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Navajo Code Talkers Lecture and Presentation by Zonnie Gorman on THURSDAY

*Largest, most comprehensive exhibition on the WWII Navajo
Code Talkers on display now at the New Mexico State Fair*

Albuquerque, NM – Renowned lecturer Zonnie Gorman, daughter of Code Talker Carl N. Gorman and Navajo Code Talkers expert, will give a lecture and presentation on the Navajo Code Talkers of World War II on Thursday, September 24 at 4:30 p.m. at the African American Performing Arts Center (AAPAC) on the State Fairgrounds. The subject of Ms. Gorman's presentation is "Our Fathers, Our Grandfather, Our Heroes," the premier Navajo Code Talkers exhibition in the word, which is on display throughout the New Mexico State Fair at AAPAC.

The exhibition is co-sponsored and supported by the New Mexico Tourism Department and the Indian Tourism Program.

Gorman will trace the story of the famed United States Marine Corps Navajo Code Talkers, beginning with the original pilot group of 29 volunteers, who in 1942 developed and tested the original Navajo code. The lecture will include discussion of the exhibit's more than 30 historic photos, facsimiles of original military documents and the now de-classified code itself.

Thursday's lecture is a must for all those interested in American and WWII history.

In addition to the exhibit and the lecture, the full-length documentary, "Navajo Code Talkers" produced by the Arts & Entertainment/History Channel, will be running throughout open gallery hours for additional enrichment to the exhibition.

The *Southwest Inaugural Tour 2007- 2010* of "Our Fathers, Our Grandfathers, Our Heroes: The Navajo Code Talker of World War II" has been made possible with grants from the New Mexico Humanities Council; PNM, and APS corporations; Arizona Humanities Council, and the Navajo Generating Station/Salt River Project, AZ.

This traveling exhibition is produced and circulated by the Circle of Light Navajo Educational Project, Gallup, New Mexico (505) 726-8030 or travelexhibits@yahoo.com.

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About the WWII Navajo Code Talker Program

Phillip Johnston, the son of Protestant missionaries to the Navajos and a Navajo speaker himself, is credited with the idea of a Navajo code, based on his familiarity with the language and the knowledge that Native languages had been used successfully in WWI. Johnston presented his idea to communications officer Major James E. Jones at Camp Elliott, near San Diego, CA. Despite much skepticism, Maj. Jones recommended a demonstration for Major General Clayton B. Vogel, commander of the Amphibious Corps, Pacific Fleet. Impressed, Maj. Gen. Vogel sent a letter to the commandant of the United States Marine Corp recommending the enlistment of 200 Navajos for this assignment. Permission was granted for a pilot program of only thirty.

Though more than 30 were recruited, twenty-nine were sworn in. Each had volunteered – none were drafted. In May of 1942, the 29 Navajo recruits reported for basic training at the Marine Recruit Depot in San Diego. After basic training in standard military procedure and weapons use, they moved to Camp Elliott's Fleet Marine Force Training Center where they received eight weeks of communications training, which included Morse code and radio operations. This is the group that developed and tested the original Navajo code of 211 words. The recruits were tested and re-tested in their knowledge of the code and military terminology.

One mistranslated word could potentially mean disaster for U.S. forces. Proven fast and accurate, twenty-seven were sent to Guadalcanal to use the code in actual combat. Two remained at Camp Pendleton to train new recruits. Johnston, who had himself volunteered for the pilot program, remained and eventually took over the administrative aspects of the training program.

With the code proven completely baffling to the Japanese, the Marine Corps recruited hundreds more to utilize the code in the transmission of critical communications throughout the Pacific theater. By the end of the war, some 420 Navajo men had served as code talkers. The ingenuity of the Navajo code, and the valor of the Navajo Marines, greatly helped in the effort to win the war in the Pacific.

Though the use of the Navajo language by the U.S. Marines has received the most recognition, several Native languages were used during WWII by the U.S. forces – Assiniboine, Cherokee, Chippewa/Oneida, Choctaw, Comanche, Hopi, Kiowa, Menominee, Muscogee/Creek and Seminole, Pawnee, Sac and Fox/Meskwaki, and Sioux. Native languages worked well to stymie the enemies of the United States during both world wars for two good reasons:

- 1) They were completely unknown, unstudied, and unwritten languages
- 2) Their syntax, tonal qualities and dialects make them completely undecipherable to the untrained ear.

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