

Code Talker Bahe Ketchum honored

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—The Navajo Nation is in mourning. President Russell Begaye ordered flags across the Navajo Nation to be flown at half-staff from sunrise on June 9 to sunset on June 12, in honor of the late Navajo Code Talker Bahe Ketchum.

Ketchum passed at the age of 96 at in Flagstaff June 8.

“The Navajo Nation sends its deepest condolences to the family and friends of Bahe Ketchum. As a Navajo Code Talker, he defended not only the Navajo Nation, but the United States of America against tyranny and oppression,” President Begaye said.

“We salute his bravery, sacrifice and determination for the Navajo people,” he added.

Vice President Jonathan Nez said, “Bahe Ketchum honored the Navajo people, not only through his service as a Navajo Code Talker, but by his willingness to help people throughout his lifetime.”

“Bahe Ketchum was an American hero and he will be honored by the generations to come for his service to his country. We salute his life and his military service,” said Vice President Nez.

Vice President Nez was the former council delegate for the chapters of Inscription House, Navajo Mountain, Oljato and Shonto.

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Ketchum reached the rank of private first class and served with the 6th Marine Division from 1944 to 1946. He saw combat in the Battles of Guadalcanal, Okinawa and Tsingtao. He was born in Kaibeto, Ariz. and grew up at Inscription House.

He was married to Estelle Ketchum, who passed in 2006. The couple had 10 sons, two daughters, 29 grandchildren and 18 grandchildren.

Marvin Ketchum, his son, said his father received a “whole slew of medals,” including the Congressional Silver Medal for his service as a Navajo Code Talker.

The funeral date has not been set and the family will be meeting at the Navajo Mountain Chapter House on June 9 at 5 pm to plan arrangements, including establishing a bank account for monetary donations.

Marvin Ketchum said his father often talked of working for the headquarters during the war, transmitting and translating messages for generals, commanders and top brass. He said his father also saw action on the battlefield.

“He said he was in Phoenix, about to catch a train, when he ran into a U.S. Marine Corps officer who recommended that he enlist,” Ketchum said. “My father was with a friend he was working with and the officer said, ‘You guys aren’t doing anything, so you should enlist.’ ”

His friend, Willard Nez Tsosie, joined Ketchum and enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps to become Navajo Code Talkers.

Ketchum said of his father, “He did a lot of services for the community of Navajo Mountain and people in general. He served his country. He was a positive role model. We ask the public for a lot of prayers for the family.”