

South Dakota National Guard

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Code talker exhibit instills pride among South Dakotans

By Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann
SDNG Public Affairs Office

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. – The South Dakota National Guard diversity council, in partnership with community organizations, held the third of four Oceti Sakowin (Oh-CHAY-tee Shaw-KOE-ween) Code Talker celebrations at Sioux Falls' Washington High School, Oct. 28.

The celebrations feature a traveling exhibit “Honoring Native Pride and Spirit – Yesterday, Today and Forever” that honors the 67 code talkers from South Dakota, their families and all veterans who served or are currently serving in the military.

The exhibit showcases the congressional medallions and tribal flags from the Cheyenne River, Crow Creek, Oglala, Rosebud, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, Standing Rock and Yankton tribes. Another medallion, honoring the Lower Brule Tribe's is currently in production and will be revealed at a later date.

“Our diversity council puts on programs or traveling exhibits like this one throughout the year to help provide inclusion and understanding of our different cultures among our service members in the South Dakota National Guard,” said 1st Lt. Carstin Jerzak, SDNG state equal employment manager. “We wanted to do this because it helps integrate the Native American culture into the military.”

The keynote speaker for the event, Brig. Gen. Matthew Jamison, assistant adjutant general for the South Dakota Air National Guard, spoke about the importance of the code talker's role.

“The United States first used Native American code talkers during World War I in October 1918 and it was kept classified until 1968,” said Jamison. “The use of native languages by code talkers was a fundamental tactic that saved countless American lives and helped win both world wars.”

Bonnie McGhee, daughter of Edmund St. John, a code talker of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, recalled the moment her father revealed to her when she was a senior in High School that he was a code talker.

He was recruited to be a code talker while sitting in his foxhole with another guy, McGhee said. A sergeant came over and pulled him out of the hole and asked him ‘What kind of language do you speak?’

A majority of the 400 Native Americans who served as code talkers were Navajos, said Jamison during his speech.

“Most people don’t realize there were other Native American tribes who utilized their native language,” said Jamison. “The movie Windtalkers released in 2002 focused on Navajo code talkers.”

Cheyenne Greger Hare, a junior in high school, from the Yankton Sioux Tribe, didn’t know until seeing the exhibit.

“I didn’t know there were other tribes who served as code talkers,” said Hare, “I thought it was going to be just about Navajo. I always had respect for the code talkers now I have more respect.”

Hare noticed the exhibit showcased three code talkers from her tribe.

“I am thankful for the code talkers,” said Hare. “It is encouraging to know my tribe has code talkers and now I know of more veterans I didn’t know before,” said Hare. “I have future plans of joining the Air Force. I am excited.”

The exhibit tour will conclude with a special celebration on November 11/Veterans Day at Crazy Horse Memorial, which will include a blast honoring all veterans.

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High resolution photos are available at www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard



151028-Z-CW157-001: Rosebud Sioux Tribe’s medallion is one of seven medallions’ showcased with the traveling exhibit “Honoring Native Pride and Spirit – Yesterday, Today and Forever” throughout the month of October and November in observance of Native American Heritage Month. The traveling exhibit “Honoring Native Pride and Spirit – Yesterday, Today and Forever” honors the 67 code talkers from South Dakota, their families and all veterans who served or are currently serving in the military. (U.S. Army National Guard by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)



151028-Z-CW157-002: U.S. Army Chief Warrant Officer 4 Bill White, South Dakota Army National Guard, explains the role of code talkers and how they changed history to Washington High School Junior ROTC students during the Oceti Sakowin Code Talker celebration, Oct. 28, 2015, at Washington High School, in Sioux Falls, S.D. The traveling exhibit “Honoring Native Pride and Spirit – Yesterday, Today and Forever” honors the 67 code talkers from South Dakota, their families and all veterans who served or are currently serving in the military. (U.S. Army National Guard by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)



151028-Z-CW157-003: U.S. Army veteran Dennis Rucker points out the Eagle Staff which signifies all branches of the military, the Yankton Sioux Tribal flag and the U.S. flag after the Oceti Sakowin Code Talker celebration, Oct. 28, 2015 at Washington High School in Sioux Falls, S.D. The traveling exhibit “Honoring Native Pride and Spirit – Yesterday, Today and Forever” honors the 67 code talkers from South Dakota, their families and all veterans who served or are currently serving in the military. (U.S. Army National Guard by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)



151028-Z-CW157-004: U.S. Air Force Brig. Gen. Matthew Jamison, assistant adjutant general for the South Dakota Air National Guard, speaks about how the code talkers changed history during the Oceti Sakowin Code Talker celebration, Oct. 28, 2015, at Washington High School in Sioux Falls, S.D. The traveling exhibit “Honoring Native Pride and Spirit – Yesterday, Today and Forever” honors the 67 code talkers from South Dakota, their families and all veterans who served or are currently serving in the military. (U.S. Army National Guard by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)



151028-Z-CW157-007: The traveling exhibit “Honoring Native Pride and Spirit – Yesterday, Today and Forever” is displayed at Washington High School in Sioux Falls, S.D., Oct 28, 2015. The traveling exhibit “Honoring Native Pride and Spirit – Yesterday, Today and Forever” honors the 67 code talkers from South Dakota, their families and all veterans who served or are currently serving in the military. (U.S. Army National Guard by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)

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