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News Release
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College and Community Relations
619-644-7840 619-644-7090 (Fax) FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – NOV. 10, 2006

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NAVAJO 'CODE TALKER' JOE MORRIS TO SHARE HIS STORY
AT GROSSMONT COLLEGE NOVEMBER 17

El Cajon - Intelligence is everything in warfare, collecting information about the enemy, and denying the enemy information about your own forces and plans.

U.S. military officers in World War II hit upon a novel, and native, way, to let American forces communicate in a code no enemy could break. They asked Native Americans to speak, in their own language, broadcasting in the clear, because with the unique difficulty of their language, there was no need for encryption.

They were the famous “Navajo Code Talkers.” Now, one of those code talkers is appearing on the Grossmont College campus Nov. 17, at an evening event sponsored by Phi Theta Kappa, the campus honor society, in conjunction with the Grossmont College Foundation, the Cross Cultural Program and the World Arts and Culture Committee.

Joe Morris, one of only a handful of the World War II code talkers surviving, will appear and make a presentation in the Student Center. Doors will open at 6:30 p.m. The event is free and open to the public. Morris' presentation will be videotaped and kept in the library for students' future reference. The evening will also feature music by “The Four Winds”.

From photographs, Joe Morris, Sr. seems like a quiet, 80-year-old man, proud yet gentle. But pictures cannot tell everything. Born in 1926 on a Navajo reservation of Indian Wells, AZ, Morris grew up herding sheep with his grandfather. They existed without running water, formal education, and electricity. However, at the age of 12, his family sent him to a government boarding school to learn English; a school that would later close and be turned into a Japanese internment camp subsequent to the attack of Pearl Harbor. Barely 17, without a complete education and no job, Morris decided to lie about his age to obtain a military draft card.

Obtaining a draft card would enable Morris to get a better paying job as a miner for 75 cents an hour, a whole 25 cents more per hour than other Navajos. But as the war grew, the Marines called Morris to serve. After a battery of tests, Morris voluntarily joined the Marines in 1944. Fearing for his safe return, Morris' family asked a tribal medicine man to bless their son. After boot camp, Morris was transferred to Camp Pendleton in San Diego County to participate in a secret training program in the development and utilization of the Navajo language as a combat code against the Japanese.

The Navajo Code Talkers memorized more than 500 phrases, using up to three Navajo words to represent each English letter. To protect the code, no writing was allowed. The code was so intricate that even untrained Navajos could not break it. Morris served two years as a Code Talker, in Guadalcanal, Guam, Saipan, Okinawa, and Tinstao, China, which he then safely returned home an unsung hero. Morris attributes his safe return to the blessing of the medicine man. In 1992, these heroes were finally recognized. It has been said that without the efforts of the more than 400 Navajo Code Talkers, the war effort would have been severely jeopardized.

Today, when not spending time with his family and at Navajo gatherings, Morris travels the country sharing his amazing story.

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