



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Navajo Code Talker Samuel Smith, Sr. passes after bout with pneumonia



*Navajo Code Talker Samuel "Jesse" Smith, Sr. passed on April 14, 2014. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps 4th Marine Division and survived the Battles of Roi Namur, Saipan, Tinian and Iwo Jima. (Courtesy photo)*

the Navajo language to preserve the American way of life.

"Dine' bizaad, the Navajo language, is not only beautiful, but powerful. The strength of our language and culture can never be disputed because of the heroics of our Navajo Code Talkers," Vice President Jim said.

### The Day of Infamy

On Dec. 7, 1941, three young Navajo men heard about the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor and immediately decided to defend their country.

Samuel Smith, Samuel Billison and Virgil Kirk were

birthdate made him a year older.

At age 16, he reported for boot camp after completing the school year. Smith had hopes of becoming a pilot because that was where he could inflict the most damage.

He completed boot camp and passed the aptitude tests for flight school. Eventually, the Marine Corps found out that Smith didn't have a high school diploma and that he just finished his junior year before leaving for boot camp.

Before leaving, Smith's maternal grandfather, his cheii, took him to táchééh, the

Instructors were looking for recruits with substantial intelligence and the ability to retain a satisfactory amount of information. The men selected were sent to U.S. Marine Corps Communications School to learn every form of communication available.

From there, they were sent to Navajo Code Talker School to learn the code.

### Fighting Fourth

Smith was 17-years-old when he was assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division. They would later be nicknamed the Fighting Fourth for their battles in the Marshal Islands.

Assigned to Headquarters Company, Smith was tasked with transmitting messages for Gen. Clifton B. Cates, commander of the Marine landings in Saipan and Tinian.

Gen. Cates would later be promoted to Commandant of the Marine Corps. Smith would be sent to Hawaii to assist with refreshing the code, which needed new terms added to the more than 600 code words. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division would set sail for an undisclosed island in the Pacific, Iwo Jima.

Samuel "Jesse" Smith, Sr., Navajo Code Talker and member of the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Division survived the Battles of Roi Namur, Saipan, Tinian and Iwo Jima.

The Navajo Nation salutes your service for preserving our way of life. Ahe'hee.

The Navajo Nation has lost another beloved Navajo Code Talker.

On April 14, 2014, Samuel "Jesse" Smith, Sr. lost his fight against pneumonia at Presbyterian Hospital in Albuquerque, according to his son Michael Smith.

"He caught pneumonia back in January and wasn't able to shake it," Smith said.

Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly said, "The Navajo Nation is saddened to hear that we lost another wonderful hero and role model to our people. He set a positive example for us to follow and we offer our prayers and condolences to his family."

President Shelly ordered Navajo Nation flags to be flown at half-staff beginning at sunrise on April 14, 2014 and ending at sunset on April 18.

Vice President Rex Lee Jim said the Navajo Code Talkers are true American heroes that must never be forgotten for their countless sacrifices and use of

## "ARE YOU NAVAJO? PICK UP YOUR SEA BAG AND COME WITH ME!"

students at Albuquerque Indian School when they heard the news. They wanted to get revenge on the Japanese.

Soon after, they decided to join the fiercest fighting unit in the world, the U.S. Marine Corps and headed straight to their local recruiter.

### Summer of 1943

Within two years, Smith was headed to boot camp with the Marine Corps. When he first enlisted, he was turned away because of his young age.

Before walking out of the recruiter's office, he turned around and said he made a mistake and wrote down the wrong date of birth. His corrected

traditional Navajo sweathouse, for a male puberty ceremony. His cheii also gave him a shield during this time for protection.

### Camp Elliott

The drill instructor's question was firm and direct: "Are you Navajo?"

"Yes, sir!" was Smith's response.

"Pick up your sea bag and come with me!" commanded the drill instructor.

There was no turning back as Smith was brought into a barracks full of American Indians. Each man was tested extensively to determine who was proficient in Navajo and English.

