



*The Indian volunteers from Skeetchewen. Joseph Drouin (back row, far left) later became chief of the Missinippi Band and served volunteers to serve in the Second World War as well as several Louis Riel (front row, right of the Mackay Lake Band, Elsie Johnson)*

unrecorded. It is safe to say that more than 4,000 Natives enlisted.

The Canadian Government, headed by Prime Minister Robert Borden, had not expected that so many Aboriginal people would volunteer. At first, it had hoped to discourage Native enlistment and initially adopted a policy of not allowing Indians to serve overseas. The policy stemmed from a belief that the enemy considered Natives to be "savage", and a fear that this stereotyped view would result in the inhumane treatment of any Aboriginal people who were taken prisoner.<sup>10</sup> However, the policy was not strictly enforced and was cancelled in late 1915 because of the large number of enlistment applications from Indians, as well as the Allies' pressing need for more troops.

Support from Native communities for the Allied war effort was by no means unanimous. For example, some band councils refused to help the Allied war effort unless Great Britain acknowledged their bands' status as independent nations. (Such recognition would not be granted.)

Following the Canadian government's introduction of conscription — compulsory military service — in August 1917, many Indian leaders insisted that Indians should be excluded. In the past, during the negotiation of Indian treaties, some Western chiefs had requested and received assurances from the British government that Indians would not have to fight for Great Britain if it entered into a war.<sup>11</sup> The government was reminded of these promises many times and, in January 1918, exempted Indians from combatant duties through an Order-in-Council.

On a voluntary basis, however, Native enthusiasm for the war effort was evident across Canada. Some reserves were nearly depleted of young men. For example, only three men of the Algonquian of Golden Lake Band who were fit and who were of age to serve remained on their reserve.<sup>12</sup> Roughly half of the eligible Micmac and Maliseet men of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia signed up, and, although small, Saskatchewan's Pie Hills community offered practically all of its eligible men. In British Columbia, the Head of the Lake Band saw every single man between the ages of 20 and 35 volunteer.

In Winnipeg, one newspaper reported that "thirty deserters of Mitis who fought at the side of Louis Riel in 1869-70 ... have just enlisted at Qu'Appelle. They are all members of the Society of French-Canadian Metis of that place. Their names are inscribed on the [Society's] roll of honour."<sup>13</sup>

News of the war did not easily reach some Canadian Native communities. Reserves in the Yukon and Northwest Territories and in northern sections of the provinces had fewer transportation