

There are over 150,000 Native American military veterans

MEMORIAL DAY
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of our veterans,” she said.

Leno also asked the crowd to observe a moment of silence for late Tribal Elder Steve Bobb Sr., long-time event organizer and Vietnam War-era Marine Corps veteran who walked on in August 2022. He also designed the memorial, which features a man and woman dressed in traditional Native clothing standing side by side while reaching for the sky.

Tribal members Anthony Quenelle and Jordan Mercier drummed and sang a memorial song.

The Grand Ronde Honor Guard posted the colors and Tribal Council member Michael Cherry provided an invocation after welcoming people to the event.

“I wanted to make sure to be here to honor all of our veterans and everyone who has served,” Cherry said. “We know that our ancestors are with us today. ... It’s very special and I just want to say thank you for everyone being here today and taking the time to be in community.”

Other Tribal Council members in attendance were Vice Chair Chris Mercier, Denise Harvey, Brenda Tuomi, Secretary Michael Langley and Lisa Leno. Past Tribal Council chair and Marine Corps veteran Reyn Leno also attended.

After invocation, Tribal member JC Rogers sang the national anthem as she has for the past six events. After she sang, Grand Ronde and Veterans Royalty members performed “The Lord’s Prayer.”

The keynote speakers were Oregon Department of Veterans’ Affairs Tribal Veteran Coordinator Jon R. Taylor and Army veteran Albert Moody.

“I am honored to serve and advocate for Oregon’s Tribal members who served this country, and returned home to their families and communities,” Taylor said. “On Memorial Day, it is a time to remember those who did not return home.



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal members Anthony Quenelle, left, and Jordan Mercier perform a memorial song during the Tribe’s annual Memorial Day observance held at the West Valley Veterans Memorial on the Tribal campus on Monday, May 29.

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We stop to honor and pay respects to those who gave their lives to the service of this country, in the service of freedom, in the service of a more peaceful world. We remember their sacrifice, their valor and their grace. For while we stand amid these beautiful granite monuments, we must never forget that each of the names forever etched represents a precious life: A son, daughter, father, mother, spouse, brother, sister and a friend.”

Taylor also acknowledged that Native Americans have participated with distinction in the U.S. military for more than 200 years.

“Currently, there are over 150,000 Native American military veterans and it is well-recognized that historically, Native Americans have the highest record of service compared to any other group,” Taylor said. “The service of these men and women has been exemplified by strength, honor



Tribal Elder and Marine Corps veteran Alton Butler carries in the POW/MIA flag at the start of the Tribe’s annual Memorial Day observance held at the West Valley Veterans Memorial on the Tribal campus on Monday, May 29.

and wisdom. These are the qualities we honor today, but we must never forget the true cost of war. The price is paid with the lives of our heroes.”

Moody talked about the tradition of military service in his family. His father had a 32-year career in the Army. Moody served 22 years in the Army, but his brother never made it home from Vietnam.

“I ended up graduating from R.A. Long High School in Longview, Washington, and joined the Army at 17,” he said. “I wanted to be a paratrooper and a medic.”

After completing his training, Moody was shipped off to Vietnam, where he spent six months as a combat medic. Afterward, he transferred to military assistance command, where he worked with a medical team doing public relations work by providing health care for local villagers.

Moody was about to retire when the first Gulf War started in January 1991. He continued his service, retiring later that year.

“So, immediately after leaving the Army, I joined Doctors Without Borders,” he said. “I’m sure most of you have heard of them. We traveled all over the world providing medical support for certain individuals and certain countries. I went to Bosnia two times, to Columbia for earth-

quake relief and to provide medical care. ... That was my career, but it didn’t stop there for me. I continue to volunteer. Veterans have this great responsibility to tell our stories, not just to each other, but to others.”

After Moody and Taylor spoke, Molly Leno read aloud the names being added to the memorial. The four pillars at the West Valley Veterans Memorial feature the names of Tribal and community members from Grand Ronde, Willamina and Sheridan who served in the four major branches of the military – Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps.

The addition of eight names this year increased the number of those honored on all four pillars to 2,382. Two additional pillars are in progress because the ones containing names of Army and Navy veterans are reaching capacity.

Other names added included Grand Ronde Tribal member Jerald W. Tyler on the Navy pillar, Allan Halverson, Benjamin Lee Rogers and Ronney Lee Rogers on the Army pillar and Billy J. Rogers on the Marine Corps pillar.

This was the 20th Memorial Day celebration held at the West Valley Veterans Memorial, which was dedicated in May 2003, because the 2020 event was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. ■

Tribal Veterans Service Office

2023 Claim Appointment Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Thursday
By scheduled appointment only	By scheduled appointment only	Walk-in claim appointments

To schedule a claim appointment:
call (503) 879-1484 or email
CTGRtribalVSO@GrandRonde.Org

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