

Canada's Indigenous Soldiers

At the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of November Canadians are asked to pause, reflect in silence and remember our war veterans. Who are these brave men and women who were willing to leave home and fight for their country? Records show that they came from different cultures, occupations and regions of Canada.

One special group of soldiers I would like to remember this year are our Indigenous veterans. These are First Nations, Metis and Inuit people of Canada who served in past wars helping to fight for peace and our freedom. It was not always easy for these brave men and women to even enlist in the military. Many lived in isolated communities far from towns or cities where they had to travel to in order to sign up to fight. Cultural differences and learning a new language were also problems that they had to try to overcome. These challenges did not seem to stop their desire to serve as several thousand fought in the First and Second World War as well as the Korean War.

Many Indigenous men had valuable skills that the army needed. Because of their traditional way of life they spent a lot of time hunting and fishing. As a result they were excellent trackers, skilled marksmen and had the patience to wait for their prey. They used these skills on the battlefield fighting the enemy and became respected by their comrades.

There are a number of Indigenous war heroes. One of the best was Francis "Peggy" Pegahmagabow, an Anishinaabe from the Parry Island reserve in Ontario. He soon got the reputation of being an excellent sniper and scout who had the courage to take part in dangerous operations even behind enemy lines. For his dedicated service he received a lot of praise and several medals which are now on display at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

We must continue to honour and never forget these courageous Indigenous soldiers and war veterans. They are a big part of our History.