



The National Aboriginal Veterans War Monument

INTRODUCTION

On November the 11th, Remembrance Day, we honour the sacrifices made by the nearly two million Canadian men and women who served their country in time of war. Included in this number are thousands of Native people who joined the armed forces and fought in foreign lands. Canada's first inhabitants responded quickly and in impressive numbers during the First World War, the Second World War and the Korean War. Their sacrifices and achievements were inspiring. This book is dedicated to the hundreds of Aboriginal Canadians who gave their lives while fighting for peace and freedom.

During the First World War, at least 4,000 Indian men volunteered to join the Allied forces in European battlefields. More than 3,000 Canadian Indians served during the Second World War, and it is estimated that several hundred Natives volunteered to help the United Nations defend South Korea during the Korean War.

Each time, the strength of the Native response was unexpected, for the wars seemed to have little to do with the everyday lives of the nation's first peoples, particularly of those living on Indian reserves. The battlefields were in foreign lands, thousands of kilometres away. In the First and Second World Wars, the roots of conflict were primarily embedded in European civilizations, and the war in Korea was likewise far removed from life on the reserve. Newspapers published countless articles on Native enlistment and, later, on the wartime experiences of Native soldiers.

In rallying with the rest of Canada, Aboriginal Canadians faced distinct challenges. At the outbreak of the First World War, a considerable number of Natives lived in remote communities and spoke neither English nor French. For many, joining a Canadian battalion marked their first exposure to the dress, terminology and unique customs of British military tradition.

Canada's Native soldiers met these challenges and others, as demonstrated by the number of decorations for bravery they were awarded. Battalion and regimental histories offer many examples of Native courage and achievements. On November the 11th — and always — we should remember that more than 500 Natives gave their lives during these three wars, defending values that were meaningful to all Canadians.

In producing this publication, Veterans Affairs Canada hopes that Canadians, particularly those who are learning about Canadian history in the classroom, will gain a better understanding of the contribution of Aboriginal veterans to this nation's