



Joint Press Release

Navajo Nation Office
of the President and the Vice President
and Navajo Nation Office of the Speaker



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Navajo Nation Announces New Class of Navy Ships

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – The Navajo Nation proudly announces that Secretary of the Navy Richard V. Spencer has named the new class of U.S. Navy Towing, Salvage, and Rescue ships Navajo. The class is named in honor of the Navajo people’s storied contributions to the American military, who have served in the armed forces for decades at a higher degree than the national participation rate.

“Throughout our history, the Diné people have always been the caretakers and protectors of our land in every branch of the armed services so we are very grateful that our people are being recognized

through this historic announcement from the Navy,” said Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez. “I also want to thank all of the past leaders who advocated and supported this initiative over the years.”

“The Navajo people have fought and served our armed forces with honor and valor in nearly all major conflicts since the birth of our nation, so it is fitting and right to name a new class of ship in their honor,” said Secretary Spencer. “The Navajo class of Towing, Salvage, and Rescue ships will serve our nation and continue the legacy of the Navajo people, and all Native Americans.”

During World War II, the Navajo Code Talkers, Marines Corps service members under the Department of the Navy, fought in the Pacific Theater transmitting top secret messages. By the war’s end, over 400 Code Talkers were trained for this essential service.

In the invasion of Iwo Jima alone, Code Talkers sent over 800 messages without error. Major Howard Connor, who was the Code Talkers’ signal officer at Iwo Jima, said, “Were it not for the Navajos, the Marines would never have taken Iwo Jima.”



PHOTO: A depiction from the shipbuilder of the class of U.S. Navy Towing, Salvage, and Rescue ships.

The new class of vessels will be based on existing commercial towing offshore vessel designs and will replace the current T-ATF 166 and T-ARS 50 class ships. The first ship of this class will be named USNS Navajo and designated T-ATS 6.

Each additional ship in the class will be named in honor of prominent Native Americans or Native American tribes.

The late Senator John McCain (AZ), who retired from the Navy with the rank of captain, strongly supported the effort to name the ship class in honor of the Navajo People.

“John worked hard to ensure the Navajo Nation's contributions to our security and culture were recognized by the U.S. Navy in the manner in which it traditionally pays tribute to important American communities. I'm so pleased, and I know John would be very gratified, that the Navy has now officially named a United States Naval Ship Navajo, a deserved and overdue honor,” Cindy McCain, the late Senator McCain’s wife of 38 years, said in statement.

After Senator McCain’s passing, Senator Martha McSally (AZ) carried forward the effort in coordination with the Navy.

“The Navajo People have an incredibly rich legacy of military service and deserve to have a class of U.S. Navy ships named in their honor. Arizonans are proud of this recognition of the Navajo Nation which was fought for and secured by Senator McCain. This is yet another example of how his legacy will live on,” Senator McSally said in a statement.

Former Navajo Nation Council Speaker LoRenzo Bates coordinated the naming project during his speaker administration. He passed on the project to current Navajo Nation Council Speaker Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) when he assumed office.

“I extend a strong *ahéhee'* to the efforts of Secretary Spencer and the late Senator McCain to advance this effort. Our Navajo people, including several council delegates, have a strong tradition of defense of this land. I would also like to recognize the current Navajo service members around the world protecting freedom and delivering humanitarian aid,” said Speaker Damon.

Gulf Island Shipyards was awarded the \$63.5 million contract for the detail design and construction of the T-ATS. The T-ATS will serve as open ocean towing vessels and will additionally support salvage operations and submarine rescue missions. The first ship in the class will be built at the company’s shipyard in Houma, Louisiana and is expected to be completed in March 2021.

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