

veterans

Natives remember war

By Sue Bailey
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OHSWEKEN - As an impressive color guard stopped traffic on Chiefswood Road Sunday, flags waved and tears were shed in remembrance of fallen war heroes.

But a declining number of veterans made co-ordinating the Six Nations Remembrance Day service difficult, organizers said.

"Somehow they have to encourage others to get involved," said master of ceremonies Bob Johnson, referring to members of the Six Nations Veterans Association. Current membership is down to about 20 — including volunteers — and available help is hard to find, he said.

Olive Moses, secretary of the Association, suggested this year's ceremony could be a "swan song."

Johnson, a former U.S. Marine and a decorated Vietnam veteran, disagreed.

"I don't think it'll go by the boards. It's part of the community."

About 250 people, including veterans and volunteers from 10 military units, commemorated the sacrifices of natives who fought in the First World War, the Second World War, and in the Korean, Vietnam and Per-

sian Gulf conflicts. Out-of-town participants came from as far away as Rochester, N.Y. and West Virginia.

"We will not forget them," said Six Nations councillor Barb Curley. "We also remember those young men and women who serve this very day as peacekeepers."

Johnson estimated about 25 Six Nations residents are currently serving in peacekeeping missions overseas.

After prayers, hymns and a gun salute, a long line of people waited to lay wreaths for their loved ones at the war memorial in Veterans Park.

The Six Nations service is held before traditional ceremonies on Nov. 11 so there is less competition for participants, Johnson said.

Military service always generates a lot of interest in the Six Nations community, he added.

"It seems to be part of the embedded family make-up. It's a tradition, and it's a good one. It'll keep the faith of people remembering. They take it quite seriously and are proud to participate."

Many natives take advantage of the chance to serve either in Canada or the U.S., he explained.

Henry Solomon, of the native community in Muncey, Ont., near

London, shared a different view. The heavily decorated former soldier spoke before the parade marched from Six Nations community centre on Fourth Line to the park.

Solomon, 75, joined the Canadian army in 1939 as the Second World War began, when "everyone was thinking about going in." He was shot fighting in Italy in 1944, but recovered fully.

Solomon said he has no regrets, but would "never" sign up if he had it to do over again.

"I was young and foolish. Travel? Forget it. And romantic? There was nothing romantic about it at all."

He said many of those who signed up back then craved experience. But far fewer native young people are now willing to get involved in the armed forces

"for political reasons," Solomon added.

Scott Miller, an Ohsweken resident who stopped to admire the parade as it passed, said views on native military participation differ widely.

"I think it's great.

"They were fighting for us. (and) I respect them for what they did."

Miller, 37, said he would have fought in Vietnam if he'd been old enough.

"I have several friends who went.

"I just think it's something you have to do sometimes."

Marwood White, 22, said he joined the U.S. Marine Corps at age 19 because "every young man should be in the military for a time."