

**AND THEN THERE WERE THREE**  
**ONE OF THE LAST LIVING NAVAJO CODE TALKERS DIES AT 98**

**465**



Samuel Sandoval and other Navajo Nation members used their tribal language to forge a complex code that Japan **never cracked**.

**HISTORYNET**

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Growing up in rural New Mexico, Samuel Sandoval was discouraged by Christian educators from speaking his native Navajo, or Diné. But when he joined the Marines during World War II, it became his secret weapon: Sandoval, along with hundreds of other men from Navajo Nation, used the traditional spoken language to transmit coded military messages in the Pacific Theater, **befuddling Japanese cryptologists and ultimately helping to win the war.**

**Sandoval, one of the last surviving Navajo Code Talkers, died on Friday, July 29, at the age of 98,** according to the Associated Press. Three living members from the group remain: Peter MacDonald, John Kinsel Sr. and Thomas H. Begay.

Born in 1922, Sandoval recalled he “didn’t know what I was getting into” — or how his heritage would shape his role— while enlisting on March 26, 1943. Only after completing boot camp in San Diego and being sent to Camp Pendleton at Oceanside, California, did he meet other Navajo recruits and learn they were to develop their own top-secret code, complete with military terms and expressions that didn’t yet exist. “It was quite a task,” he recalled in a recorded speech at Oregon’s Milwaukie High School in late 2005.

Each letter of the English alphabet was initially assigned a Navajo code word, Sandoval told the Arizona Republic in 2019. “We said the Japanese could easily decipher those 26, let’s add on to it,” he said. “So we did.” In addition to assigning one to three code words to each letter, the group — fluent in both English and Navajo — came up with analogous terms for patrol planes (“ga-gih,” a.k.a “crow”) and other combat expressions. They ultimately coined and memorized hundreds of code words to use in the field.

Shipped off to the South Pacific island of New Caledonia in September 1943, Sandoval joined the Marines on Guadalcanal following initial operations, Bougainville, Guam, Peleliu and Okinawa. He and other Code Talkers tirelessly communicated troop movements, tactics, orders and other information via phone and radio .

Sandoval received numerous recognitions and awards as a veteran, including a Navy Unit Commendation Ribbon, a Combat Action Ribbon, a China Service Medal, a World War II Victory Medal, a Navy Occupation Service Medal with Asia Clasp and an Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with a silver star, according to the Navajo Nation. But for years he remained silent about his service, not even informing his wife he was a Code Talker until a month or so after their marriage.

The Navajo Code was declassified in 1968, enabling Sandoval to eventually share his story in a book and documentary film.

Public recognition of the Code Talkers increased in 1982, when President Ronald Reagan proclaimed August 14 Navajo Code Talkers Day, and the 2002 film "Windtalkers" solidified their fame. ("All I can say is it's a movie — a Nicholas Cage movie," Sandoval joked to his Milwaukee High School audience.)

Sandoval was on Okinawa in 1945 when "word came over radio in the Navajo Code, and I received it, that the Japanese had surrendered," he recalled to students in 2005. He and his fellow Code Talkers celebrated, but their return to America was still far off: just a few days later they boarded a ship to China for occupation duty. A few months later, in December 1945, Sandoval recalled, "the commanding officer called us before we left China. And he said 'Son, here's a piece of paper. Here's my pen. Right at the top of the line.'"

Sandoval looked at the form and realized it was to sign up for another four years of service.

"No, officer, you can have it back," he said. "I'm going home."

Memorial details for Sandoval are pending, and a granddaughter has launched a crowdfunding campaign to cover expenses.

When the war ended and the Code Talkers returned to their homes, mostly reservations, they were prohibited, for security reasons, to discuss what they did during the war. This Navajo Code was declassified in 1968 **23 years after the end of the WW2**, and remains, to this day, the **only code during any war that was NEVER broken by the enemy.**

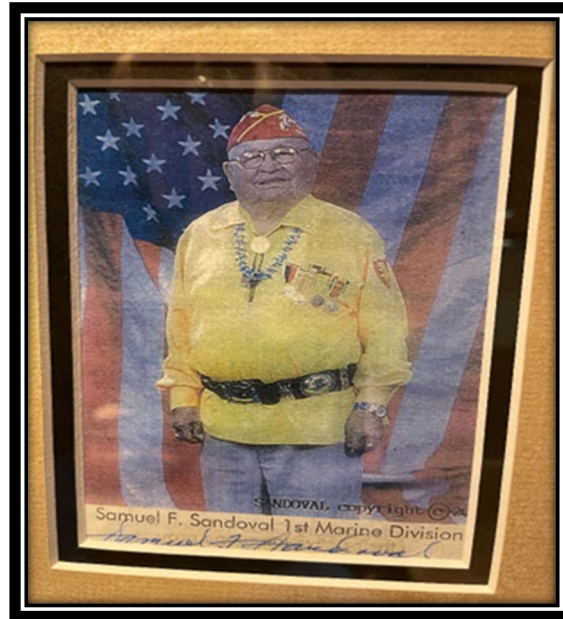
#### **PERSONAL NOTE**

**It was my privilege and honor to meet and listen to Samuel S. Sandoval, a true Navajo Code Talker, during my visit, with my church mission, to the Navajo Indian Reservation in Shiprock, New Mexico in October of 2009, truly an experience I will never forget. I regret the fact that it took so long for the Code Talkers to be recognized for their invaluable contribution to the Allies victory in the Pacific.**

In April of 2000, **55 years after the end of WW2**, Senator Jeff Bingham (NM) introduced a Bill, co-sponsored by Senator Daniel Inouye (Hawaii), to recognize the Navajo Code Talkers with the highest civilian medal the United States can award – The Congressional Silver Medal.

Representative Tom Udall co-sponsored the bill in the House and in December 2002, **57 years after the end of WW2**, President Clinton signed the bill into law.

Before, during and even after the war the Code Talkers were not treated well by our own Government and the other soldiers and many Americans here at home. After all, they were Indians and second class citizens. Even Congress said so !!!



**CODETALKER SAMUEL SANDOVAL**

I was fortunate enough to obtain his autograph (on picture shown on previous page) and lucky enough to be in a picture (below) while he was signing it.



**SEE PICTURES WITH NOTE HANDING ON MY WALL**

There is much more detailed information concerning the Code Talkers Establishment, War Contributions And History in Article # 84 which is available in Book # 2. It is not available online.