



## Navajo Code Talkers Honored in Flag Raising Dedication in Virginia

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PHOTO: Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. receives flag from Master Gunnery Sergeant, Dennis M. Romo at Code Talkers Hall in Quantico, VA.

**QUANTICO, Va.** — Last week, members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council traveled to the Marine Corps Cyber Operations Center (MCCOC) to attend a special flag raising ceremony dedicated to the Navajo Code Talkers, as well as meeting with various congressional leaders in Washington, D.C. to advocate for more federal funds to aid Navajo veterans.

“The Navajo Code Talkers used the Diné language that was given to us by the Holy People to conjure up the warrior spirit that resides within each and every person,” said Delegate Nathaniel Brown (Dennehotso, Kayenta, Chííłchinbii’tó). “As these war veterans and soldiers return to Dinétah, they walk back on the Corn Pollen Path.”

In attendance was Delegate Brown, Delegate Raymond Smith, Jr. (Klagetoh, Wide Ruins, Houck, Lupton, Nahat’á Dził), Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain), Delegate Pernell Halona (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl’á’a’), Navajo Nation Washington Office Executive Director, Santee Lewis, Navajo Nation Veteran’s Administration Executive Director, James Zwierlien, and Office of the Speaker Chief of Staff, Sherylene Yazzie.

“The Navajo People or Diné as we call ourselves, have a proud history of overcoming adversity and this would be the case with the recruitment of the Navajo to serve under the US marines,” said Delegate Smith Jr. “It was Major General Clayton B. Bullgal who in 1942 recommended that the Marines recruit 200 Navajos.”

The ceremony began with introductions of the Navajo delegation with the Command Deck at the Code Talker Hall building before being escorted to the Flag Pole where a platoon of active service men and women lined up before them.

Then the color guard began the dedication with the lowering of the national flag which after being folded, Sarget Cardona handed off and saluted the Executive Officer who presented the flag to Delegate Smith, Jr.

In commemoration to the Navajo Code Talkers, the national and Navajo Nation flag were raised and Delegate Smith, Jr. provided a brief overview of the Navajo Code Talkers and their significance in helping the allied powers defeat the axis powers during World War II.

“The code talkers were primarily used during the Pacific Theater of WWII which included the infamous battle of Iwo Jima,” said Delegate Smith, Jr. “It was at Iwo Jima that the code talkers were able to transmit 800 messages without any error that ultimately helped to win in the month-long battle and saved countless marine lives and other lives out there.”

Delegate Smith, Jr.’s father, Raymond Smith, Sr., served in the 5th Marine Corps Division as a Code Talker and shared that he was mistaken by his fellow troops as a Japanese soldier until the commanding officer identified him as a code talker. His service to his people and country earned him a Congressional Silver Medal.

He emphasized the importance of freedom that the original 29 Code Talkers fought for through their decisive measures of utilizing the Navajo Language to transmit coded messages quickly. Aiding in the Battle of Iwo Jima that led the U.S. Marine Corps and Navy to capture the island from the Imperial Japanese Army in 1945.

The code was never broken until 1968 when the operation was declassified. The significance of the Navajo Code Talkers led President Ronald Raegan to establish Navajo Code Talker Day on August 14, 1982.

The State of Arizona is the only state in the Union to recognize National Code Talker Day as a legal state holiday with Governor Doug Ducey issuing a proclamation for the paid holiday last year.

“On Behalf of the Navajo Nation Code Talkers of the great Navajo Nation and being here with the delegation of the Navajo Washington Office and in being in front of the US Marine Corp, I want to accept this flag with great honor and humility,” said Delegate Smith, Jr.

To conclude the flag dedication, Delegate Brown offered a prayer in the Navajo Language to honor the Code Talkers and the men and women who serve this nation.

Afterwards, the delegates met for a Veteran’s Affairs meeting between Zwierlien and VA Executive Director, Henry Huntley and VA Office of Tribal Government Relations, Clay Ward (Cherokee) to advocate for more federal funding for veterans on the Navajo Nation.

One subject that was brought up was the prospect of having a veterans hospital being established on or near the Navajo Nation to ease the travel restrictions or challenges that many veterans deal with. In addition, surrounding tribes would be able to utilize the hospital for their own tribal veterans as many travel hours to the nearest veterans hospital.

In addition, a meeting with the U.S. Senator Mark Kelly (D-AZ) and U.S. Senator Mitt Romney (R-UT) was scheduled in which the discussion was on transportation initiatives for the Navajo Nation.

In observance of Navajo Code Talkers Day, the Legislative Branch will grant its employees and temporary employees eight (8) hours of administrative leave on Friday, August 13th, 2021, from 8:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M.

The Office of the Speaker extends its gratitude to the Navajo Code Talkers for the sacrifice they endured to grant our Navajo Nation and its people the freedom we enjoy to this day.

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