

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL VETERANS DAY



November 8, 2020

The Federal Government established National Aboriginal Veterans Day on November 8, 1994 to honor the thousands of First Nation, Inuit and Metis veterans who were not recognized in Remembrance Day activities. It is now celebrated in many communities across Canada.

Over 12,000 Indigenous people are estimated to have volunteered in all three wars, including 7,000 First Nations members and approximately 300 died during these conflicts. In 1995 the first wreaths to honour Indigenous Veterans were laid at the National War monument.

First Nations were exempt from conscription because they were not considered citizens of Canada (they were also unable to vote), but many volunteered along with Metis, Inuit and non-Status Indians despite the challenges they faced, including traveling long distances from remote communities to enlist, learning a new language (English), and coping with racism against them. They did not have the right to obtain other benefits available to non-Aboriginal Veterans due to Indian Act restrictions.

Indigenous people were not allowed to join the Canadian Air Force until 1942 and the Canadian Navy until 1943, as you had to be of "pure European descent". Both men and women enlisted, serving as soldiers, nurses and in other roles. Many served with distinction, winning medals for bravery in action.

In 2003 First Nations veterans and survivors were identified as eligible for up to \$20,000 in compensation. In 2009 the Canadian Government finally recognized the service of Metis Veterans with a monument on Juno Beach in France.

Then in 2019, 74 years after the end of the war, surviving Metis Veterans were given \$20,000 in compensation for their service.

Today Indigenous people continue to serve in Canada's Armed Forces.

