



Representative Ann Kirkpatrick
Arizona's First Congressional District

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Rep. Kirkpatrick Honors Life, Service of Navajo Code Talker Willard V. Oliver on House Floor

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Representative Ann Kirkpatrick paid her respects to Navajo Code Talker Willard V. Oliver today, honoring his life and service to our country in a speech on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives. Oliver, a Code Talker from Lukachukai, passed away October 14 at the age of 88.

Her remarks as prepared for delivery are included below:

“Mister Speaker, I rise to mourn the loss of Willard V. Oliver, one of the last surviving Navajo Code Talkers.

“The Code Talkers saved the lives of countless Americans in World War Two and the Korean War by using Diné to communicate sensitive military intelligence without risk of interception by the enemy. Mr. Oliver spent more than two years fighting his way across the South Pacific as one of those esteemed Marines.

“Willard Oliver passed away on October 14, after a life marked by heroic service to his people and to his country.

“In speaking of his service, Mr. Oliver said ‘I am proud to be a Code Talker, and I know we counted for something great.’

“Today, I am proud to honor him and all Navajo Code Talkers for their bravery and sacrifice on behalf of this country. His and their contributions to our great Nation must never be forgotten.”

BACKGROUND:

The Navajo Code Talkers were a critical part of America's war effort in the Pacific Theater from 1942 to 1945 and later in Korea. The code used the Diné language to allow our military to communicate without risk of enemy forces intercepting our secrets. The lack of knowledge of the language by non-Navajo made the code virtually indecipherable to the Japanese, North Koreans and Chinese.

Despite their successes and their bravery at battles from Guadalcanal to Okinawa, the story of the Navajo Code Talkers remained largely unknown for many years. The code was not declassified until 1968, and their contributions were not recognized for decades afterwards.

Finally, on July 26, 2001, President George W. Bush presented the Congressional Gold Medal to the 29 original Code Talkers in a ceremony at the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. More than 200 other Code Talkers were later honored with the Congressional Silver Medal in a November, 2001 ceremony in Window Rock.

Rep. Kirkpatrick represents much of Navajo Nation, and she has been pushing to further recognize the sacrifices of the Code Talkers in working with the Navajo Code Talkers Association to establish a Navajo Code Talkers Museum and Veterans Center on Diné lands.

Willard Oliver was the fifth Code Talker to pass away in less than six months.

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