



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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CONTACT: GEORGE HARDEEN
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
OFFICE – 928-871-7917
CELL – 928-309-8532
pressoffice@opvp.org

Navajo President Joe Shirley, Jr., orders flags to half-staff to honor the late Navajo Code Talker Merril L. Sandoval, 82

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., on Monday ordered flags on the Navajo Nation to fly at half-staff from Feb. 13 to Feb. 16 to honor Navajo Code Talker Merril L. Sandoval who died Saturday. He was 82.

“The late Merril L. Sandoval was a Navajo Code Talker who served the United States of America and the Navajo Navajo with courage, honor, and distinction,” President Shirley said in his proclamation.

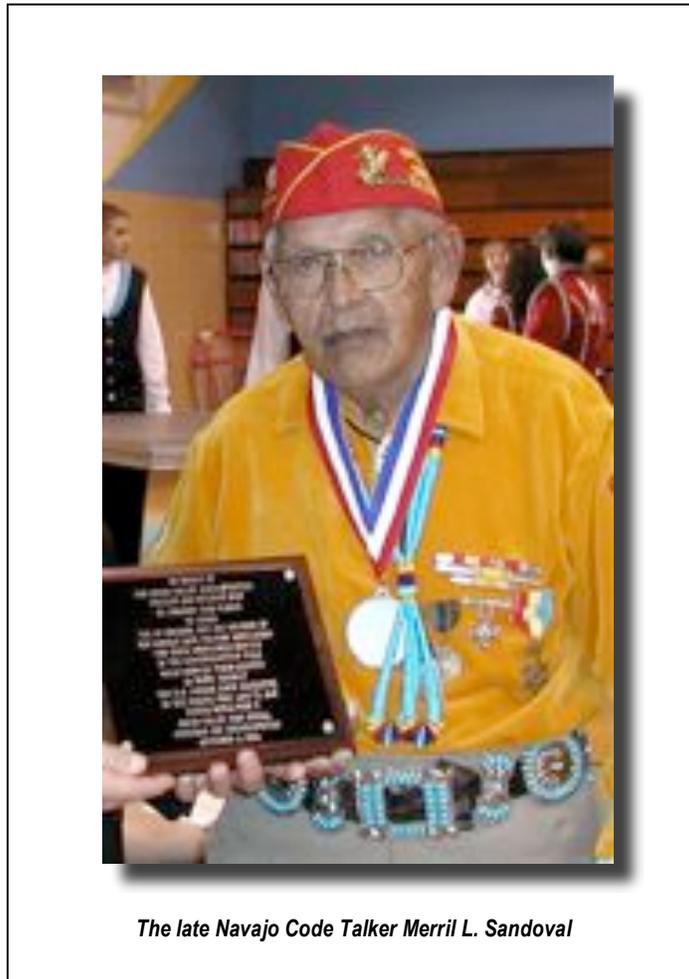
Mr. Sandoval died at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Phoenix after an illness. His family said he has been in declining health for the past year.

Mr. Sandoval was born April 18, 1925, at Nageezi, N.M., but lived in Tuba City, Ariz., for the past 44 years.

As a student, he attended Farmington Methodist Mission School where he learned to speak English. In 1943, he enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in Santa Fe, N.M. After boot camp in San Diego, Mr. Sandoval was transferred to Camp Pendleton to the Radio Communication School where he was trained as a Navajo Code Talker.

Mr. Sandoval served with the 2nd and 5th Marine Division in the Hawaiian Islands, Saipan, Iwo Jima, and the

occupation of Japan. He was discharged in March 1946 as a corporal.



The late Navajo Code Talker Merril L. Sandoval

On Feb. 19, 1945, Mr. Sandoval was sent with the Marine units who invaded Japanese-held Iwo Jima.

Mr. Sandoval's job was to stay behind the front line to translate reports from two-man Code Talker teams elsewhere on the island.

Mr. Sandoval then sent these messages back to military commanders based on Hawaii. He was also responsible for passing orders to the U.S. Marines on the front line.

“I was on guard duty the morning of January 19, 1945,” he was quoted as saying on his web site. “It must have been around 5 or 6 o'clock when I saw what looked like lightening over the top of this little island. Our ship was heading in that direction. It wasn't too long after that when our commanding officers ordered us to get ready to disembark. I soon found out the island was Iwo Jima”

“There was no question we'd fight,” he said of the Navajo soldiers of World War II. “We understood all about people taking land from us. That was what was happening over there.”

His daughter, Jeannie Sandoval of Espanola, N.M., said she traveled with her father when he was asked to speak across the country about his experience as a Navajo Code Talker.

“When he finished speaking he would receive a standing ovation,” she said from Tuba City. “It was heartfelt, genuine and real. But he always said his heroes were those who didn’t make it back.”

Following his honorable discharge, Mr. Sandoval completed his high school education at Sherman Institute in Riverside, Calif., and then went on to graduate from Albuquerque Indian School.

After High School, Mr. Sandoval learned to be a machinist at Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas. He began his career as a machinist with Bendix Aviation in Kansas City, Missouri.

In 1951, Mr. Sandoval married his wife, Lorraine Humetewa Shingoitewa Sandoval of Tuba City. He soon began to work for Garrett Air Research in Phoenix. Mr. Sandoval was a machinist for 15 years before returning to the Navajo Nation in 1963. He then joined the Navajo Tribal Police Force for three years.

He then became a legal advocate for D.N.A. Legal Services.

Mr. Sandoval retired from the D.N.A. Legal Services after 23 years but continued to practice as a private tribal advocate. He also served as interpreter for the tribal legal courts for another 16 years.

Mr. Sandoval was preceded in death by his son Gerald Sandoval, and his brothers Roger H. Sandoval and Franklin D. Sandoval, and sister Beulah Kelly.

He is survived by his wife Lorraine, his son Gary Sandoval, and his daughters Jeannie Sandoval, Sharon Iron and Maxine Sandoval.

He is also survived by his brothers, Samuel Sandoval and Bert Sandoval, and his sisters, Mabel Penn, Nellie Sandoval, and Betsy Sandoval. Mr. Sandoval’s brother, Samuel Sandoval, was also a Navajo Code Talker. Mr. Sandoval’s maternal clan is Zuni-Edgewater (*Naaste`ezheh Tabaaha*) and his paternal clan is Red Bottom People (*T’aschi’l Diné*).

Mr. Sandoval had 17 grandchildren, 22 great-grandchildren, and one great-great grandchild.

For more information, call Jeannie Sandoval at 505-490-1598 or Patrick Sandoval at 505-870-0270 or 928-502-2988.

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Mr. Sandoval's Silver Congressional Medal of Honor