



IN HONOR OF OUR FALLEN SOLDIERS ON MEMORIAL DAY 2009

Just weeks before Navajo leaders signed the Treaty of 1868 at Fort Sumner, N.M., the national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, General John Logan, officially proclaimed May 30 as Decoration Day through his General Order No. 11.

The May 5, 1868, order called for springtime flowers to be placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery that had been established four years earlier. By 1882, Decoration Day became known as Memorial Day, and, by 1890, Memorial Day was recognized by all of the northern states although the southern states honored their dead on separate days until after World War I when the holiday changed from honoring just those who died fighting in the Civil War to honoring all Americans who died fighting in any war.

On May 2, 2000, President Clinton asked that we observe a National Moment of Remembrance at 3 p.m. on each Memorial Day, saying "Memorial Day represents one day of national awareness and reverence, honoring those Americans who died while defending our Nation and its values. While we should honor these heroes every day for the profound contribution they have made to securing our Nation's freedom, we should honor them especially on Memorial Day."

Since World War I, without hesitation many of our Navajo men and women left their hogans, their families, and their homeland to join the Marines, Army, Navy, Air Force and other branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. Many of them gave up their lives to ensure that we continue to live free – to exercise our freedoms of religion, of speech, and to go about our daily lives knowing that we are protected.

Beneath the sacred Window Rock at the Navajo Nation Veterans Memorial Park are 147 names of our soldiers who were killed-in-action and are missing-in-action. Those who have come home, come home as heroes. Among our veterans are former Prisoners of War, many women veterans, and the honored Navajo Code Talkers. As everyone knows, just last Wednesday we lost another Code Talker, Mr. John Brown, Jr., who passed away at home at age 87. He was among the first 29 Navajo Code Talkers, and endured the horrific battles of Tarawa, Saipan, Tinian and Guadalcanal. He will be laid to rest on Tuesday, fittingly the day after Memorial Day.

Throughout this week, I encourage each of us to remember a veteran in our life who may have passed on, to personally thank a veteran, whether we know them or not, and to honor them through appropriate ceremonies. Let us pray for their well being. And let us not forget those who are in health care facilities, care centers or those who may be homeless.

Let us also remember the many young Navajo men and women who today serve in Afghanistan, Iraq and other parts of the world. We owe these brave and courageous warriors a debt of gratitude that we can never fully repay.

DR. JOE SHIRLEY, JR., PRESIDENT
THE NAVAJO NATION