



IN HONOR OF OUR FALLEN SOLDIERS ON MEMORIAL DAY 2010

This Memorial Day, we must remember that our Country is at war.

As we think of those who died defending the United States and the Navajo Nation, we learned the sad news of the 1,000th U.S. military fatality in Afghanistan. A young U.S. Marine from Camp Pendleton, Cpl. Jacob C. Leicht, 24, of College Station, Texas, was killed Friday by a roadside bomb in Helmand Province while on foot patrol.

Since the start of the war in Iraq on March 20, 2003, 4,400 soldiers and Marines have also been killed. Among them are 11 Navajos.

Since last Memorial Day, we've lost two soldiers, one Marine, and six Navajo Code Talkers.

On Aug. 17, 2009, U.S. Army Sergeant Troy Orion Tom, 21, of Beclabito, N.M., was killed in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan.

On Oct. 7, 2009, U.S. Army Sergeant First Class Kenneth W. Westbrook, 41, of Shiprock, N.M., died of wounds sustained a month earlier in the Ganjigal Valley, Afghanistan.

On Feb. 12, 2010, U.S. Marine Private First Class Alejandro Jay Yazzie, 23, of Rock Point, Ariz., was killed in Afghanistan, leaving behind a young wife and unborn child.

On April 18, 2009, we lost Navajo Code Talker George Chavez, Sr., 85, of Farmington, N.M.

On May 20, 2009, we lost Navajo Code Talker John Brown, Jr., 87, of Crystal, N.M., who was one of the original 29 Code Talkers.

On May 26, 2009, we lost Navajo Code Talker Thomas Claw, 87, of Parker, Ariz.

On June 1, 2009, we lost Navajo Code Talker Willie K. Begay, 88, of Pinon, Ariz.

On June 22, 2009, we lost Navajo Code Talker Matthew Martin, 84, of Crownpoint, N.M.

On Oct. 14, 2009, we lost Navajo Code Talker Willard Varnell Oliver, 88, of Lukachukai, Ariz.

Beneath the sacred Window Rock at the Navajo Nation Veterans Memorial Park are 147 names of our soldiers who were killed in action or 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.

We come to remember our honored fallen through General Order No. 11 which was issued on May 5, 1868, by the national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic, General John Logan. He officially proclaimed May 30 as Decoration Day and called for flowers to be placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery that had been established in 1864.

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.”

On Saturday, President Obama asked that we continue this tradition.

“On this day, we honor not just those who’ve worn this country’s uniform, but the men and women who’ve died in its service; who’ve laid down their lives in defense of their fellow citizens; who’ve given their last full measure of devotion to protect the United States of America. . . . I ask you to hold all our fallen heroes in your hearts, and if you can, to lay a flower where they have come to rest.”

Since World War I, without hesitation countless 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 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 in the knowledge that we are protected.

Throughout this week, I encourage each of us to remember a veteran in our life who may have passed on – a father, brother, uncle or grandfather – and to personally thank a veteran, whether you 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 or needing our care.

Let us remember the many brave 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