



THE NAVAJO NATION

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Vice President Nez attends Birdsprings Memorial Day event



Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez paid respect and honored veterans killed in combat during the Birdsprings Chapter Memorial Day event. The day before, he honored the fallen warriors by dedicating his 50-kilometer ultra marathon at Los Alamos to the veterans lost in battle. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

BIRDSPRINGS, Ariz.— The Birdsprings Chapter honored their fallen warriors on Memorial Day. The daylong event brought in veterans from the surrounding communities of Leupp and Tolani Lake.

While many gathered for the event, the mood was not celebratory.

“I wouldn’t really call this a celebration. In a Memorial Day event, we honor all of our fallen soldiers: POW, MIA, KIA. That’s what this event is all about,” said Randolph David, commander of the Birdsprings Chapter Veterans Organization.

He said people seem to forget the purpose of Memorial Day, instead focusing their attention on cookouts and celebrating the start of summer.

“It’s about the men and

women who gave their lives for our freedom. You guys are very lucky and fortunate that we have men and women willing to give their lives for our freedom and our rights,” David said.

Those words set the tone for the event, as more than 100 people packed into the domed confines of the Birdsprings Chapter House on May 25. A wall on the south side of the facility featured photos of veterans killed in action. The community also had framed photos of veterans that served in the military.

Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez was in attendance and said he was proud to honor the fallen heroes that died in service to the U.S. Armed Forces.

He said veterans fought for

Navajo culture, for preservation of *Diné bizaad*, which was used to end the atrocities of World War II.

“Our prayers are our foundation. We pray for our people throughout the Navajo Nation, especially our military men and women,” Vice President Nez said. “That’s what makes our Navajo Nation so unique, we are a spiritual people.”

On May 24, Vice President Nez participated in the Jemez Mountain Trail Run in Los Alamos, N.M. in honor of veterans that died in combat.

The 50-kilometer ultra marathon was a distance of about 32 miles, beginning at an elevation of 7,000 feet and increasing to an elevation of 10,000 feet.

“I wanted to run for our veterans and those that lost their lives in the military. I dedicated that run to each and everyone of you throughout the Navajo Nation,” Vice President Nez said.

He said that participating in endurance sports like ultra marathons provides plenty of time to think. The incessant urge to quit is also always there, but prayer and perseverance overcome those doubts, he added.

“Sometimes, I feel like giving up and stopping, but I say to myself that our veterans push their bodies to the ultimate limit. If they can do it, I can do it. I ran 32 miles for (them) and it took me nine hours to finish,” Vice President Nez said.

He said President Russell

Begaye was in Washington, D.C. and that he sent a message of gratitude and respect to honor the fallen warriors on Memorial Day.

Navajo veterans are one of the four pillars of the administration and plans include appointing a veteran within the Office of the President and Vice President to work solely on veteran issues.

“We know that you need a veteran in our office. They know what you’ve been through and what you’re facing on a daily basis. We’re going to put a good person in there who knows the veteran issues,” Vice President Nez said.

Melvin Nez, adjunct for Post 112 of the American Legion in Leupp, praised the Birdsprings event in memory and honor of those who died in battle.

“It’s really humbling to experience where the chapter veterans organizations are taking the lead,” Nez said.

He noted that previously, it was the American Legion that coordinated events such as the

branches of service and died fighting in the battles of World War II, Korean Conflict, Vietnam War, and Desert Storm.

The Birdsprings church choir performed “Amazing Grace” in Navajo and English to honor the fallen veterans.

Families that brought the flags of loved ones who died in battle participated in the flag folding ceremony with the honor guard from Birdsprings and Tolani Lake.

The veterans unfolded the flags, shook them out, inspected them and refolded the flags before presenting them back to the families. Nez read the 13 folds of the American flag to the audience, detailing the significance behind each fold.

The flags were refolded for veterans killed in action from the local communities: Tony Kenneth Begay, John W. Redsteer, Murphy Tsosie, Joe K. Wagner, Fred Chee, Billy Thompson, Nathan Curtis and Robert Williams.

The American and Navajo

“We know that you need a veteran in our office. They know what you’ve been through and what you’re facing daily.”

Memorial Day recognition of veterans lost in battle.

He asked for two minutes of silence in honor of veterans in the area that lost their lives in service to the U.S. Armed Forces. He then read their names to the audience.

Alvin Begay, John C. Begay, Stephen K. Begay, Delfred B. Bitsuie, Joseph H. Curley, Ben Joe, Leon Jones, Riley Jones, David Kelly Sr., Michael Lee, Jack D. Nelson, John Redsteer, R. Riggs, Arliss Sloan, Yoland Tom Swift, Elwood Thompson, Virgil H. Todakoozie, Murphy Tsosie, Austin Williams, Lesley Williams and Alex Williams Sr. were all honored.

They were from different

flags were also refolded for Loren Whitehat Sr., a Navajo Police officer killed in the line of duty.

At the conclusion of the flag folding ceremony, the honor guard stepped outside the chapter house to perform a 21-gun salute for those who died in combat.

Other dignitaries in attendance included Sen. Carlyle Begay and Navajo County Supervisor Jesse Thompson.



Vice President Nez was well received by the residents of Birdsprings Chapter, many of which said it was the first time in a long time that a Navajo leader came to break bread with them and take time from their busy schedule to honor the fallen Navajo veterans. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Current and former veterans lined the southern wall of the chapter house to be honored by the audience. The people in attendance were invited to meet the veterans and shake hands with them to personally thank them for their service to their country. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Two groups of honor guard members unfolded the American flags of veterans killed in combat, shook them out, inspected them for tears or frays, and then refolded them before presenting the flag back to family members. Upon return to the families, they saluted the flag before executing an about face. (Photo by Rick Abasta)