized throughout the world. They used our sacred Navajo language to help win the war and protect the freedom that we have today,” Nez said.

During his presentation Nez honored the Code Talkers who have passed, along with the three surviving Code Talkers.

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“Many of them have gone to their final resting places, but their service and efforts will forever be remembered and cherished for many generations. Today, we are blessed to have three surviving Navajo Code Talkers, including Thomas H. Begay, John Kinsel Sr., and former Chairman of the Navajo Nation Peter MacDonald, Sr. We also commend them and their families for breaking ground to build the very first Navajo Code Talker Museum in the country. The Museum will tell the legacy of our Navajo warriors, and our children and grandchildren will have the opportunity to learn and remember how resilient we are as Diné people,” Nez said.

Over 500 individuals attended the event to commemorate the thousands of lives the young Navajo Code Talkers saved during World War II. Historians share the integral role that the Navajo Code Talkers played in bringing an end to World War II. There are three surviving Navajo Code Talkers, MacDonald, Thomas H. Begay, and John Kinsel Sr.

“In 1942, 29 Navajo Code Talkers developed an unbreakable code that would win the war in the Pacific and save millions of lives worldwide. The Navajo Nation appreciates Code Talker Peter MacDonald and the late Samuel Sandoval for leading the charge to get us here today,” Damon said.

Damon also spoke about what the museum would mean to the Navajo people.

“This museum and veterans center should have been completed years ago, and it will be a gathering place to hear their stories. We now break ground to make this massive project a reality, and we are forever grateful to our Navajo warriors in uniform for protecting our freedom and way of life,” Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh) said.

In 2019, the Navajo Nation received over \$1 million to assist with the design and construction of the Navajo Code Talker museum from the state of New Mexico, which was of great importance and priority of the late New Mexico State Sen. John Pinto. During the event, Damon and Nez shared their joint commitment to support the Navajo Code Talkers and their families.

“Today we pay tribute to our Navajo Code Talkers and our veterans for their contributions to our Diné people. We look forward to the opening of the National Navajo Code Talkers Museum to pay homage to our brave warriors and commemorate their heroic actions using our Diné

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language. We are united in supporting this accomplishment and are thankful to all those who have worked and who will continue to work to make this dream a reality,” Jayne said.

“The Marine Corps has an enduring 80-year relationship with the Navajo people and Indian Country. We value tradition just as the Navajo Nation does. The story of the Navajo Code Talkers must be told. They were on the frontlines reporting battle information through a sacred code to our generals and decision-makers,” Bellon said.

Bellon spoke about how important the Diné language was during World War II.

“The Diné language was vital to our victory in the Pacific, and we remember that sacrifice today. The unbreakable code now is about love for family and community, love for country, and a commitment to protect our liberty,” Bellon said.

State Senator Shannon Pinto, daughter of Code Talker and former Senator John Pinto, provided a message from New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham.

“New Mexico honors our Navajo Code Talkers and recognizes the countless lives they saved. Only three remain today - Peter MacDonald, John Kinsel Sr., and Thomas H. Begay. Each served selflessly during World War II and deserves to be remembered for what they did.

“Their steadfast service to a Nation that had systematically underserved and undervalued Indigenous people is a true testament to their character and a debt that we will never be able to repay fully. I am incredibly proud that the Navajo Code Talker Museum will be here in New Mexico,” Pinto read.

“We thank our Creator for blessing us with a beautiful day to recognize our honorable Navajo Code Talkers. We are very grateful for them, not only for their immeasurable bravery but for their tremendous leadership. Our Creator raised these warriors. Each of the 400 Diné warriors was gifted and protected by God to help deliver America in her most trying time in the Pacific Theater of WWII with our sacred language,” Lizer said.

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Lizer also thanked everyone who helped build the Code Talker Museum.

“We appreciate everyone who developed the Navajo Code Talker Museum project plan to break ground today. It will be historical for generations to come. We look forward to unveiling the new Navajo Nation Code Talkers Museum soon to tell the story of these brilliant and courageous warriors,” Lizer said.

“Navajo Code Talker Samuel Sandoval’s legacy lives on today as we remember his sacrifice to our nation. He is remembered as a loving and courageous person who gave more than we will ever know to defend our homeland using our sacred Navajo language,” Kanzabah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley, Tsé’ahnáoozt’í’í, Sheep Springs, Beclabito, Gad’ii’áhí/Tó K’í), said, singling out Sandoval.

Kanzabah Crotty also praised all the other Code Talkers.

“We honor all our Navajo Code Talkers for saving countless lives around the world. Through their bravery and courage, they changed history,” Kanzabah Crotty said.

Other attendees at the event included Council Delegates Raymond Smith, Jr., Nathaniel Brown, First Lady Phefelia Nez, Second Lady Dottie Lizer, Miss Navajo Nation Niagara Rockbridge, Navajo YES, Tséhootsooí Diné Bi’Ólta’ students, and others.

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