

# Indigenous Veterans in Canada





**Why might someone fight  
for a country that has  
treated them poorly and  
unfairly?**





to join the fight for **freedom**



# Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:**

- Understand the contributions of Indigenous Peoples in Canada's wars
- Recognise the challenges and discrimination faced by Indigenous veterans
- Explore how Canada has responded and how those responses have affected Indigenous veterans
- Think critically about identity, community, and remembrance
- Consider how this history shapes identity, memory, and reconciliation in Canada

01

# Indigenous Participation in the Wars



WWI, WWII and the Korean War

# World War I

(1914 - 1918)



# On the Front Lines



- **Over 4,000 Status First Nations soldiers served**
  - ~1/3 of First Nations people in Canada aged 18 to 45 years
  - Thousands more Inuit, Métis, and non-Status First Nations also enlisted, but weren't officially recognised as Indigenous
- **About 35% of eligible Status First Nations men enlisted**
  - Similar to the rate of non-Indigenous men (higher in some communities)
  - In some communities, Elders discouraged young people from enlisting
- **Key roles:**
  - Snipers
  - Scouts
  - Front-line infantry
  - In support units: railway troops, tunneling companies and forestry
- **More than 50 Indigenous soldiers were awarded for bravery and heroism**
- **At least 300 lost their lives and many more died shortly after returning home**



# On the Home Front

## Indigenous Communities

showed strong support by:

- **Generous contributions** to charitable and patriotic causes
  - Donated almost \$45,000 from band funds alone
- **Supporting** the British Empire and national war effort
- **Increasing farming** on reserve land and joining war-related jobs

Despite this,

## The Canadian Government:

- Implemented the “**Greater Production Effort**”
  - Use of “idle Indian land” for farming
- Expropriated over 313,000 acres of reserve land
- **Forced** bands to lease reserve lands without their consent
  - Usually to non-Indigenous farmers for “proper” use or to establish Greater Production farms
  - Against the Indian Act
- **Amended the Indian Act** to allow land expropriation without consent



# The Women

- Indigenous women mainly supported war efforts on the homefront
  - Knitting bandages and clothes for soldiers
  - Fundraising
  - Nursing
- Did this alongside raising children and filling in male roles
- Could not take advantage of the advancement of women's rights which occurred during the war
  - Obtaining traditionally masculine jobs
  - Voting



## Edith Monture

- ★ Mohawk WWI Veteran
- ★ One of few Indigenous women who served overseas
- ★ 1<sup>st</sup> Indigenous woman to become a registered nurse in Canada
- ★ 1<sup>st</sup> female Status Indian and registered band member to gain the right to vote in a Canadian federal election



# World War II

(1939-1945)



# On the Front Lines



- **~3 000 - 4 500 First Nations soldiers enlisted**
  - Thousands more Métis, Inuit, and non-Status First Nation soldiers served without official recognition (like WWI)
- **At least 17 Indigenous soldiers were awarded for bravery and heroism**
- **At least 200 lost their lives**
- **The highest rank held by an Indigenous soldier up to that point was achieved**
  - “Brigadier” by Oliver Milton Martin
- **Key Roles:**
  - Snipers
  - Scouts
  - Code talker
    - New role in this war
    - Translated secret messages into Cree to keep them hidden from enemies, then back into English for the intended recipients.





## On the Home Front

- Communities donated large amounts of money
  - Over \$23 000 were recorded
- Participated in drives to collect scrap metal, rubber, and bones
- Conducted public and ceremonial expressions of support and loyalty
- Worked in **war industries and production** in unprecedented numbers
- Had access to more work opportunities with higher pay
  - Due to labour shortages
- Many families were doing financially better than they ever had before
- Some Indigenous communities protested **conscription**
  - **Reasons:**
    - Against verbal treaties
    - Unfair for them to assume the same responsibilities as enfranchised people when they were legally treated as 'wards' or 'minors.'

# The Women



- Some First Nations and Métis women also enlisted with the women's auxiliary services of the Army
  - 72 Status First Nations women
  - **Roles:**
    - Clerical
    - First aid
    - Mechanical
    - Training





# Korean War

(1950-1953)



## KOREAN WAR



- Several hundred Indigenous People served
- Many came back after serving in WWII
  - Expanded on their previous duties in new ways



### Tommy Prince

- ★ An Ojibwa from Manitoba
- ★ Served in **WW2**, and served **2 tours in Korea**
  - For his Korean tours, he was awarded the Canadian Korea Medal and the United Nations Service Medal (Korea)
- ★ Served with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in Korea
- ★ Led many **"snatch patrols"**

02

## **Barriers to Enlistment**



## Barriers to Enlistment



- The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) required volunteers be “**of pure European descent and of the white race.**”
- Many First Nation leaders argued that it was **unjust** to compel people to defend rights that they were not getting
- Few could meet strict medical and demanding education standards
  - Due to inadequate healthcare and schooling
- Many Indigenous men were unfamiliar with both French and English
- Military restrictions conflicted with some Indigenous traditions (Ex. cutting hair)

**03**

## **Treatment after Service**





## Non-Indigenous Veterans

✓ Access to the **full benefits of the Veterans' Land Act**

✓ Pensions, grants, necessary services and programs in accessible locations

✓ Granted "free" land

✓ Returned to jobs

## Indigenous Peoples & Veterans

✗ Many faced enfranchisement (loss of status) due to the Indian Act

✗ **Denied benefits** under the Indian Act

✗ **Land was stolen and given away**  
• Soldiers Settlement Act of 1917 & 1919

✗ Applied for the same grant as non-Indigenous veterans → given **certificates** to use their stolen land

✗ Struggled to re-establish themselves in civilian life

✗ Government programs and care were very difficult to access

✗ Jobs taken away and given to the returning non-Indigenous veterans

✗ Children forced into **residential schools, day schools and industrial schools** → stripped of their identity

✗ Racism & Marginalization

✗ Many traditional ceremonial practices (ex. Sun Dances) became prohibited

**04**

## **Efforts to recognize contributions**



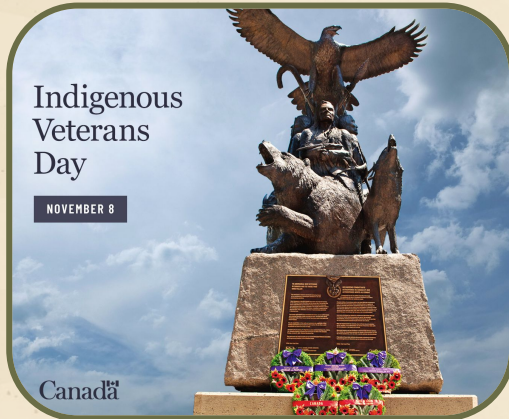
## Recognition



- Canadians acknowledged Indigenous participation during WWII
  - Did not happen during WWI
- Led to **revisions of the *Indian Act*** in 1951
  - Bans on ceremonies such as the Sun Dance removed
  - Indigenous women allowed to participate in Band council elections
  - **BUT:**
    - Gave provinces jurisdiction of Indigenous child welfare → Sixties Scoop
    - \*\*Voting rights were not granted at the federal level until 1960
- Indigenous veterans were largely forgotten until they organized and campaigned (1970s - 2000s).
  - **2001:** Consensus report accepted by both First Nations veterans' groups and the federal government.
  - **2003:** Public apology issued + compensation offered to First Nations veterans.
- **Métis veterans' grievances remain unaddressed.**



# Current Day



**National Indigenous  
Veterans' Day**



**National Aboriginal  
Veterans' Monument**



**Names of Royal Canadian  
Navy War Ships: HMCS  
Iroquois, Cayuga, Huron, etc.**

***Why might someone fight for a country that has treated them poorly and unfairly?***



**Income**

Attraction of a regular wage

**Solidarity**

Friends and family had enlisted

**Adventure**

To satisfy their want for adventure

**Travel**

To explore the world

**Patriotism**

Wanted to support Canada

**Allegiance**

To honour the past relationship between Indigenous peoples and the British Crown during the War of 1812





# Your Task

Use the provided articles to complete the worksheet



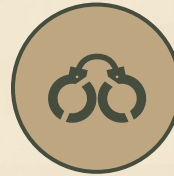
## Article 1

Tommy Prince



## Article 2

Indigenous Veterans



## Article 3

Tommy Prince





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