



# The Saskatchewan First Nations Veterans' Association

## *We Answered the Call*

A HISTORY OF THE SASKATCHEWAN FIRST NATIONS' CONTRIBUTION TO CANADA'S FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY.



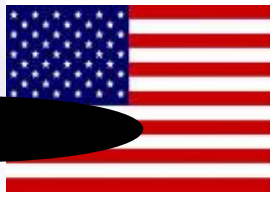
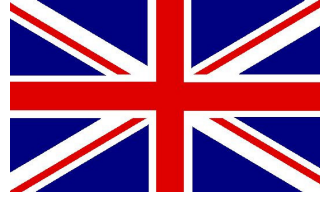
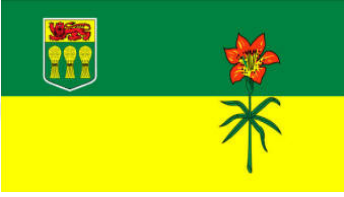


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**Cover Art:** was created by Ronald (Rocky) Redwood. Rocky is a member of the Cowessess First Nation and a veteran of the Vietnam War. Veteran Redwood currently serves as the SFNVA's Regina-Qu'Appelle Branch Vice President. He joined the United States Army in 1968. In 1969 he served in Vietnam and in 1970 he returned to Vietnam for a 2nd tour. He served with the 572nd Transport Company and was released with an honourable discharge in 1971.

To book a speaker call: (306) 956-6946



## ***Our Treaty Promise***

***The English never call the Indians out of their country to fight their battles. You are living here and the Queen expects you to live at peace with the white men and your red brothers, and with other nations. (Alexander Morris to the Saulteaux Nation, Treaty 3 negotiations at The North-West Angle, October 4, 1873).***

***In case of war you ask not to be compelled to fight. I trust there will be no war, but if it should occur I think the Queen would leave you to yourselves. I'm sure she would not ask her Indian children to fight for her unless they wished, but if she did call for them and their wives and children were in danger they are not the men I think them to be, if they did not come forward to their protection. (Alexander Morris to the Cree Nation, Treaty 6 negotiations at Fort Carleton, August 23, 1876).***

***I know that you have been told that if war came you would be put in the front, this is not so. Your brothers at Carleton asked me that they might not be forced to fight, and I tell you, as I assured them, you will never be asked to fight against your will; and I trust that the time will never come of war between the Queen and the great country near us. (Alexander Morris, Treaty 6 negotiations at Fort Pitt, September 7, 1876).***

Glenbow Archives NA-1406-177

**Treaty Negotiations at Fort  
Carleton**





# Our History

Prior to the arrival of the Europeans in Saskatchewan, the Tribes of the Canadian Prairies had their own system of friendships and enemies. Often, different Tribes would help each other fend off an attack. War was made only when necessary, as the Cree, Saulteaux, Dene and Sioux were not the blood-thirsty warriors that the first settlers made them out to be.

With a few exceptions, Chiefs were not warriors. Instead, when a tribe was threatened, or there was a crisis of some kind, the Tribe would choose, from amongst themselves, a warrior Chief. It would be his job to face the threat and keep his people safe. Tribal members would choose the person they thought had the best skills to face the challenge.

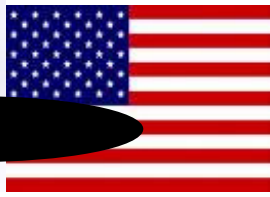
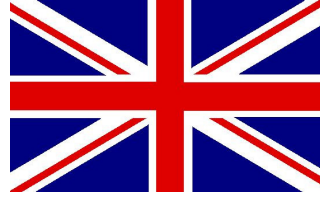
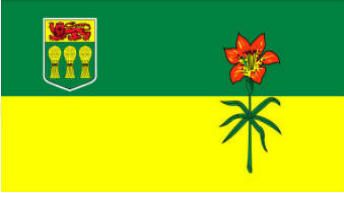


**Beardy's Warriors (circa 1876)**

Although only one warrior was chosen to lead the war party, every young man within the tribe knew it was his role and duty to help keep his people safe. Young men would go to war in order to win glory and honour for themselves, but their main reason for risking their lives was to make sure that whatever the danger was that was threatening their people was stopped. There was a word in every First Nations language for this duty. In English, those words translate best into what can be called "the warrior ethic."

**Cree and Saulteaux Battle in Cypress Hills. *Canadian Illustrated News*, 29 January, 1881.**





Tribes often came to each other's aid when there was a threat. This was the case in the winter of 1722, when the Piegan Indians, a Blackfoot Tribe, were under attack from the Snake Indians (Shoshone). The Piegan sent out a call for help to the rest of the Blackfoot, as well as to the Plains Cree. Twenty Cree warriors volunteered to help the Blackfoot, one of whom was Saukamappee, a 16 year old Cree boy living with his family along the Saskatchewan River. Some years later, Saukamappee told his story to a fur trader, David Thompson, who wrote it down.

*We came to the Peeganies and their allies. They were camped in the Plains on the left bank of the River and were a great many. We feasted, a great war tent was made, and a few days passed in speeches...A war chief was elected by the chiefs, and we got ready to march. Our spies had been out and had seen a large camp of the Snake Indians on the Plains of the Eagle Hill, and we had to cross the river in canoes, and on rafts, which are securely secured for our retreat. When we had crossed and numbered our men, we were about 350 warriors. They had their scouts out, and came to meet us. Both parties made a great show of their numbers, and I thought they were more numerous than ourselves.*

The battle, fought with arrows and on foot, was a draw, with neither the Snake or the Cree/Blackfoot alliance obtaining a clear victory. The following year, the Blackfoot again appealed to the Cree for assistance. But this time, the Cree had both guns and iron headed arrows, but the Snake had horses. Only three Cree warriors volunteered to go to their aid, Saukamappee and two others.

Throughout Canadian history, First Nations warriors have fought alongside the British Army during conflicts. For example, in 1775, during the American Revolution, the Six Nations Confederacy was allied with Great Britain's Royal Regiment. In total, Great Britain awarded 96 military General Service medals to First Nations for their military assistance between 1793 and 1814.

# Our Contributions

## WWI

First Nations people enlisted at a rate higher than any other group in Canada. At least 300 never came home, and many of those that did had contracted tuberculosis in the damp trenches of Europe. First Nations women, too, enlisted and served overseas as nurses or staff. At home First Nation communities also supported the war effort. Records indicate that Canadian First Nations raised over \$44,000 for the war effort, which was a lot of money in those days. Saskatchewan First Nations donated \$17,257.90 to the war effort, and on George Gordon's First Nations, children knitted 75 pairs of socks for Canadian soldiers and helped raise money for the Belgian Relief and the Soldier's Tobacco

**Did you know?**

**At the outbreak of WWI, 1 out of every 3 Canadian First Nations people enlisted, approximately 4,000 in total. It is estimated that 107 Saskatchewan Treaty First Nations men and women enlisted during WWI. Many more who volunteered were turned down due to poor health or a lack of education.**

**Records indicate that of the 107, 28 were wounded, 5 were gassed, 1 was both gassed and wounded, 2 became sick and 5 were killed in action.**



Five Indian volunteers from Saskatchewan. Joseph Dreaver (back row, far left) later became chief of the Mistawasis Band and would volunteer to serve in the Second World War as well, as would Louis Arcand (front row, right) of the Muskeg Lake Band.

## Our Stories

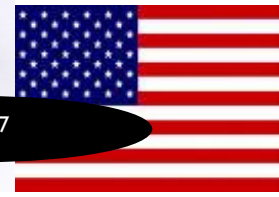
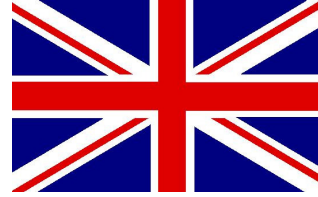
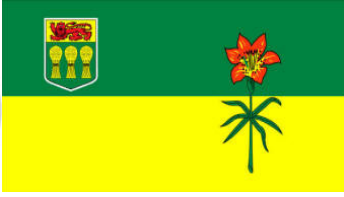
### John Fisher Gordon's First Nation

John Fisher was born in 1898 on the Gordon's Reserve. In 1914, at age sixteen, he entered the Canadian army and was sent overseas to fight in the First World War. John had never traveled beyond the prairies and the sight of so much ocean amazed him. The crossing took fourteen days from Halifax to Liverpool. John saw an American troop ship torpedoed and sunk in the mid-Atlantic with great loss of life.

WWI was fought in trenches. When John was introduced to war, he was brought to the front lines at Emyon, France through an interlocking network of trenches as deep as a man stands. Being curious, he climbed up the side and peered over the battlefield. While he looked around him at the moon-like surface of the battlefield, which was filled with craters and barbed wire, he began to draw fire from the enemy. He didn't know that rifle fire usually led to a full scale cannon barrage. It was only when the cannon shells started dropping that his fellow soldiers grabbed him and dragged him down out of sight. His curiosity nearly got him killed on his first day at the front.

John fought with the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles in the famous battle of Vimy Ridge. He also fought battles at Arris, Canal D'or and Cambrai. At Cambrai he was wounded in the side. He saw the German lines break and they had no reinforcements, so the allies rapidly advanced. Guns were everywhere and the Germans were in retreat. They pushed the Germans back until they came to a small village. It was there that John saw how much the people hated and feared the Germans. Wounded Germans were splashed with slop and kicked by the children.

If there is one incident that stands out clearly for John it is when he lost a close friend in battle. They were advancing across no man's land at a run when James T. Forsythe was hit by a bullet. John held his dying friend's head and Forsyth asked him to write a note for him. James knew he wasn't going to make it. He spoke while John wrote. He said: "Mother, I am dying. I love you. I will see you in heaven."



Shortly after, John wrote a letter to the Forsythe family telling them he was honoured to call their son his friend and that their son had died honourably in defense of his country. He later received a letter from the family thanking him and asking him to visit them. John's wound ended his combat duty in Europe. He left France aboard the Olympic, crossing to Halifax in seven days. He served in the Veteran's Guard during the WWII after being denied enlistment in the regular service because of his age.

## WWII

First Nations men and women, many of whom were a product of the Residential Schools, enlisted in the thousands and served in every theatre of war in which Canadian troops served during WWII. Records indicate that 3,090 Treaty First Nations across Canada enlisted, of which 72 were women. 213 were killed in the line of duty. However, it is acknowledged by most researchers that these numbers are too low to accurately reflect the First Nations contribution.

For each First Nations man or woman who enlisted there was another that had offered him/herself for service only to be rejected for medical reasons, lack of education, or the racial restrictions in the Naval and Air Force recruiting policies. In fact, the Navy recruitment policy read that all Navy personnel must be of "Pure European Descent and one of the White Race." This ban against First Nations people remained in effect until 1943.

First Nations individuals' reasons for joining were as complicated and diverse as they were for anyone else that enlisted. Some went to join their buddies, others went for the 3 square meals and a decent pay cheque, something they couldn't count on getting in Canada. Some enlisted for a chance for adventure or an opportunity to recapture the glory of warrior ancestors, and some felt obligated to defend the Queen because of the Treaty.

### Did you know?

**In Saskatchewan, there were at least 443 Treaty First Nations people who enlisted, of which 22 were women and 27 were killed in action. In the Crooked Lake area alone, 70 people went off to fight in Europe: 50 from Cowessess, 5 from Sakimay, 10 from Ochapowace and 5 from Kahkewistahaw (based on interviews with Elder George Acoose, 1999). It is difficult to determine the actual number, due to the inconsistent method of keeping records by the Indian Agents. In fact, the records from Indian Affairs and the Indian Missionary Record differ considerably, and some estimate that 220 First Nations soldiers never came home from Europe.**

## Our Stories

Gordon Ahenakew

Sure enough, the war started. Here they were sitting, about 3 or 4 Elders, and they said "we think it is going to be pretty soon, anytime, when Hitler will cross the ocean and seize, capture the government." At that time, the Elders mentioned and questioned, wondered what will happen when Hitler really

does capture the government. what will happen to our Treaty rights... I thought maybe Hitler would just disregard our Treaty rights. Then again, maybe he would just send us all up north just so we wouldn't be in the way. This is the time I decided to join the war too. If this is true, maybe I can help and do something about Hitler. Maybe somehow I can stop Hitler from treating us like dirt, like we are nothing. If this is true, then I will do my best to help prevent this situation. (Gordon Ahenakew, South Saskatchewan Regiment, 2nd Division). Overwhelmingly, First Nations Veterans have claimed that they were treated as equals in the service, where they earned the respect and comradeship of the people they fought and died beside.

First Nations soldiers earned a minimum of 18 decorations for bravery in action, including **David Greyeyes** from Muskeg Lake.

First Nations soldiers participated in every major battle and campaign, including the disastrous Dieppe landings and the pivotal Normandy invasion.

They also served in the worst imaginable theatres of war, including Hong Kong where just under 2000 members of the Winnipeg Grenadiers and the Royal rifles of Canada became prisoners of war of the Japanese. Included among those prisoners were at least 16 First Nations and Metis men, nine of whom died from their wounds or illness.



### Did you know?

**Canada's First Nations donated their own money, raised additional funds by holding auctions, raffles, sports days and special dinners, and collected relief items to be sent to soldiers. At war's end, the Indian Affairs branch noted the donation of over \$23,000 from Canadian Indian Bands plus additional unknown amounts that were sent directly to war relief funds such as the Red Cross. In addition, some First Nations contributed reserve lands to be used for airports, rifle ranges and defense posts across Canada.**

## Our Stories

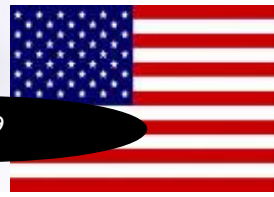
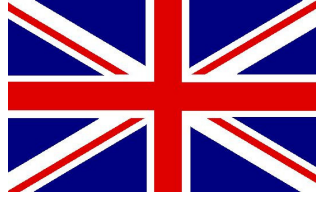
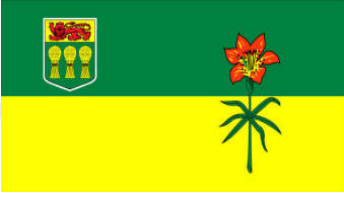
**Joseph Dreaver  
Mistawasis**

Chief Joe Dreaver, of the Mistawasis Cree Band, was one of the many First Nations people who served in both World Wars. During the first, he was a sapper that earned the Military Medal at Ypres. Although he had lost a brother at Vimy Ridge, and another at home from wounds received at Vimy, Chief Dreaver didn't hesitate to offer his services when war broke out again.

Chief Dreaver left his farm and drove 17 men from his reserve to







Saskatoon to enlist. Three of the men were his own sons. Two of his daughters also served, and a younger brother went overseas as well. At 48, the chief himself was no longer accepted for overseas duties, but he remained in Canada with the Veterans Guard, watching over prisoners of war in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

## Korea

The Korean War began on June 25, 1950, when thousands of North Korean infantrymen crossed the 38th parallel into South Korea. It didn't take long for the United Nations to decide to defend South Korea, nor did it take long for the Canadian Prime Minister to commit Canadian Troops to the UN effort.

Unfortunately, the Indian Affairs Branch kept poor records of those who enlisted, and didn't submit a final report, but it is estimated that several hundred Canadian First Nations served on the battlefields and at sea in the Korean War, at least 13 of who currently live in Saskatchewan. In addition, many First Nations people who were too young to join snuck across the border and joined the U.S. Military so they could go overseas.

It is not known how many First Nations people were killed in action in Korea. More than 500 Canadians lost their lives as a result of the war.

# Our Stories

## **Clement and Patrick Arcand Muskeg Lake**

Clement and Patrick Arcand, from the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, were already trained and experienced soldiers when the Korean War broke out. Both volunteered to go overseas.

During WWII, Clement, Patrick, and all eight of their brothers served in the armed forces. Their father, Louis, was a veteran of WWI and served, at home, in the Veterans Guard. In early 1952, Clement and Patrick enlisted in the CASF. Both privates, they joined the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps, the same branch that they had served in during WWII. As drivers, they helped to deliver ammunition, rations and other supplies to the UN troops in the far east.

## **Senator Allan Bird Montreal Lake Cree Nation**

I joined the army on January 29, 1952. I was there for three years. My basic training was in Camp Petawawa, Ontario. After six months, I didn't come back once to Montreal Lake to visit my family. From Ontario, I went straight through to Wainwright, Alberta for the summer training. I stayed there for about two months.

From there we went across the ocean in a ship. It took us about 14 days. We got to Yokahama, Japan.



In the meantime, on our way to Korea, I was outside on the ship standing on the rail just thinking about home and why I had to leave home. Yet I was very glad I joined the army because my father was in WWI. My brother was in WWII and I thought I might as well join the army too. While I was at the railing on the ship, just standing there and being very lonely, I saw another man there. He was just looking, and he looked like an Indian to me. I went to say hello to him. I asked him if he was lonesome and he said "yes." I wondered why I crossed the ocean. I was already overseas in WWII," he said. "While I was there in Germany, during the war, I won myself a George Cross, next to the Victoria Cross for bravery." Then he told me: "I'm not coming home until I win the Victoria Cross in Korea." He told me lots of stories about the war. At the end, I asked him his name. "Tommy Prince," he said. That was the most decorated Indian in the Canadian Army.

While we were in Tokyo, the people there gave us a tour. I saw where the atomic bomb fell in 1945 by the Americans. It looked like a fire went through there. Everything was burnt, even the steel buildings. The steel bars were bent from the heat of the bomb at Hiroshima.

After one week in Japan we went to Korea. We had six submarine and aircraft escorts. When we landed, we stayed on the ship. At night we were put on a train in boxcars. We were being sent to the front lines. We were there for 13 months. Sometimes we had fun, sometimes we were scared. We hauled food and ammunition. We did all this mostly after dark, without our jeep lights on because the taillights would show. We could never do anything during the day. The war was mostly at night.

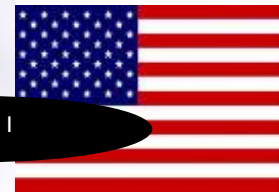
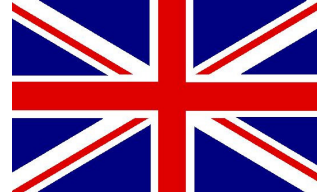
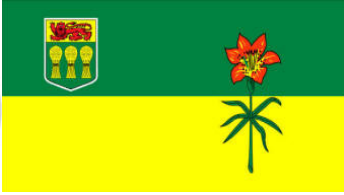
One day I volunteered to go on patrol to find out what was going on at the other side. We had an English corporal by the name of Webster from London, England who joined the Canadian Army. It took us all night to get to the front lines. There was tall grass, so we crawled to see what was on the other side. In the meantime, while we were crawling, our corporal told us to lay down quiet. Something was wrong and we knew it. Then I saw the enemy about three feet away. They were looking for us. They were not sure where we were but they knew we were there. We lay quiet for two hours, waiting to get orders from our leader. Then he told us we could sit up to stretch. He radioed to headquarters and we were told to return. While we were walking, the sky would light up from the flares. It was like daylight. We would fall on the ground and wait until it got dark again. When it grew dark, we would start running again until we finally got back.

### **Peacekeepers/NATO Forces**

The United Nations defines a Peacekeeper as a Veteran who has served the United Nations in a specific mission area. His or her responsibilities are determined by the "mandate"—a definition of the tasks and goals of the mission—formulated by the Security Council. The responsibilities of a UN military peacekeeper are primarily to maintain peace through patrols and observations. A military peacekeeper is still a soldier in his or her own country's service, and is responsible to his or her own national command, but serves under the control of the UN force commander—a senior military officer from one of the countries providing personnel for the UN mission.

Since 1945, UN Peacekeepers have undertaken 63 field missions which enabled people in dozens of countries to participate in free elections and helped disarm more than 400,000 combatants in the last decade alone. Peacekeepers deploy to





war-torn regions where no one else is willing to go. Without them, these areas remain in conflict, creating an environment where criminals operate freely and terrorists find a safe haven.

Canada's First Nations have contributed immensely to the Peacekeeping Forces of the United Nations. Hundreds of young men and women from Saskatchewan First Nations have left their homes to assist overseas including in:

- Egypt (1956-57)
- Lebanon (1958)
- Congo (1960-64)
- New Guinea (1962-63)
- Yemen (1963-64)
- Cyprus (1964—present)
- Dominican Republic (1955-66)
- Egypt (1973-79)
- Lebanon (1978-present)
- Afghanistan and Pakistan (1988-90)
- Iran-Iraq (1988-1991)
- Angola (1989-91)
- Namibia (1989-90)
- Central America—Nicaragua (1989-92)
- Iraq-Kuwait (1991-2003)
- Angola (1991-95)
- El Salvador (1991-95)
- Morocco (1991-present)
- Cambodia (1991-92)
- Ethiopia (2000-2008)
- East Timor (2002-2005)
- Liberia (2003-present)
- Côte d'Ivoire (2004-present)
- Haiti (2004-present)



**The UN Peacekeepers were awarded the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize in 1988. A poem commissioned for the occasion read:**

*This is the sword you must bear in your fight  
-  
Faith in this life and man's God-given right.  
For the future of all, seek it and choose it;  
Die, if you must, gird it on and use it.  
Silent the path of the arrow by night;  
Halt with the spirit its death-dealing flight.  
Then, only then, will all warfare cease.  
Man's dignity only can give us true peace.*

Over the years, more than 2,400 United Nations Peacekeepers have died while serving, several of them from Saskatchewan First Nations.

**Did you know?**

**In 1988, the UN Peacekeepers were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Each time you meet a Veteran who served in peacetime, you are meeting a Nobel Peace Prize holder!**

Peacekeepers, while overseas, are subject to many of the same dangers as those who serve during war-time. There is nothing peaceful about what they do. Indeed, during the Cold War period, our First Nations soldiers in Germany were often called upon, in the middle of the night, to guard against invasion. One Canadian researcher says that Canadian Peacekeepers have been, in fact, Cold Warriors.



Many Saskatchewan First Nations people who served as Peacekeepers or with the NATO Forces came home with service related injuries including loss of hearing due to explosions, injuries received in training exercises, lost fingers and limbs and illnesses. Some never came home at all, having sacrificed their lives to ensure the world's super powers did not get out of control and those less fortunate had an opportunity for peace.

## Our Stories

### Arthur Anderson

Arthur Anderson was born at Gordon's Reserve. At age 17, with only a Grade 7, Arthur joined the Canadian Armed Forces. It was during his time with the CFA that Arthur completed his Grade 12, going to night school while stationed in Edmonton.

Arthur says he "launched his career in military service as a young First Nations man excited to see the world," and his wish came true. Arthur served in Germany twice in the First Canadian Airborne Regiment as a Paratrooper on peacekeeping missions. He also served in Cyprus (1977) and in Africa (1980). In total he served 15 years in the Airborne Force, completing 265 jumps with the Canadian Forces and a further 11 with the United States Airborne.

In 1970, Arthur served his country again, during the Quebec crisis, when Prime Minister Trudeau called the troops to protect the Canadian Confederation.

In total, Arthur served 29 years with the Canadian Forces, leaving the military in 1983. On Sunday, while at an Anglican service, Arthur received a calling and knew he must become an Anglican Priest. Arthur's journey in theology began at the College of Emmanuel and St. Chad at the University of Saskatchewan. Since that time, Arthur has worked tirelessly to bring together Christianity and the traditional teaching of First Nations spirituality.

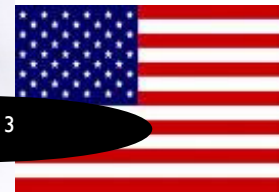
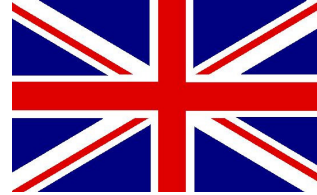
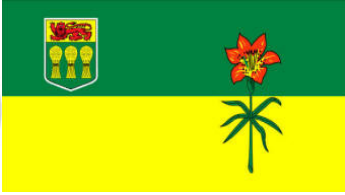
As Elder for the Diocese of Qu'Appelle, Arthur can currently be found at healing ceremonies, round dances, band council meetings, worship services, and almost anywhere First Nations people gather to pray, laugh and solve problems in their communities.



**Above: Arthur Anderson in mid-air.**

**Below: He made it safely to the ground.**





## Allied Veterans

Many Saskatchewan First Nations men and women, recognizing all of North America as First Nations traditional lands, don't distinguish between the American and Canadian parts of Turtle Island. As a result, hundreds of Saskatchewan First Nations people have fought with the United States Army. First Nations people fought, and died, alongside American soldiers in every major theatre of war, winning honours and sacrificing their lives for peace and democracy.

Today, there are still First Nations people from Saskatchewan who are enlisted in the U.S. Military and, recently, two of those young Saskatchewan First Nations men gave their lives in the Middle East. In 2009, Sergeant Darby Morin, of Big River First Nation, and Private Kyle Whitehead, of Pelican Lake First Nation, were killed in action while serving with the U.S. Military as part of the United Nations Peacekeeping forces in the Middle East. Saskatchewan First Nations continue to contribute to Canada's safety and democracy, and continue, to this day, to sacrifice themselves in the name of freedom.



**Sergeant Darby Morin, from Big River First Nation, was killed in action while serving with the U.S. Military**

# Our Stories

George Benson, of Red Pheasant First Nation, served in Korea with the United States Army.

At the age of 16, George joined the Canadian Armed Forces, but after only six days his superiors discovered he was underage and discharged him. He decided to try again. He crossed the border and joined the United States Army, once again telling them he was older. "I remember telling my mother I had to go to a meeting," George says, "because I didn't want her to know that I was going to join the army." George went across the border, and made his way to California where he enlisted as a private in the United States Army.

George served with the Allied Forces in the United States Army from 1952-1957. He served 16 months overseas in the Korean War, and then re-enlisted, qualifying for the Green Berets Airbourne. He then completed a second tour of duty in Germany.





## Our Women

First Nations women from across Saskatchewan have made huge contributions to Canada's freedom and democracy. Many women joined the Canadian Forces and served at home and overseas. For example, it is estimated that at least 22 First Nations women enlisted during WWII, six from Muskeg Lake alone! Women served as nurses and in administration, and undertook a variety of tasks to assist in the war effort.

Those who didn't enlist contributed to the war effort at home. Women raised funds for the war effort and charities such as the Red Cross. Women and their children knitted socks and other necessities for the soldiers, and women went to work in munitions factories and wherever else they were needed to fill in vacancies left as entire reserves were depleted of their young men.



**Irene (Left) and Josephine (right) Greyeyes both served with the Canadian Womens' Army Corps from 1943-1946.**

It was, however, the women who were left behind that gave so much to Canada's war effort. Wives, mothers, sisters and daughters waited anxiously at home, praying everyday that their loved ones would come back alive and unharmed. Many First Nations women sacrificed their men to the war effort; some lost husbands and sons, brothers and dads. Many too, had their husbands come home wounded and damaged, their horrific memories a new and painful part of their everyday life.

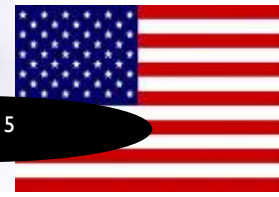
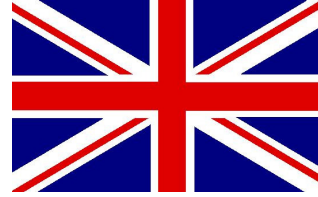
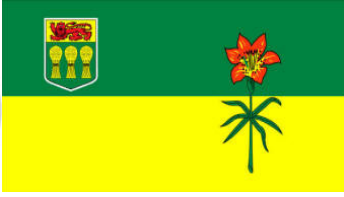
## Our Stories

**Mrs. Pelly**  
Keeseekoose First Nation

Mrs Pelly, of Keeseekoose First Nation, relates what it was like when her husband returned from WWII:

My husband used to speak of the Second World War. For him, it was not a happy memory at all. He used to say he would rather shoot his children than see them go to war. He was in the thick of it.

The old man gave him a pipe to carry when he went. He carried this under his shirt over his heart. One time he was shot and taken prisoner. The bullet hit the pipe and glanced off. If it wasn't for the



pipe he would have died on the spot. The Germans took him prisoner. They bound up his wounds. They were looking at his pipe and talking together. He, of course, couldn't understand a word. They repaired the pipe for him because a piece had broken off. They gave it back to him and then took him back to the front lines. They pointed across, and it was then he understood they were telling him he was free to go back to his own lines. He went but was shot at by his own troops. They thought he was a German.

He was a sniper and a good one. When he killed his first German and watched him die he couldn't stop crying. His commanding officer slapped him and told him to come out of it. If he hadn't killed that man, he would have been killed himself. Like I said, the war really affected him.

One time they were behind enemy lines, surrounded by Germans. My husband told everyone to wait. He prayed with his pipe. One guy didn't respect Indian ways. He said a lot of disrespectful things. They were in this clump of bushes for days. One morning my husband woke up and found his pipe missing. This guy who had no respect for Indian ways had thrown it away. My husband finally found it. This crazy guy got very thirsty and said he was going to get water. The others told him not to go, but he wouldn't listen. He had only gone a little ways when the Germans shot and killed him. The others who stayed with my husband lived.

After the war he returned to Keeseekoose. The war really hurt him and he was never the same after.

### **Clara Pratt Gordon's First Nation**

Colin and Clara Pratt kept a small farm on the Gordon's First Nation at the beginning of the 1940s. The Pratts had five children, ages eight to fourteen and the farm provided for their basic needs.

Military service was a proud tradition from both the Pratt and Anderson sides of the family. Clara's grandfather, Archie Anderson, had fought in the Boer War and had been awarded a distinguished service medal. Both families had relations who fought in WWI. Clara's father and all her uncles went overseas, and some didn't return, but died on foreign soil.

In keeping with family tradition, Colin Pratt decided to enlist. In 1942, he walked from Gordon's Reserve to Saskatoon, a distance of over 120 miles. He was placed in the Royal Saskatoon Engineers and after eight weeks of training, he was sent east for transportation overseas. At the train station in Regina his son Hector, who was 14 years old, told his father he would see him on the Rhine River.

In early 1944, Hector Pratt, now 16, joined the Canadian Army. Like his father before him, he lied about his age. Colin Pratt had claimed to be seven years younger in order to enlist, and Hector claimed to be three years older. Hector joined in time to be part of the fierce fighting in Europe that followed the Normandy invasion. It was in Belgium that Hector first tasted combat. He felt the fear all men face under fire and it was there that he killed his first German. He saw the face of the man he killed and was tormented for years after.

The war was an ever present strain on Clara and her children. She lived daily with the uncertainty that one of her loved ones may have died in battle.

She prayed constantly and prepared packages for overseas mail. Clara always included vitamin pills because she worried her men weren't getting proper nutrition.

In February 1945, the Canadian First Division was assigned the task of clearing out German troops south of the Rhine River. This battle, code named Blockbuster, was intended to secure the south branch of the Rhine in preparation for crossing. The Canadian army ran into usually strong resistance. A crack German paratroop division backed by the fanatical Hitler Youth and led by a clever commander contested every foot of ground.

Hector went into this battle with 137 men and returned with only 35 left standing. The fighting was intense. At age 17, Hector was made a frontline sergeant with up to 17 men under his command. During the fierce fighting he went behind enemy lines to rescue a wounded comrade. He took a red cross arm band off a dead stretcher bearer and crossed over, hoping the sight of the red cross would provide some protection. He succeeded in the rescue attempt, but found that the wounded man had already died from his bullet wounds.

Following this battle, the Canadian army was prepared to cross the Rhine in conjunction with allied crossing on the front. The Canadians were regrouping when word reached Hector that his father was encamped less than a quarter of a mile away. They had been camped within walking distance of each other for weeks.

On the eve of the allied crossing of the Rhine River, Hector walked to his father's camp and kept his promise to "see him on the Rhine River." While both Hector and his father came home safely, Clara lost her brother Lawrence Anderson, who died in combat.

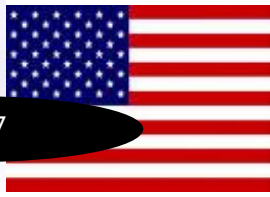
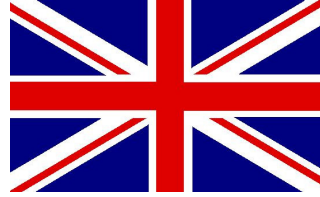
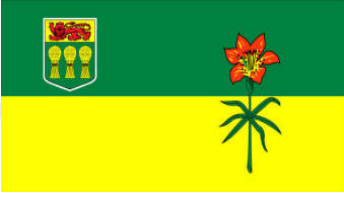
**This drawing, designed by Ronald (Rocky) Redwood, Vietnam War Veteran, depicts the circle of life disrupted by war.**

**Looking carefully, one can see the birds of the air and the fish of the sea completing their natural circles. Their paths, however, are disrupted by the bullets fired from the soldiers gun as he crouches behind and beneath both horse and eagle.**

**As the artist explains it, "there can be no natural life until there is peace."**







# Our Continuing Contribution

Today, many Saskatchewan First Nations people continue to serve their country, both at home and in the United States Military. While we do not know how many of our men and women are serving in the United States, current records show that of the people that make up the Regular Force, Primary Reserve, CIC and Rangers of the Canadian Forces, 893 of them are Canadian Treaty First Nations people. Of that 893, 18 are Saskatchewan First Nations.

## Our Return

Despite the many contributions made by First Nations people to Canada's freedom and democracy, First Nations Veterans were never provided with the same benefits as other Canadian Veterans. Despite the Treaty promises that First Nations people would not be conscripted, First Nations people were initially conscripted for service in WWI. The policy was reversed in 1918, but by that time the war was almost over. Further, there is evidence that those who were already serving overseas were not informed that they could return home if they chose. When WWII broke out, conscription of Treaty First Nations was again confusing and problematic. First Nations people were required to register for service and then claim exemption on an individual basis. There is evidence that Treaty First Nations people were fined and jailed for failing to register, including one woman from Cote Reserve, Irene Severight, who was fined \$5 and jailed for 30 days.

It should be noted that some First Nations veterans have indicated that conscription was used as punishment for veterans who challenged the Indian agent, since it was the agent who applied for exemption on behalf of the individual Treaty First Nation person. In fact, a 1944 report from the Battleford Indian agent includes the suggestion that "a few of the lazy young Indians did nothing all winter and these should be called up for military service."

When these soldiers returned home, some of them wounded and in pain, others celebrated as heroes, they quickly discovered that the equality that they had experienced overseas was not evident in Canada. In order to grasp the First Nations veterans' frustration, the following information is reproduced from a chart prepared in 1949 by Saskatchewan Indian Affairs:

- 439 First Nations Veterans enlisted in WWII
- 249 qualified and 145 did not qualify for benefits under the VLA, based on length of service
- 55 of those who qualified were deemed, by the Indian Agents in most cases, as "not interested"
- A further 20 qualified but were not recommended by the Indian Agent
- 41 qualified but did not receive benefits because their Bands refused to grant a location ticket
- 145 were established on small holdings (2-3 acres by location ticket)
- 1 was established in the fishing industry



- 21 were awaiting further action
- 2 were approved but there is no evidence that any action was taken
- 1 was approved but his benefits were later cancelled due to "misconduct"
- 1 died immediately upon receiving benefits

**Did you know?**

**In total, only 146 of 439 Saskatchewan First Nations Veterans received any actual benefits, and these benefits were, of course, not a part of that veteran's estate and thus could not be inherited by his/her family.**

Instead of land on which to start farms or business loans, First Nations Veterans were given nothing at all, or the right to live on land on reserve, which was already theirs as part of the collectively owned reserve concept.

Primarily, all the benefits afforded to veterans of WWII came by way of the *Veterans' Land Act*. Although this Act clearly stated that First Nations Veterans would be treated equally, the benefits provided to First Nations Veterans were different in at least three significant ways:

1. Those receiving the \$2,320.00 grant would have it managed in trust by the Minister of Mines and Resources.
2. The grant approval was dependent upon recommendation by the Indian Agent.
3. First Nations veterans who returned to the reserve would not be eligible for the \$6,000 loan because reserve lands could not be used as collateral.

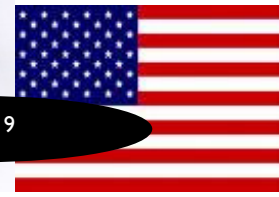
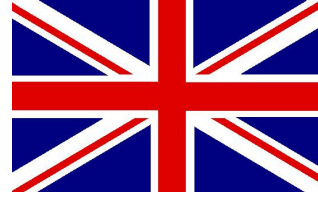
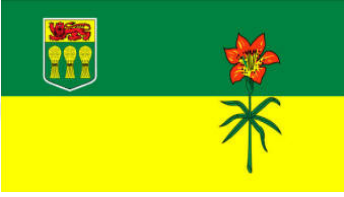
Evidence also suggests that many First Nations were not informed of their potential benefits, and others were given misleading information about their eligibility, particularly for the \$6,000 loan if they chose to settle off reserve.

Despite over 25 years of consistent efforts to obtain an adequate amount of compensation and to have their issues addressed, Saskatchewan First Nations Veterans have yet to receive even a public apology. The so-called compassion package, a maximum of \$20,000 for a very limited number of Veterans, was woefully inadequate to address the issues raised by the many studies that have been conducted on this issue.

**Many First Nations Veterans gather together to remember their lost friends and relatives each year.**

**Photo by Ron Merasty (PAGC Tribune)**





A second group of individuals who suffered from the discriminatory practices and poor administration of the Indian Affairs Branch (IAB) is the war veterans' dependents. Next to the administration of the VLA (especially the \$2,320 grant) the most serious issue facing First Nations was the administration of the Dependents' Allowance. Once again, First Nation veterans faced the disadvantage of having this benefit administered by IAB rather than the branch of the DVA responsible for its administration to all non-First Nation veterans' spouses. Further, like the administration of VLA benefits, there is ample evidence of both discriminatory federal policy and of mismanagement by the Indian Agents.

### Did you know?

**During WWII, First Nations women received only \$25.00 per month in Dependents' Allowance while non-First Nations women received up to \$55.00/month. Further, while non-First Nations women simply received the allowance to help support them while their bread-winners were away at war, First Nations women's allowance were made out to the Indian Agent who gave them only a percentage, with the rest invested into war saving bonds that were never cashable.**

Initially, the spousal allowance was set at \$35.00/mth for a spouse or mother and \$12.00/mth per child up to a maximum of two children. Further, the veteran could request that the equivalent of 15 days' pay be provided to his family (Assigned Pay). This would amount to \$55.00/mth for a woman with no children, \$67.00/mth for a woman with one child, and \$79.00/mth for a woman with two or more children. The funds were to be administered by the newly created Dependents' Allowance Board (DAB).

As with the administration of benefits, IAB almost immediately requested that responsibility for the administration of the Spousal Allowance for First Nations women be transferred to IAB. As early as 1939, the Inspector of Indian Agencies in Saskatchewan, Thomas Robertson, was writing to his superiors in Ottawa that "this is a great deal more money than they [First Nations women] have ever received and a great deal more than they actually need." Robertson goes on to request that the DA cheques be made payable to the Indian Agent because it "would permit our agents to look after these people [and] see their money is not squandered." First Nations women, it seems, could not be trusted. IAB took up this request, and sent several letters to National Defence, urging that cheques be made payable to his Indian Agents, or at least sent in care of the agent.

In 1941, their request was granted. The sequence of events regarding the Spousal Allowance followed a familiar path:

- Initially, cheques were mailed out in care of the Indian Agent, who then passed them on to the spouse or mother.
- In 1941, the decision was taken that the money would be paid directly to the Indian Agent to be held in trust for the women. The Indian Agent required the permission of the veteran to receive the money directly.
- By 1942, there were 52 cases in which the cheques were made payable to the Indian Agent.
- In March 1942, the DAB set a lower rate of Spousal Allowance for those First Nation women who did not agree to have the money held in trust. These women could only receive a maximum of \$25.00/mth.

- The reduction met with much resistance from First Nation women and even some Indian Agents.
- A new scheme was devised whereby the rates were the same for First Nation and non-First Nation women, but the First Nation women were required to invest a certain amount in War Savings Certificates.
- The savings were then put under IAB's control.
- Money held in trust was paid into an Indian Savings Account created for the purpose of saving a portion of the Spousal Allowances to help re-establish the veteran upon his return.
- In 1945, there were 220 cases of First Nation women making War Savings deductions and a further 48 who were contributing to the Indian Savings Account.

The Indian Agents were distressed to discover that some dependents had already received cheques directly, and were unwilling to agree to have them redirected to the agent. That did not, however, stop the agents from trying. In 1942, J. Ostrander, the Indian Agent for Battleford wrote to IAB headquarters that

*"We seem to be going around in circles and getting nowhere...few Indian women (one might almost say no Indian women) have the stability to handle from \$59.00 to \$94.00 a month, in cash, purchase what they actually require, and save the balance for a rainy day, or till their husbands return from the war."*

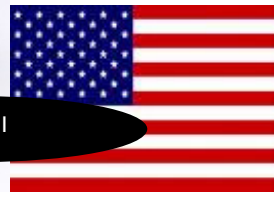
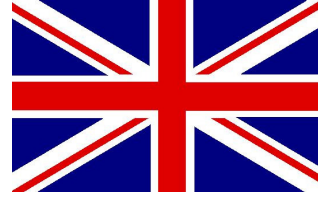
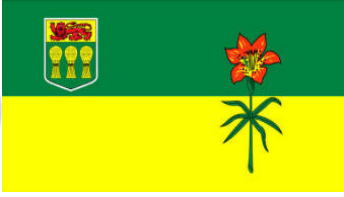
Ostrander goes on to reveal his feelings regarding those people under his care. First Nations women who receive the DA "are followed about by all sorts of scum of the land, while they are known to have money, not having the experience in withstanding such pressure, they are easy victims." Ostrander has an easy solution, however, because "the better Indians, who know their own weaknesses, prefer to have their money handled in the Agency offices." Ostrander lists among the things that the women are squandering their money on "ill-advised legal advice."

To Ostrander's surprise, the DAB responded to his complaints, and those of others, by simply reducing the amount of allowance paid to First Nations dependents to \$25.00/mth. According to Ostrander, "the Board has decided now...the wives of Indians are not worthy of equal consideration by the Government, as that given to the wives of white men and half breeds who enlist" and later wrote that the DAB's justification of the reduction-basically that Indian women were used to poverty was ridiculous and "contrary to the principles for which this war is being fought."

### Did you know?

**In Saskatchewan, despite the fact that there were at least 800 First Nations people who participated in the two Great Wars and Korea, only 262 applications for the \$20,000 compassionate package were accepted for processing. Of those, at least 81 were denied, leaving a final number of around 150 Veterans who received anything for their service to Canada.**

Unfortunately, many Canadians are unaware of the way First Nations Veterans, their wives and their families were treated following the wars. Others are unaware of the significant contribution that First Nations people made to keeping Canada safe and free.



# Our Stories

## Berton Baptiste

I was born in Little Pine. I had lied about my age, and now I'm having trouble over that because one of my older brothers too had joined up. Now, according to the records I am older than him. Men from here were joining up so I tagged along. I started in the army a long time ago, around 1938-39.

I was sent to the Onion Lake Residential School. My parents died when I was very young. I am Saulteaux, but I can't speak it because I was raised in Cree country. At Onion Lake school I was in the cadets. We did a lot of drilling and a lot of boys from that school joined up as a result of that.

I left for Saskatoon, Dundern and Regina and very early I went across the ocean. I got there and stayed in England for a long time. We were trained in all sorts of things, mostly how to kill. I traveled pretty well all over the Island (Britain). We got leave every 3 months.

When they talked about Sicily and Italy, I was there too, but Sicily was conquered. We went to Italy and landed in a town just below Mount Edna. I was thrown into the hospital because I broke my leg. When I got back to them, the Canadians had gone quite a ways already. There were quite a few Indian boys there and most of them were in the infantry and machine gunners. We were of very good use to our buddies. We had all volunteered, and it seemed like we had bitten off more than we could chew. I saw Henry and Tom Starr there, and that was about 2 days before Henry was taken prisoner.

Finally, we won there and were sent to the south part of France. We finally got to Belgium, did some training, and then they sent us right to the front lines. We crossed the Rhien River and I was transferred to the Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry. That was in 1945. The war ended on May 8th. Boy, everybody was happy. We all shot into the air. The Germans did it too. We could not celebrate. We had no liquor and we were so tired we just went to bed. I don't remember how long we'd been up, but I know I was very tired. It was about 8 o'clock when it was all over. I was with Jonas Starblanket, who has also seen some hard times, having been wounded 3 times. He is from Sandy Lake Reserve and we had gone to school together.

Three of us were keeping this house. We got a phone call saying that they wanted us to go and fight the Japanese. We were promised \$100 and 30 days leave in Canada. Quite a few of us Indians joined up and then came home right away, but while we were at home Japan gave up, so that was the end of that.

Then trouble started in Korea, and a lot of us Indians went again. I was in the front lines again, then it ended too. I was in the same company and the same regiment in two wars!



I could tell a lot about war, but I've never done that. It wasn't all war. There were good times too. I tell these stories just to make people laugh.

The government said we had to go to war, but we all volunteered and when we came home we were promised things. I heard we were supposed to be given things. I wouldn't understand and I didn't know, but Indian Affairs was handling everything for us. We were given much less than our White buddies. We couldn't start farming. We had no land because it belonged to others. I didn't take my grant right away because we were having trouble over the land, even though I was in the army for 9 years and 8 months, and fought in two wars.

## Our Legacy

Canadians have so much to be thankful to First Nations Veterans for. Our legacy includes war heroes like David Greyeyes, Joe Dreaver and George Munroe.

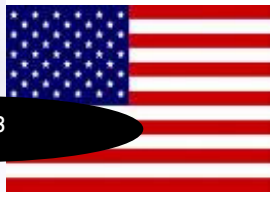
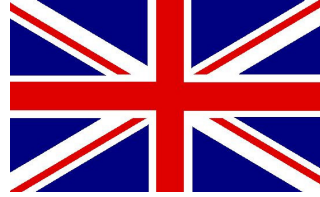
### Did you know?

Saskatchewan had its own code talker during WWII. George was a Cree man from Muskoday who was involved with the Canadian Code Talkers. These men would communicate important information in Cree during a battle. Like many First Nations soldiers, George was also a sniper and a scout. When on a solo mission, perched high in a tree, he observed an ambush being set up by the Germans. He quickly communicated this information, in Cree, to a comrade headed for this ambush. He was able to save the lives of 119 men, and he proceeded to engage the enemy. He was seriously wounded, having been hit three times. For his bravery, he was awarded the Military Medal.

In addition to their bravery, heroism and sacrifices, First Nations Veterans have contributed so much to Canada and to First Nations, specifically, since they came home.

For instance:

- First Nations Veterans started the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) as a way to fight against the unfair treatment that First Nations received during and after the wars. For example, in the 1960s, all the Chiefs of the FSIN were Veterans.
- Saskatchewan First Nations Veterans formed their own association in the early 1980s. First known as the Saskatchewan Indian Veterans Association, it is now the Saskatchewan First Nations Veterans Association (SFNVA). This organization is dedicated to closing the gap in the quality of life for First Nations Veterans and their families, and to raising public awareness of the First Nations people's contributions to Canada's freedom and democracy. The SFNVA works with children and youth to help instill pride in them as a result of First Nations heritage, contributions and accomplishments.



- Saskatchewan First Nations Veterans were instrumental in developing the Department of National Defense's Bold Eagle Program. The goals and objectives of the joint Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and Department of National Defense Bold Eagle program is to provide Aboriginal youth with an opportunity for meaningful summer employment, exposure to cultural and traditional activities, and an adequate level of training to prepare them for careers within the Canadian Forces and law enforcement. The program is open to Treaty First Nations youth over the age of 16.
- Throughout the year, First Nations Veterans visit schools across Saskatchewan to promote pride in our country and to raise public awareness of soldiers' lives, contributions and history.
- Saskatchewan First Nations Veterans assist Veterans in historical research, funeral services and benefit applications.

## ***If you enjoy your freedom, thank a Veteran***

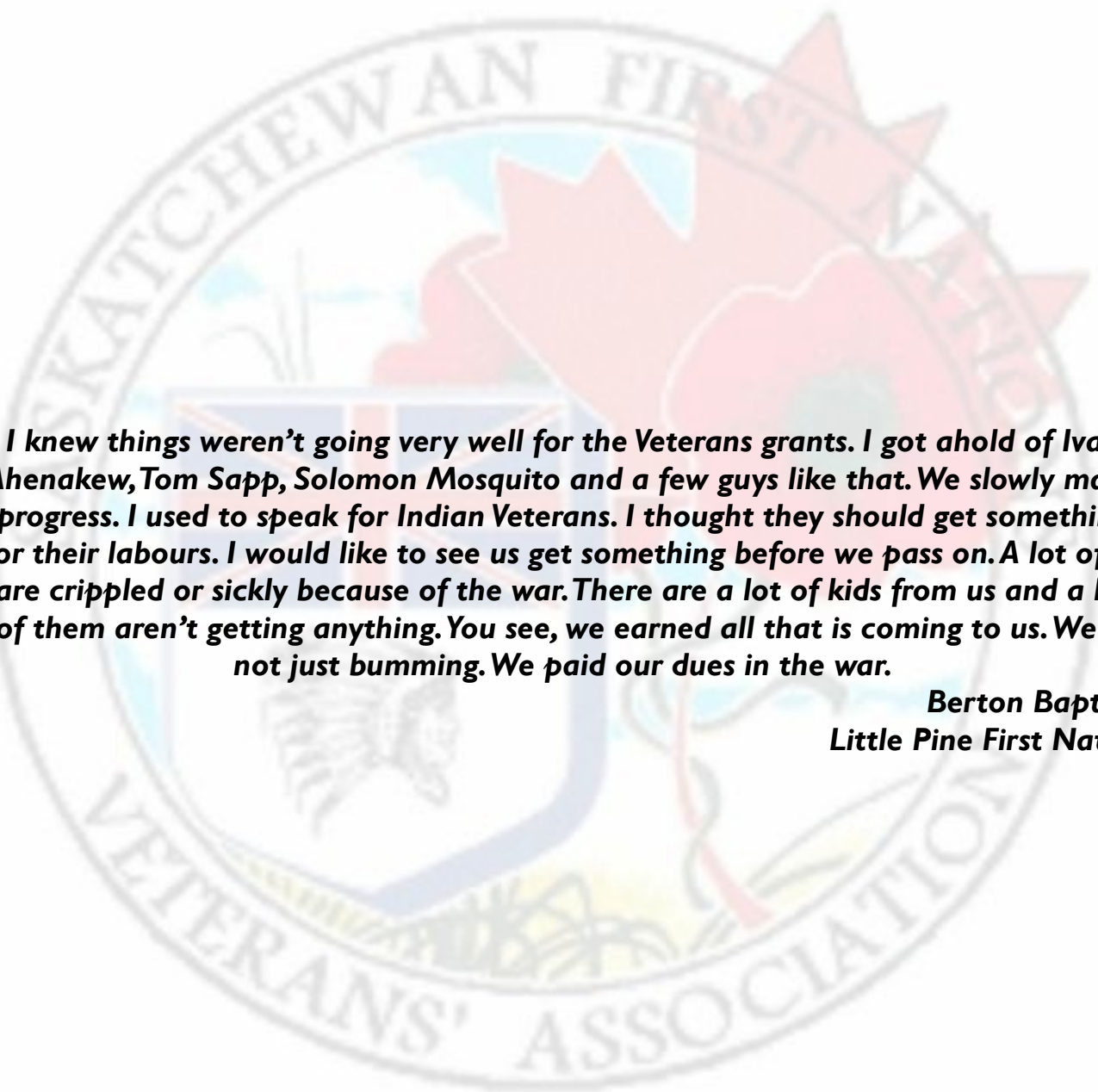


**The SFNVA Executive with Minister Bill Hutchinson (Province of Saskatchewan) and Vice Chief Dutch Lerat (The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations).**

**Front Row (left to right):** Grand Chief Emile Highway, Minister Hutchinson, Ronald (Rocky) Redwood, Arthur Anderson

**Back Row (left to right):** Vice Chief Dutch Lerat, George Benson, Phillip Ledoux

**Missing:** Ray Sanderson



*I knew things weren't going very well for the Veterans grants. I got ahold of Ivan Ahenakew, Tom Sapp, Solomon Mosquito and a few guys like that. We slowly made progress. I used to speak for Indian Veterans. I thought they should get something for their labours. I would like to see us get something before we pass on. A lot of us are crippled or sickly because of the war. There are a lot of kids from us and a lot of them aren't getting anything. You see, we earned all that is coming to us. We're not just bumming. We paid our dues in the war.*

**Berton Baptiste**  
**Little Pine First Nation**

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