

50 YEARS AGO

# Another ceremony honors slain soldier

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SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

For the second time in less than a month, the military had a special ceremony at Fort Wingate to honor a Navajo soldier who died in the Vietnam War.

The Navajo Times carried the story on its front page as tribal leaders and representatives of the military honored Army Spec. 4 Patrick Skeet on Oct. 18 by bestowing posthumously the Silver Star and the Purple Heart for actions the previous February that led to his death on the battlefield.

Skeet had been a rifleman with Company C, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry when he went into battle on Feb. 23 and died later of injuries he suffered on that day.

The ceremony was held at the Fort Wingate Army Depot with tribal representatives on hand as well as members of Skeet's family.

Army officials at the event said on Feb. 23 Skeet's unit came under heavy fire from a large enemy force near a community called Huo in the Republic of Vietnam.

"He exposed himself to hostile fire in order to move through an open area so that he could rout the enemy fortifications out of action," said Col. Gordon T. Fearson, commanding officer of the depot.

"Using a recoilless rifle, he man-

district had a policy prohibiting the enrollment if any student whose parents were unemployed or were receiving welfare benefits.

Superior Court Judge J. Thomas Brooks said in his ruling that school officials on numerous occasions said their sole reason for not allowing the three students to enroll in classes there was because their parents were receiving welfare.

In his editorial that week in the Navajo Times, the newspaper's publisher, Dick Hardwick, said that a new era was approaching with the opening of the FedMart in Window Rock on Nov. 1.

For the first time, the Navajo people, he said, would be able to get food and other items at the same or lower prices than was being offered in border communities and they would no longer be dependent on having to go to Gallup to do their weekly shopping.

This could be a major disaster for Gallup businesses, he said, since a recent survey indicated that Gallup businesses were dependent on Navajo shoppers for 70 percent of their business.

He pointed out that more than 11,000 Navajos lived within the market area of the new store and they had a purchasing power of more than \$32 million.

He also pointed out that the success of FedMart would lead to

aged to destroy the enemy fortification and was mortally wounded by sniper fire," he added.

A plaque was presented to his parents that not only included the Silver Star and the Purple Heart but also the numerous other awards Skeet earned during his military career.

These included the Combat Infantry Badge, the Vietnam Campaign Ribbon, the Republic of Vietnam Service Medal and the marksmanship medals for his proficiency with his weapons.

This also was a week that the Navajo Tribe won a major victory in securing the rights of Navajo children to attend public schools in Arizona.

Earlier that year, three Navajo school children from the Leupp area were denied admission to the elementary public school there because they were on welfare.

The parents of the three students, Amy and Lena Monroe and Lorena Begay, filed suit in state court arguing that this was discriminatory. The Superior Court out of Flagstaff this week agreed with them and ordered the school district to enroll the students "if adequate facilities are available."

If the school did not have the facilities available, the district superintendent was ordered to find a school nearby that they could attend.

A spokesman for the Leupp Elementary School said the school district was in the process of determining if there was room in the first and second grades to accommodate the three students. If not, the three students would be enrolled at the Jefferson Elementary School just east of Flagstaff.

During the court proceedings, it was learned that the Leupp school

similar stores being set up in major reservation communities and this would lead to an economy and families would no longer need to go to border towns to shop.

Tribal officials were also predicting that within a decade, the reservation economy would start seeing a major portion of the income generated by jobs on the reservation being spent on the reservation, resulting in even more jobs being created.

And while there was a fear by many business owners in Gallup that this may occur and their businesses would suffer, that never really happened.

FedMart and later the opening of several Basha's supermarkets on the reservation did affect the supermarkets in Gallup but the Gallup Chamber of Commerce would later say that shopping overall by Navajos living on the reservation would increase annually throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Part of the reason for this was the lack of entertainment on the reservation and many Navajo families would come in on weekends to see movies or go to night spots that featured country and western bands.

The ability to purchase alcohol in border communities was also seen as a major reason for many reservation families continued to come to Gallup on weekends to do their shopping.

Another reason for many families to come to Gallup, according to chamber officials, was because of water. Many Navajo communities still did not have access to groundwater and families had to come to Gallup to fill up their water tanks to provide enough water for bathing and preparation of food throughout the week.