

# South Dakota National Guard

## Public Affairs Office

Phone: 605-737-6721 Email: [ng.sd.sdarng.list.pao@mail.mil](mailto:ng.sd.sdarng.list.pao@mail.mil)

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November 12, 2015

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

## **Celebration honoring SD code talkers concludes at Crazy Horse**

By 1st Lt. Chad Carlson  
SDNG Public Affairs Office

CUSTER, S.D. – “The use of Native American languages by code talkers was a remarkable tactic that saved countless American lives and helped win both World Wars,” Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, South Dakota National Guard’s adjutant general, told the hundreds attending the final of four Oceti Sakowin Code Talker celebrations at Crazy Horse Memorial, Nov. 11. “It is undisputed that the Native American code talkers had a truly significant impact on our history.”

Designed as a series of events held throughout South Dakota in observance with Native American Heritage Month, the culminating celebration on Veterans Day honored the 67 code talkers from South Dakota Sioux tribes.

The event featured a ceremonial Crazy Horse Memorial blast, guest speakers representing the SDNG and South Dakota’s Native American tribes and an exhibit displaying identification tags, tribal flags and congressional medals.

“The design of the exhibit was an easy decision to make,” said Lt. Col. John Weber, a member of the SDNG diversity council and emcee of the celebration. “The Code Talker Recognition Act of 2008 required the Secretary of the Treasury to strike congressional medals in recognition of the dedication and valor of Native American code talkers to the U.S. Armed Services during World War I and World War II. The idea was formulated to once again promote these tribal treasures of honor.”

Under the Act, unique gold medals were struck for each Native America tribe that had a member who served as a code talker. Silver duplicate medals were presented to the specific code talkers, their next of kin or other representatives.

The exhibit showcased the congressional medallions from the Cheyenne River, Crow Creek, Oglala, Rosebud, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, Standing Rock and Yankton tribes. The Lower Brule Sioux Tribe has been authorized a congressional medal which is currently in design.

“Today, we conduct the last of our code talker celebrations to pay a long overdue tribute to South Dakota’s Native American code talkers and their families for their unique and remarkable service to our great nation,” said Reisch, the keynote speaker. “Since the days of the Revolution, it has been the customary of Congress to award gold medals in honor of great acts and contributions and to commemorate significant historic events.”

Reisch emphasized that the issuance of congressional medals is reserved for only the highest level of recognition and appreciation of people, institutions or events.

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“For many years the role of the code talkers was kept classified,” Reisch said. “Until 1968, the very existence of code talkers was a military secret. After serving with distinction, code talkers did the honorable thing and kept their service a secret, even to family members and loved ones.”

One of many family members in attendance, Francis Whitebird, was there to honor his father, Noah Whitebird, a code talker from the Rosebud Sioux Tribe who served in the 9th Army Corps, 999 Signal Battalion.

“He did tell me that he was a code talker, but he used to just tell funny stories,” said Francis, “He didn’t say much about combat or anything like that.”

Francis, who comes from a long line of military service, beginning with two great grandfathers who fought in the Battle of Rosebud and the Battle of Little Bighorn said the recognition is a long time coming.

“They never talked about what they did,” said Francis. “They took an oath and they kept it.”

Richard Brown of Pine Ridge, told a few light-hearted stories his father, Garfield Brown, had shared with him from before telling the audience about the time his father’s unit came across a prisoner-of-war camp during World War II.

“It was a very emotional scene,” Richard said. “Soldiers were hugging them, crying, and thanking them that were now free. My dad, shared some water and food with one POW who would pass away in his arms.”

Garfield would tell his son, “It was then he knew why they were fighting,” Richard said. “He fought for family, country and freedom.”

Identification tags with the names of each of the 67 code talkers from South Dakota were blessed in a ceremony held by Jerome LeBeaux, medicine man from Pine Ridge, and then presented to their respective tribes by Reisch.

“The significant contribution of our South Dakota code talkers has gone unheralded for too long,” Reisch said. “It is absolutely fitting and proper that we finally acknowledge their accomplishments and celebrate their service to our state and nation. This nation has definitely benefitted, greatly from our Native American’s service and sacrifice.”

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High resolution photos are available at [www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard](http://www.flickr.com/photos/southdakotationalguard)



**151111-Z-FO377-006:** Francis Whitebird, along with his son, Brendan, a former sergeant in the U.S. Army, stand with a photo of Francis' father, Noah Whitebird Sr., at the Oceti Sakowin Code Talker celebration at Crazy Horse Memorial, Nov. 11, 2015. Noah Whitebird Sr. was one of the 67 code talkers from South Dakota, who were honored along with their families and all veterans who served or are currently serving in the military. (U.S. Army photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson/Released)



**151111-Z-FO377-014:** The South Dakota National Guard's diversity council held the final Oceti Sakowin Code Talker celebration at Crazy Horse Memorial, Nov. 11, 2015. The celebration featured an exhibit "Honoring Native Pride and Spirit – Yesterday, Today and Forever" honoring the 67 code talkers from South Dakota, their families and all veterans who served or are currently serving in the military. The exhibit showcased 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. (U.S. Army photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson/Released)



**151111-Z-FO377-013:** The South Dakota National Guard's diversity council held the final Oceti Sakowin Code Talker celebration at Crazy Horse Memorial, Nov. 11, 2015. The celebration featured an exhibit "Honoring Native Pride and Spirit – Yesterday, Today and Forever" honoring the 67 code talkers from South Dakota, their families and all veterans who served or are currently serving in the military. The exhibit showcased 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. (U.S. Army photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson/Released)



**151111-Z-FO377-017:** The South Dakota National Guard's diversity council held the final Oceti Sakowin Code Talker celebration at Crazy Horse Memorial, Nov. 11, 2015. The celebration featured an exhibit "Honoring Native Pride and Spirit – Yesterday, Today and Forever" honoring the 67 code talkers from South Dakota, their families and all veterans who served or are currently serving in the military. The exhibit showcased 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. (U.S. Army photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson/Released)



**151111-Z-FO377-080:** U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, adjutant general of the South Dakota National Guard, presents identification tags for the 67 code talkers from South Dakota to representatives from their respective tribes at the Oceti Sakowin Code Talker celebration at Crazy Horse Memorial, Nov. 11, 2015. The celebration, put on by the SDNG's diversity council, in partnership with community organizations, featured an exhibit "Honoring Native Pride and Spirit – Yesterday, Today and Forever" honoring code talkers from South Dakota, their families and all veterans who served or are currently serving in the military. (U.S. Army photo by 1st Lt. Chad Carlson/Released)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** contact Maj. Anthony Deiss at (605) 737-6721 or cell (605) 431-8753, or e-mail [ng.sd.sdarnng.list.pao@mail.mil](mailto:ng.sd.sdarnng.list.pao@mail.mil)