



## Navajo Code Talkers honored during the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo

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**LAS VEGAS, Nev. —** During the final 10th go-round performance of the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo (NFR), the Navajo Code Talkers were honored by the Wrangler National Patriot Program in front of over 170,000 rodeo fans and eight million viewers on live television.

United States Marine and Navajo Code Talker Association President, Peter MacDonald, joined 9-time National Finals Rodeo Qualifier Derrick Begay, and Army Sergeant First-Class Christopher Bullis in an honoring ceremony Saturday night at the Thomas and Mack Center.

The Office of the Speaker and the 24th Navajo Nation Council worked with Wrangler and the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) to coordinate the NFR recognition event.

“In 1942, 29 Navajo Code Talkers developed an unbreakable code that would be used during World War II in the conflict across the Pacific. Since this time, the Navajo Nation has a long and proud history of our men and women enlisting without hesitation to serve our country. Many veterans are ranchers, farm the land, and compete in rodeos today. This is a way of life our warriors defended and the Navajo people honors their sacrifice. We applaud the Wrangler Patriot Program and the Pro Rodeo Cowboys Association for recognizing Chairman Peter MacDonald and over 400 Navajo Code Talkers during the National Finals Rodeo,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááhaalí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Red Rock, Rock Springs, Tséyatoh).

The Navajo Code Talkers participated in all Marine Corps assaults in the Pacific from 1942 to 1945, including Guadalcanal, Saipan, Guam, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa. The military code was never broken by the Japanese and messages were conveyed by radio transmissions in Diné Bizaad (Navajo language).

“We are proud that millions of rodeo fans honored our Navajo Code Talkers during the National Finals Rodeo and this elite rodeo organization has acknowledged many Indigenous veterans this



PHOTO: Wrangler National Finals Rodeo Qualifier Derrick Begay escorts Navajo Code Talker Peter MacDonald to the arena for recognition during the Wrangler National Patriot Night at the Thomas & Mack Center in Las Vegas, Nev.

year. The Navajo Nation commends the Wrangler Patriot Program for supporting the families of our fallen soldiers and wounded warriors. My community was honored Saturday night because we have two grandfathers who served as Navajo Code Talkers - Mr. Jimmy C. Begay and Mr. James C. Begay - from Fort Defiance, Ariz.," said Council Delegate Wilson Stewart (Fort Defiance, Crystal, Red Lake, Sawmill).

Founded in 2009, the Wrangler National Patriot Program is a year-round organization created to raise funds to support military veterans and their families. Director of Western Events, Jeff Chadwick, was commended by the Navajo Nation for his leadership in organizing the recognition of Native American veterans across the country.

"Rodeo is a way of life for many of our Navajo families who ranch and raise livestock. The Navajo Nation applauds our own NFR athletes - Derrick Begay, Erich Rogers, and Danielle Lowman - who are amazing role models for our young people. They continue the long tradition of competing with the Pro Rodeo Cowboys Association and representing the Navajo people on the world stage. The Council sends its appreciation to the National Finals Rodeo for uplifting the proud history of our Navajo Code Talkers, the service of Chairman Peter MacDonald, and recognizing the sacred Navajo language," added Budget and Finance Chairman Jamie Henio (Alamo, Ramah, Tóhajiilee).

The United States Marine Corps has recognized the unbreakable Navajo Code as a key factor in saving thousands of lives and leading to victory in the Pacific. In 2001, President George W. Bush recognized the first 29 code talkers with the Congressional Gold Medal while the subsequent code talkers received the Congressional Silver Medal.

Each year on August 14th, National Navajo Code Talkers Day honors the contributions of over 400 code talkers during World War II.

Video of the ceremony can be viewed at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mlf\\_LX2OVh0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mlf_LX2OVh0)

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