



NATIONAL _____
INDIGENOUS
VETERANS
DAY



NWAC **REMEMBERS** and **HONOURS** the many Indigenous women who have served in missions across Canada and the world. Today, it is important to recognize those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in keeping Turtle Island safe.





Background

Every year on November 8, Indigenous Veterans Day, we honour and celebrate Indigenous veterans who have served in missions around the world in times of war, conflict, and peace. Indigenous Veterans Day was first established in Manitoba in 1994 and has since spread across the country as a way to recognize the combat and peacekeeping efforts of Indigenous people in Canada.

While often not known or recognized, Indigenous people have been part of Canada's military history for over 200 years. A number of Indigenous veterans have been some of the most highly decorated soldiers, aviators, and sailors in Canadian history (Sgt. Tommy Prince is a fine example).

Despite efforts to become valuable members of the military, Indigenous people often faced many challenges in order to serve, including having to travel great distances from their communities in order to enlist. Discriminatory policies saw them lose their Indian status. As well, they were not allowed to vote and were prohibited from recognizing their war efforts at the National Memorial in Ottawa on Remembrance Day. They also had to learn new languages and quickly adapt to cultural differences.

Indigenous people brought valuable skills to the military, and often became successful snipers, scouts, and in the Second World War code takers.¹ Throughout the world wars and the Korean War, thousands of Indigenous people served in uniform. Those at home donated money, clothing, and food, and in some instances granted the use of reserve lands for military practices.

Indigenous Women in Service

Indigenous women were enlisted with the women's auxiliary services of the Army, including the Canadian Women's Army Corps, Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service, and Royal Canadian Air Force – Women's Division. They held different roles ranging from clerical, first aid, nursing, mechanical, and training.

Today, they continue to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces, and have been deployed to serve in peacekeeping efforts with NATO, the United Nations, and other multinational peace operations.

¹ As code takers, Indigenous people would translate sensitive radio messages into Cree to prevent them from being understood if and when messages were intercepted.



Charlotte Edith (Anderson) Monture

Charlotte Edith Anderson Monture from the Six Nations Grand River Reserve, Ontario, was the first Indigenous woman to work as a trained nurse in Canada. Monture studied at the New Rochelle School of Nursing in New York State and became a registered nurse in 1914. She served as a nurse overseas in the First World War, where she worked for an American hospital based in France caring for wounded soldiers. Occasionally she was sent to other medical centres across the country.





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Dorothy Askwith

Dorothy Askwith of Métis descent, from Saskatoon, enlisted in 1942 and ended her service term in 1945. Askwith was excited to enlist, as the family of 10 children did not have much in the way of housing, food, and clothing. She was offered \$1.25 a day in the service and had clothes and medical expenses paid for. As an unqualified member, Askwith served in the Royal Canadian Air Force and had various roles, including working in the parachute section and post office, and serving officers in the mess hall. Askwith was eventually accepted into both the Service Flying Training School and Bombing and Gunnery School. She also worked at the Ground Instructional School.



Private Mary Greyeyes

Private Mary Greyeyes from Muskeg Lake, Cree Nation, was part of Canadian Women's Army Corps. After successfully passing a written test at age 20, she was accepted into the military—becoming the first woman to join the military in 1942. Greyeyes was also the first Indigenous woman to join Canada's armed forces, and later became a member of the Canadian Women's Army Corps during the Second World War. The armed forces tried to boost Indigenous recruitment and demonstrate Canada's military might by posing her in a staged photo that has since been widely circulated. Greyeyes served in a Canadian base in England, where she was tasked with cooking and doing laundry. After asking for a transfer to London, England, she cooked at the war headquarters, and was released at the end of the war.





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Corporal (Ret'd) Francine Beaudry

Beaudry's parents were both Indigenous. Beaudry enrolled in the Canadian Armed Forces in 1976 and was moved to Saint-Jean-Sur-Richelieu, a leadership and recruit school where she finished top of her class and won the sniper trophy. After completing her training, she served on her first overseas mission, a six-month peacekeeping mission in Egypt. Beaudry's second mission was in Baden-Solingen, Germany, where she did administrative work. Upon returning to Canada, Beaudry continued to serve. She worked in an administrative role until 1991 and participated in the Gulf War by sending coded messages to the war zones. She ended her military career in 1995 and continued to volunteer. She is now the President of the Association des Veterans Autochtones du Québec and received a Minister of Veterans Affairs commendation for her work.





Sergeant (Ret'd) Wendy Jocko

Jocko was born in Pembroke, Ontario, and is the Chief of the Algonquins of Pikwakanaga First Nation. Jocko comes from a line of Indigenous warriors who fought to defend Canada and restore peace. Constant Pinesi, Grand Chief of the Algonquins, was the first known warrior in her family who served in the War of 1812, and many of her other family members served in the First and Second World Wars. Jocko enlisted in the Canadian Armed Forces at the age of 19 and attended the Canadian Forces' Recruit School Cornwallis and was first posted at the Edmonton base. She has served in Calgary, Chilliwack, and Petawawa and completed two NATO peacekeeping tours in Bosnia and Croatia from 1993–1998. Jocko retired in 2002 after having served 23 years. In 2015, she returned to Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation, and in 2017 was elected to council, before being elected chief in March 2020. As the chief, she has led Canada's response to COVID-19 and took part in the treaty and self-government negotiations with Canada and Ontario.





NWAC's Role

In the past, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has participated in events to respect and honour the Indigenous people and women who have served in the Canadian Armed Forces. Through social media, NWAC has reflected on the important contributions that Indigenous people have made to protect Turtle Island.

Government of Canada's Role

The Government of Canada currently recognizes the contributions and sacrifices made by Indigenous people in combat and peacekeeping efforts. As part of this recognition, the Government of Canada erected the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument in Ottawa (2001) and has named several Royal Canadian warships after Indigenous groups (for example, HMCS Iroquois, Cayuga, and Huron).

Remembrance ceremonies are held at the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument each year to observe Indigenous Veterans Day.

STATISTICS

- Approximately 3.5% of the Canadian Armed Forces membership is of First Nations descent, with 2,700 members of the Canadian Armed Forces identifying as Indigenous.





NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA





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#HonouringIndigenousVeterans



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Native Women's Association of Canada

L'Association des femmes autochtones du Canada

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