



National Park Service
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Navajo Code Talker Commemorates Memorial Day at Montezuma Castle National Monument

“I was wondering about all those boys on the beach and thinking about their parents”, said retired Marine Master Sergeant Dan Akee, relating his experience as a Navajo Code Talker during World War II.

Mr. Akee was the keynote speaker at Montezuma Castle National Monument’s special Memorial Day program, “Remembering America’s Heroes”, and he shared one memory of the exposed beachhead invasion of Iwo Jima, site of the bloodiest battle recorded in U.S. Marine history.

After delivering a prayer of remembrance in Navajo, Mr. Akee outlined the skills needed to memorize the approximately 555 Navajo words in the highly classified system. The code terms were designed to communicate locations and information of strategic importance during the Second World War. Navajo words, he said, were integrated to represent approximately 450 military terms not in the traditional language, such as submarine and dive-bomber.

The Tuba City, Arizona resident explained it took five months to memorize the code, which remained top secret until declassified in 1968. He emphasized the importance of indigenous language preservation and how the code was used to save many lives on both sides, and especially hasten the end of the war.

The approximately 450 Navajo Marines were not allowed to discuss their Signal Corps role in World War II until the 1990s. In 2001, they received Congressional Medals of Honor for service to their country.

On May 31, Park Superintendent Kathy M. Davis presented Mr. Akee with a commemorative medal and World War II era American flag. She also recognized the other veterans in the audience and encouraged all present to express appreciation for their military and civilian support service to the country.

For more information, contact Superintendent Kathy Davis, at 928-567-5276 x223.



Navajo Code Talker Dan Akee reacts to the standing ovation he and other veterans received at Montezuma Castle National Monument on Memorial Day. With him is his wife of over 60 years, Margaret Akee. Other members of the Akee and Boyd families, residents of the Verde Valley, were in attendance.

Photo by Peter Pilles

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