

## Code Talker to deliver Veterans Day message

### Navajo who served in WWII to speak at local ceremony

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David Patterson, who turned his native Navajo tongue into a secret weapon during World War II, will be the guest speaker Thursday at Vancouver's Veterans Day observance.

Patterson was one of about 400 Navajos who joined the U.S. Marines and were used as communication specialists in the war in the Pacific.

Relaying orders and information in Navajo, they were the basis of a code the Japanese military was unable to break.

#### **If you go**

**Who:** Guest speaker will be David Patterson, a World War II Navajo Code Talker.

**What:** Vancouver Veterans Day ceremony

**When:** 11 a.m. Thursday.

**Where:** Post cemetery north of Fourth Plain Boulevard.

**Cost:** Free.

Patterson, who turns 88 on Veterans Day, was a member of the 4th Marine Division.

Thursday's observance begins at 11 a.m. at the Vancouver Barracks Post Cemetery, on the north side of Fourth Plain Boulevard, across from the Center for Community Health.

Patterson, who lives in Shiprock, N.M., was a high-school student when he joined the Marines. In 1943, Patterson was chosen for Code Talker training.

The Code Talkers took part in every Marine assault, from Guadalcanal in 1942 to Okinawa in 1945.

It wasn't just that the Navajos spoke an unfamiliar language that Japanese intelligence officers couldn't understand. There were several aspects to the code. Some Navajo words were used to

represent military terms — “hummingbird” meant fighter plane, “tortoise” meant tank. The system also used an alphabet code based on Navajo words.

The code remained a secret until the government declassified the program in 1968.

Larry Smith, Vancouver city councilor and retired U.S. Army colonel, will host the Veterans Day event. Smith is one of the chairmen of the Community Military Appreciation Committee, which is presenting the program.

Vancouver Mayor Tim Leavitt also will speak.

Following the observance, military historian Jeff Davis will lead a tour of the cemetery and discuss the contributions of the soldiers buried there.

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