

Grand Ronde Honor Guard and Dayton High School Honor Veterans

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that was followed by a morning of breakout sessions where Veterans had an opportunity to tell students, faculty, and guests about their experiences in battle.

In one of the breakout sessions, the students listened intently, as Sandoval talked about his experiences as a Navajo Code Talker in World War II.

"I learned and spoke the Navajo language at a very young age," said Sandoval. "At age five I was enrolled in a boarding school that was sponsored by United Methodist Church. On the first day of school I was told that I was no longer allowed to speak a word of Navajo. I was told that there would be consequences to pay if I was caught. Every once in a while we would sneak away and speak Navajo. I was lucky; I never got caught."

In 1942, after he graduated from high school, Sandoval began working. He was told that he could not register as a U.S. citizen because he was Indian, but he was allowed to sign up with the service.

When the word went out that the Marine Corps were looking for young Navajo boys between the ages of 17-30, with a 10th grade education, and were fluent speakers of the Navaho and English languages, Sandoval qualified.

"They gathered all the boys on the Navajo reservation. There were 413 Navajos that were trained as code talkers during the war. About 135 were actually in the thick of the battle, but there were only about 60 Code Talkers that survived the war," he said.

"In 1864, the Navajo Tribe was driven away from their homes by the U.S. Military. They forced to walk about 400 miles. They were taken captive and forced to southeast New Mexico. The military forces burned their crops, their homes ... What was I doing in the military? There were 500 other Tribes, why use the Navajo language? I had a lot of questions about this, but it had a positive outcome.

The Japanese military were deciphering every military message the U.S. troops were sending. The codes they sent were changed, but still the Japanese de-coded their messages. They knew where the troops were; they knew where the

next invasion would be. They were ready for us," Sandoval said.

The Navajo had an unwritten language, and the Code was different from the everyday language. They took Navajo words and developed them into military terminology for ships, airplanes, equipment, bombs, and personnel. They included everything they needed to develop the Code and make a dictionary.

The Navajo didn't have a word for bomb in their language, so they had to think back in their every day lives to determine what could represent a bomb. They chose an egg, so egg (A-Ye-Shi) became a bomb. A hand grenade looked similar to a potato, so they used potato (Ni-Ma-Si) to represent a hand grenade. They used turtle (Chay-Da-Gahi) to represent a tank because it was slow like a turtle.

They developed a system to include punctuation and form sentences. For example, if they wanted to ask a question they ended the sentence with the word ear (Ah-Jah) because an ear looked similar to a question mark.

"That's the way we wrote the Code, and that code has never been broken. When we left the war, we were told to never talk about it with anybody, but in 1968 it was de-classified. That's why I can talk about it today.

In 1982, President Ronald Regan declared that August 14th would become the national Navajo Code



Alex Mathews, (l) member of Pawnee Nation, World War II POW and survivor of the Bataan Death March and Samuel Sandoval, World War II Navajo Code Talker spoke about their experiences during service.

from Brooklyn.

We would go out at night and he would always be running into trees and bushes and would stumble over roots. I had a hard time with him. I had more problems with him then I did the Japanese. Anyway, he was my body guard, but I didn't know that. He carried a side arm, a .45

were for re-enlistment of four more years; it's a good thing I can read. I handed them the pen and paper and said you can keep them; I don't want them," Sandoval said.

At the same time Laf Keaton, a Paratrooper, Ranger, and Airborne Soldier of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, talked of his experiences in the many battles he encountered. He recalled an experience in a Japanese prison camp, and spoke about a little girl who learned the hard way about displeasing the Japanese.

After lunch, the students held an "Assembly of Honor" for the Veterans. The ceremony began with students, faculty, and guests giving a standing ovation as a procession of Veterans entered the auditorium to take their seats. This was followed by the Grand Ronde Honor Guard posting the colors and Coyote Creek drumming them in.

"It was mind-boggling to be a part of that ceremony. There was just so much experience and years of military life there. And for them to come back and form a group to attend a meeting of this sort without holding grudges, shows that there is peace even after this many years, said La-Bonte." "We get invited to a lot of events. You think you've done



On Sunday, March 18, Dee Odem, (in white) Grand Ronde Honor Guard, gives a medallion of honor to Alex Mathews, World War II POW and survivor of Bataan Death March. Approximately 125 Veterans from World War II, Vietnam, and the Korean War visited the Grand Ronde Veterans Memorial where each were presented a medallion of honor.

talkers day. That was the first recognition we ever received.

In combat I carried my rifle, my field radio, and a field telephone. I had a white man always tailing me; he was always around. I got used to him and it didn't bother me. It was later in the war that a friend of mine asked me if I knew who that guy was. I said yes, he's

caliber. That pistol was for me in the event that I got captured. Lucky for me, I'm still here.

When the war was over they said we could go home, but they called me in. They said they wanted to talk to me. They gave me a piece of paper and a pen and said I had to sign the papers to go home. I asked if I could read them. ... The papers