

Honouring Indigenous Veterans This National Aboriginal Veterans Day

November 8th is National Aboriginal Veterans Day, a day of remembrance and commemoration of the contributions of Indigenous veterans in the First and Second World Wars, as well as the Korean War. National Aboriginal Veterans Day began in Winnipeg in 1994 when Indigenous veterans were not recognized in Remembrance Day activities, and is now celebrated in many communities across Canada. This Aboriginal Veterans Day, we would like to acknowledge the sacrifices of our Aboriginal veterans and express our gratitude for their contributions to Canada and the world.

While not eligible for conscription, as they were not considered citizens of Canada, over 12,000 Indigenous people are estimated to have volunteered in all three wars. They enlisted despite the challenges they faced, including traveling long distances from remote communities, learning a new language (English), and coping with racism against them. Both men and women enlisted, serving as soldiers, nurses and in other roles. Many served with distinction, winning medals for bravery in action.

After the war, enlisted Indigenous people returned home to continued discrimination, including in some cases denial of benefits, loss of Indian Status, and expropriation of their land by the government for non-Indigenous veterans. They were also excluded by the Veterans' Associations and were banned from Legion halls, where veterans gathered to drink and get advice on post-war benefits. It was only in 1995 that Indigenous veterans were allowed to lay wreaths commemorating their fallen comrades at the National War Memorial in Ottawa. It took until 2003 for the Government of Canada to provide veterans' benefits to First Nations soldiers who had been denied them in the past, and Metis veterans have never received them.

As educators, it is important to bring this recognition into our discussions with our students about Remembrance Day. Here are some resources to help you with that work: [Aboriginal-Canadian Veterans](#) , [Indigenous Veterans](#).



**The late Fred George
Wet'suwet'en Veteran**

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**Robert S. Bright
Gitksan served in WWII**



In 2002, Kwakwaka'wakw Totem Pole Artist Calvin Hunt was commissioned to create a totem pole at the Veterans Memorial Lodge in Broadmead near Victoria (Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ territories).