

HONOURING

Aboriginal Veterans



Aboriginal people have a long history of participating in the defence of Canada. The Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois, fought on the side of the British during the American Revolution and again during the War of 1812. Shawnee Chief Tecumseh, the brilliant military strategist whose tactics and bravery helped push back the American invasion, was killed in the Battle of the Thames on October 5, 1813.

Aboriginal participation in Canada's war efforts was proportionately higher than that of any other group of people in Canada. One in three able-bodied Aboriginal men enlisted in the First World War. All the men of the Chippewas of Nawash (on Georgian Bay) enlisted in the First World War. And every man from the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan (Golden Lake), with the exception of three, signed up for service in the First World War.



Photo above. In Germany, in April 1945, a group from the Lake Superior Regiment display the enemy flag they had captured.



Photo above. Edith Anderson left her job as an elementary school nurse to join the U.S. Medical Corps in 1917. Overseas, she tended sick and wounded soldiers in an American military hospital in France. (Helen Moses)

About the Cover

During the First and Second World Wars, First Nations in Canada witnessed the departure of many of their young members. Here an Aboriginal Chief in traditional dress blesses a new recruit who is about to leave her reserve after enlisting in 1942, during the Second World War. (DND) / National Archives of Canada (NAC) / PA - 129070)



Photo above. Brigadier Oliver Milton Martin in 1943. The First and Second World War veteran wore many career hats in his lifetime, including those of magistrate and school principal. (Nina Burnham)

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More than 7,000 status Indians fought in the two world wars. Some estimate that the number would be closer to 12,000 if the non-status Indians were included. There were some attempts to create all Indian battalions. The 114th Battalion, for example, consisted of Six Nations, Akwesasne and Kahnawake soldiers.

Most Native people served in the infantry, partly because that was where the most manpower was needed, but also due to entrance restrictions of the Royal Canadian Air Force. Many were snipers and scouts, and the Government of Canada often received letters from the front praising the work of Aboriginal people in these roles.

When our war veterans are honoured on November 11th, let us pay tribute to the Aboriginal volunteers who defended Canada.

For more information:
Veterans Affairs
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Photo above. Corporal Huron Brant of Ontario's Bay of Quinte Band was decorated with the Military Medal in Italy in 1943. One year later, he was shot and killed during an attack near Rimini. Brant was one of more than 200 Aboriginal Canadians who gave their lives in the war. (Capt. Frank Royal / DND / NAC / PA130065)