



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
 December 13, 2013

Diné Bizaad Yee Atah Naayéé' Yik'eh Deesdlíí'

The Navajo Language assisted the military forces to defeat the enemy



Top, the late Navajo Code Talker Wilfred Billie stands proudly before American flags. Billie returned to Japan to pay his respects to his fallen comrades and traveled the globe extensively, including a visit to South Korea. Above, the communications group Billie was attached to during his service in the Battle of Saipan. Billie passed at the age on 90 on Dec. 12, 2013. (Courtesy photos)

The Navajo Nation mourns the loss of the late Navajo Code Talker Wilfred E. Billey.

Billey left us on Dec. 12, 2013. His funeral is scheduled for Dec. 21, at the First United Methodist Church in Farmington, N.M.

Billey was 90 years old

and lived in Farmington, N.M. His clans are Táchii'nii (Red Running Into the Water) and Tl'aashchi'i (Red Cheek People). His maternal grandfathers are Naasht'ézhí Dine'é (Zuni) and his paternal grandfathers are Hooghan lání (Many Hogans).

On Dec. 13, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly signed a

proclamation to have all flags on the Nation to be flown at half-mast in honor of Billey's passing, from Dec. 13 to 20.

"The Navajo Nation is greatly saddened by the loss of the late Wilfred E. Billey, who served in the U.S. Marine Corps," President Shelly said. "The Navajo Nation unites and offers prayers for his family and friends during this time of grief."

Billey's daughter, Barbara, said she was working on a biography of her father before his passing.

"My dad was an educator and assisted educating the Elderhostel, Inc. Road Scholar program from around the world. He really pushed for education, especially for scholarships for the children of Navajo Code Talkers," she said.

Billey also worked for the Navajo Methodist Mission School, Central Consolidated School District and Farmington municipal schools. He informed the youth and world about the role the Navajo Code Talkers played in the fight for freedom during World War II.

The following account is from Barbara Billey's conversations with her father on his memories of the war.

Born on Dec. 28, 1922, Wilfred E. Billey was raised by his grandparents and lived a simple life. They spent their summers in the Chuska Mountains above Sanostee, N.M., herding sheep and farming. The family lived in a

traditional forked stick hogan.

Billey attended Toadlena Boarding School and was taken to school on horseback by his grandfather. For junior high, he attended school at Shiprock. Eventually, he became friends with William Yazzie, who later changed his name to William Dean Wilson, one of the Original 29 Code Talkers.

In 1941, Billey was enrolled at Navajo Methodist Mission School in Farmington, a boarding school providing a strong Methodist background for young Navajos.

One day, the school superintendent informed students that the U.S. Marine Corps was looking for a few good men fluent in Navajo and English. He asked for volunteers and 11 students stepped forward, including Billey.

Of the 11 men, eight passed their physical examinations and were inducted into the Marine Corps. Billie's daughter said military records state he was drafted, but that was untrue because he volunteered for service.

The young recruits were sent to Camp Elliot, north of present-day Camp Pendleton, to undergo 13-weeks of basic training. They coalesced into USMC Platoon 297, the second all-Navajo platoon, comprised of 56 men.

The Navajos were trained as radiomen and Platoon 297 was shipped out to New Calendonía, aboard the USS

Mount Vernon. Howard Billiman, a member of the original 29 Code Talkers, accompanied the men and served as code instructor.

While aboard the ship, the platoon was split up and radiomen were sent to various Marine divisions in the Pacific. Billey was sent to the 2nd Marine Division at Wellington, New Zealand with eight others, including David Tsosie.

The men shipped out with their new division and began practicing island hopping. This involved the landing of amphibious landing tractors, or amtracs, on island beaches in preparation for the battles to come.

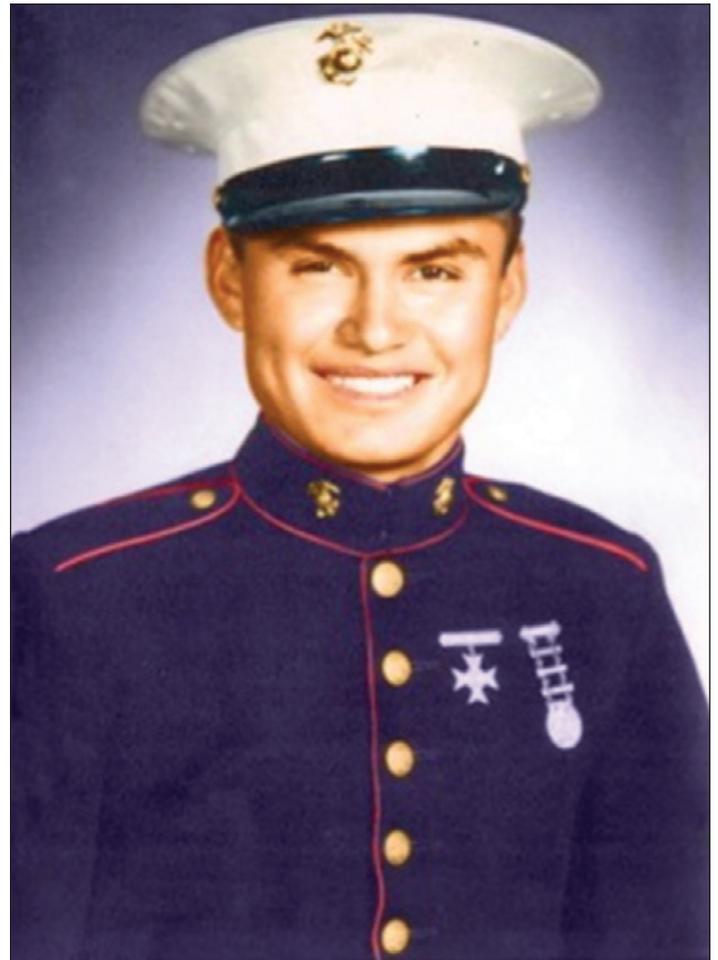
On Nov. 19, 1943, around 10 p.m., the Marines were fed steaks and ice cream. Several

Saipan in the Mariana Islands. Billey and the rest of his communications group made it to the jungle and radioed U.S. ships to fire upon enemy locations.

The island was covered with caves and the Japanese hid inside them. Billey said many of the Japanese soldiers committed suicide in the face of defeat, either by gunshot or jumping off Suicide Cliff or Banzai Cliff.

During the Battle of Saipan, Billey communicated with Howard Billiman and called in artillery strikes upon the enemy. Billey fought again on the island of Okinawa, where ships were under constant attack by Kamikaze pilots.

Billey's daughter said her father would recall these



Corporal Wilfred Billey proudly served as a Navajo Code Talker in the United States Marine Corps. He fought in the Battle of Tarawa, the Battle of Saipan, Tinian and Okinawa in the Pacific Theater during World War II. He also served in the Marine occupation of Nagasaki after Japan surrendered. (Courtesy photo)

“I’m not a hero. The heroes are the ones we left behind.”

hours later, on Nov. 20, at 4:30 a.m., the men invaded the island of Tarawa, the site of one of the bloodiest battles in the Pacific Theater.

The Marines needed to secure the airport on the island. The Japanese were prepared for the invasion and fired at amtrac engines, resulting in countless explosions and loss of life.

Billey would later say he never saw so many dead men. The 6th Marine Division landed on the southeast portion of the island to flank the enemy and met up with the men of the 2nd Marine Division. As the island was secured, Billey would see and talk to his friend Billiman, who had arrived from the Battle of Guadalcanal.

On June 15, 1944, the 2nd Marine Division invaded

experiences during World War II with humility and said, “I’m not a hero. The heroes are the ones we left behind.”

Billey leaves behind six children, eight grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. His legacy as a Navajo Code Talker will live on for the generations to come.

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