

Artist's commission pays tribute to a local military hero

Written by By Rachelle Nones Sun Correspondent
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When self-taught metalworker Michael Mitchell transitioned from silversmithing to working with steel and other metals, he didn't anticipate receiving a commission to craft a sword to honor Gallup native Hiroshi H. "Hershey" Miyamura, a second-generation Japanese American Medal of Honor recipient and former POW who served in the United States military during the Korean War.

Mitchell told the *Sun* that he learned how to craft steel by working on personal projects as a "backyard blacksmith" shaping steel, copper, brass, and other metals into horseshoe art and various objects on a trial-and-error basis.

Last year, Mitchell "wanted to test myself" by making a sword. "The sword that caught my eye was a Japanese katana," Mitchell said.

He made the sword to honor the Navajo Code Talkers and donated it to the Navajo Hopi Honor

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Riders, a nonprofit serving Native American military veterans or their surviving families.

Mitchell said that a local veteran, after viewing a photograph of the sword he'd donated to the Navajo Hopi Honor Riders, contacted him about crafting a sword to honor Miyamura.

"I had to go online and see how he got this medal of honor. It was interesting. He was a warrior," Mitchell said.

Spanning 34" in length, the steel sword Mitchell crafted was etched with Miyamura's name and information related to his military service. Upon completion, the sword's handle was wrapped in black leather.

Mitchell never works from sketched images on paper. His designs are organically gleaned from ideas that pop into his head while he is engaged in other activities or during the manufacturing process itself.

In addition to knives, horseshoe art and tools, Mitchell often crafts rings, bracelets, and earrings, but none of his jewelry is ever offered for sale because as soon as he makes it, it's gone. Lightheartedly, Mitchell remarked, "My wife and my daughter, everything I make they take."

Mitchell said that working with metal inspired him to learn leatherworking so he could make his own sheathes to cover the knives and other metal items he crafts. "Once you learn something you have to learn something else," Mitchell added.

To watch Hiroshi H. Miyamura's speak about his military service, visit The American Veteran's Center YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/TvUycZhp2U4>

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