



24th Navajo Nation Council

Office of the Speaker

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Navajo Code Talker Fleming Begaye Laid to Rest

CHINLE, Ariz. – Navajo American hero and World War II Code Talker Fleming Begaye, Sr. was laid to rest in Chinle, Ariz on Friday May 17.

Despite heavy rainfall in the morning, motorcyclists from the Navajo-Hopi Honor Riders provided escort from the Silver Creek Mortuary in Tse Bonito, N.M., to a viewing at the Potter's House Church in Chinle. Following the viewing, more than 200 attended the funeral to celebrate the life of the 97-year-old war hero.

In World War II, the Navajo men recruited by the U.S. Marines to transmit top secret combat communications using Diné Bizaad, the Navajo language, were known as Code Talkers.

In his service to country, Mr. Begaye narrowly avoided death several times. During the Battle of Tarawa, Begaye survived by swimming for his life after a Japanese bomb destroyed his landing craft.

Later, Begaye spent nearly a year in the hospital after surviving wounds endured in the taking of the Japanese base on Tinian in the Mariana Islands. Begaye also saw action on Guadalcanal.

The Navajo Code is widely thought to be the only military code that has never been deciphered, and the Code Talkers are credited with helping ensure the Allies' victory in the Pacific theater.

Navajo Council Speaker Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Lichíí', Rock Springs, Tsayatoh) offered words of encouragement to Begaye's surviving relatives in attendance and offered a Navajo Nation flag to Theo Ott, Begaye's granddaughter.

"Fleming Begaye's life was always dedicated to service," said Speaker Seth Damon. "Whether it was answering the call to protect freedom in World War II or his service on the Navajo Nation, Mr. Begaye brought honor and dignity to all his endeavors. His outsized influence on the Navajo Nation will be missed by all. The Council is honored to present the Navajo Nation Flag to his family in honor of Mr. Begaye and as recognition of his devoted service to his Nation and country."

After his military service, Begaye returned to the Navajo Nation, met his wife Helen, and served his people as a Bureau of Indian Affairs school guidance counselor. He used his savings from the position to start a series of businesses on the reservation, starting with a general store and Shell gas station in Chinle.

In addition to his business career, Begaye was a civic leader and booster for Navajo capacity-building efforts.

He served on the executive board of the Office of Navajo Economic Opportunity, the Chinle planning board and school board. Countless rodeos, churches, sports teams, schools, and even the Navajo police department enjoyed Begaye's beneficence.

When Navajo Community College requested his help to get the first tribally-controlled institution of higher education off the ground, Begaye offered financial backing, goods, and equipment to the school.

In 2017, Begaye was honored by President Donald Trump in the Oval Office. He and former Navajo Nation Chairman Peter MacDonald, also a Code Talker, were honored for their World War II service at the White House ceremony.

Begaye received military honors at his internment at a family burial plot east of Many Farms. His U.S. Marine pallbearers gave a 21-gun salute and taps was played by a local trumpeter from his church of more than 30 years, the Potter's House.

From a recruitment of 420 Code Talkers, there are seven living Code Talkers alive now.

Begaye's beginnings are common to many on the Nation. He was born on sheepskin in a hogan in 1921 in Red Valley, AZ. He attended BIA schools before dropping out to join the Marines.

Helen, his wife, passed in 2008. He is survived by his daughter, Veronica Walters, six grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.

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