

OR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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NAVAJO NATION PRESIDENT JOE SHIRLEY, JR., HONORS RETURNING U.S. MARINE CORPS
CPL. BRIAN YAZZIE AFTER TWO TOURS IN IRAQ

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. - Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., cut short a day-long tour of the San Juan River Water Settlement tour with U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman in order to attend a noon homecoming dinner here Saturday for returning U.S. Marine.

Cpl. Brian D. Yazzie of Kayenta, a member of the 1st FSG 7th Engineering Support Battalion and stationed at Camp Pendleton, Calif., was recently honorably discharged after four years in the Marine Corps which included two tours of duty in Iraq.

"I wouldn't have missed your dinner for the world," President Shirley told Cpl. Yazzie, whom he had just met outside the Diné Restaurant. "It's an honor to be invited to a dinner for a soldier who has returned from the front lines of war."

Cpl. Yazzie said that four years earlier he was living in Tucson, attended two semesters of college, but felt like he was not doing much with his life. He visited the Marine recruiter in 2001 and requested immediate deployment to boot camp.

"For two months my parents didn't know where I went," he told about 40 relatives and friends. "I never thought when I joined that I'd get into a combat zone."

But he was among the first wave of Marines to enter Iraq when the war began, he said. "When I joined the Marine Corps, I didn't know how demanding it was," he said. "All I told myself was I wasn't going to give up. I'm very proud of who I represent - the Diné. I do care about people. That's why I'm in this uniform."

President Shirley said he greatly appreciates the safe return of all Navajo soldiers. Many others from other wars often tell him no one gave them a dinner, offered them a thank you or showed them any appreciation at all.

"They were unappreciated," he said. "Nobody even said thank you. But soldiers are a special breed of professional people because they are willing to give their lives so another may live."

He said when a Navajo soldier goes to war, they are not merely protecting the principles and freedoms everyone enjoys as Americans. "They're also protecting our way of life as Diné people," he said. "We have freedom because of our soldiers, and freedom isn't free. We should be thankful for more than just one day a year on Veterans Day. Brian, I want you to know I appreciate you."

The President then presented Cpl. Yazzie with a Navajo Nation Plaque of Honor which states:

"For having defended Freedom and the Diné Way of Life as a Soldier in the country of Iraq. Your Courage, Service, and Commitment on the

Frontlines of war have been Exemplary. We have been vigilant in prayer for your safe return. May the Creator always be with you and your family. Welcome Home, Soldier! Presented November 12, 2005 Joe Shirley, Jr., President, The Navajo Nation."

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CONTACT

George Hardeen, Communications Director
Office of the President and Vice President
The Navajo Nation
Ofc: 928-871-7917
Cell: 928-309-8532
georgehardeen@opvp.org