

MEDALS AND MEMORIES: First Nations

Character Education

- Explore multiple perspectives to achieve consensus on universal attributes
- Develop common ground on the values we share as Canadians
- Learn to think critically about the world
- Increase levels of personal and social responsibility

Facts

- More than 7000 persons, then called Indians, served in WWI, WWII and the Korean War, along with an unknown number of Métis and other individuals with First Nations heritage
- Francis Pegahmagabow, from Ontario was the most highly decorated Canadian native in WWI; among his many medals was the Military Medal with two bars for bravery
- Tommy Prince from Manitoba earned 11 medals during WWII and Korea including the American Silver Star for gallantry

Before the Reading

- What do you know about Joseph Brant or Molly Brant or any other First Nations persons who in the past served Canada in war and peace?
- If you could award medals, or create a new medal for service to Canada, what would you call your medal and what criteria would you set for earning the medal?
- How may you serve your country even without wearing its uniforms?

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Francis Pegahmagabow (1891-1952) three times awarded the Military Medal in WWI was an expert marksman and scout credited with killing up to 378 Germans and capturing 300 more. The Ojibwa from Parry Island was twice wounded but willingly returned to his unit after recovery. His citation for the Battle of Passchendaele reads, "November 6th/7th, 1917, this NCO did excellent work. Before and after the attack he kept in touch with the flanks, advising the units he had seen, this information proving the success of the attack and saving valuable time in consolidating." Francis served in the Algonquin Regiment after 1919, as chief of the Parry Island Band 1921–1925 and as Supreme Chief of the Native Independent Government in 1943. Joseph Boyden's 2005 novel *Three Day Road* was inspired in part by Pegahmagabow.

Reading #1 – A Fighting Tradition

Remembrance Day provides opportunities to celebrate the contributions of those who forged Canada's values throughout its history. What better place to start than with the service of Canada's First Nations. The Brant family provides glimpses of long ago battles and important ways First Nations contributed to Canadians evolving sense of identity.



Joseph Brant

Mohawk Chief and British Military Officer, Joseph Brant, received a silver medal from the British for his service in French and Indian war expeditions such as the 1759 Battle of Fort Niagara. Joseph and his sister Molly became famous during the American Revolutionary War for their loyalty and service to the British Crown. Molly with her intelligence and knowledge of colonial administration wielded power over

the Mohawk warriors; Joseph, distinguished by his acts of bravery and knowledge of native languages, rose to the rank of Captain. Both siblings worked tirelessly for native rights within a strong Canada.

In 1850 the remains of Joseph Brant were carried 55 km in relays on the shoulders of young men of Grand River to a tomb at Her Majesty's Chapel of the Mohawks in Brantford.

John Brant, like his father Joseph, typified loyalty to the British Crown. John, known as Ahyouwaighs, fought against the Americans in the War of 1812. John travelled to London, to appear before parliament and meet with the king. In 1821 he sought to serve his country as a member of the Canadian Party. He lost his seat for Haldimand to a rival candidate and both he and his opponent died of cholera before Brant could regain his authority over his disputed place in government.

Lieutenant Cameron Brant, the great-great-grandson of Joseph Brant continued his family's traditions of service to country by going to military school after graduating from Hagersville High School. He served with the 37th Regiment, Haldimand Rifles for six years until 1912. August 7, 1914, Cameron was the first member of the Six Nations Reserve to enlist. He received a lieutenant's commission while assigned to the 4th Infantry Battalion in Valcartier, Quebec; the battalion shipped out for Europe October 3, 1914, as part of the first Canadian contingent to go overseas.

Lieutenant Brant was killed April 23, 1915, when he led his men "over the top" at the Battle of Ypres in Belgium. Brant, who always led by example, did not shirk in the face of a fierce German attack which had been preceded by the release of poison gas. His commanding officer said of him that, "The boys will follow him anywhere." His body was never recovered.

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When **Tommy Prince (1915-1977)** was presented the Military Medal and Silver Star on behalf of the American President by King George VI at Buckingham Palace, he had come a long way from being turned down for military service in Manitoba. Prince made his name with the elite First Special Service Force dubbed the Devil's Brigade. In 1944 in Italy Prince set up for four days behind enemy lines in an abandoned farmhouse to report the location of German assembly points. When the 1,400 metres of telephone wire connecting him to his forces was knocked out, Prince grabbed a hoe and civilian clothing and rejoined the break in the wire while pretending to tie his shoe laces. The citation for his Military Medal read, "Sergeant Prince's courage and utter disregard for personal safety were an inspiration to his fellows and a marked credit to his unit". Later in Italy under similarly difficult circumstances, Prince reported information that led the brigade to capture over a thousand German soldiers.

For a CBC News' Soldiers Assignment student Peter Boggis from the North West Territories wrote, "I thank you, Cameron D. Brant, for the bravery and devotion you showed,/ For the honour, the patriotism, and the love./ For you gave up the greatest gift of all, your life, / For Canada, for freedom, and for me. / And I shall never forget it."

Cameron D. Brant was one of 17 descendants of Joseph Brant who served in WWI. The Six Nations recognized the accomplishments of another descendant of Joseph Brant, Dr. Gilbert Monture, when they made him honorary chief with the name Ohstoserakowa—or Big Feather. Dr. Monture provided service to his country during three wars.

Monture, a 1.83 metre tall engineering student postponed his studies in 1917 to become a gunner in the Royal Canadian Field Artillery. He was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Royal Canadian Engineers but was too late to see battlefield action. After WWI, Monture served in the militia for five years as a lieutenant. When WWII broke out, Dr. Monture was prevented from serving due to a hand injury he'd suffered in a mining accident. Instead, he became the Canadian Executive Officer of the combined Canadian, American and British Production and Resources Board allocating strategic minerals for the war effort—work for which he received an Order of the British Empire.

Dr. Monture continued to serve his country with resources planning for the Korean War and later in peace time for NATO. The strong sense of duty of Dr. Monture, and of all Joseph Brant's descendants, stands for all the individuals with First Nations heritage who have gone out of their way to serve their country.

During a spiritual journey to Europe in 2005, then 18 year old Dakota Brant was studying the Mohawk language of her ancestor Joseph Brant. She found the name of her grand-uncle Cameron Brant on the Menin Gate Memorial among the names of 54,896 Commonwealth soldiers who died in the Ypres Salient during WWI and who have no known grave: "You'd have to have a heart of stone not to feel anything", the young woman told *Legion Magazine*.

You would have to have a heart of stone not to appreciate other First Nations sacrifices—Chief Joe Dreaver who earned the Military Medal for bravery in the field in Belgium in WWI and who re-enlisted for WWII; he left his farm in Saskatchewan bringing 17 men with him, including his three sons—John McLeod who served overseas in WWI. Of his six sons and one daughter who enlisted in WWII, two sons gave their lives and another two were wounded.

Roughly half the eligible Mi'kmaq and Maliseet men of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia signed up in WWII; Saskatchewan's File Hills community sent nearly all its eligible men to war. Every single man of the Head Lake Band of British Columbia volunteered. In spite of huge communication difficulties of the news of WWII reaching into Canada's far north, 100 Ojibwa from isolated areas north of Thunder Bay, served mostly in the 52nd Canadian Light Infantry Battalion; six were awarded medals for bravery.

For more than three centuries, individuals like these from the First Nations have modelled duty, loyalty, courage, sacrifice, commitment and capability. It is a fitting legacy to remember and a great one upon which to base a Canadian sense of identity.



Ahyouwaighs John Brant and Cameron Douglas Brant

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Edith Anderson Monture

(1890-1996), a descendant of Joseph Brant, was born on the Six Nations Grand River Reserve.

Unable to study nursing in Canada, Edith graduated in New York State. She was the first Native Canadian woman to train and work as a nurse. In 1917, along with 14 other Canadian nurses, she joined the U.S. Medical Corps; she was one of only two native nurses sent to Vittel, France. Anderson spent her time treating shot and gassed soldiers. "We would walk right over where there had been fighting. It was an awful sight—buildings in rubble, trees burnt, spent shells all over the place, whole towns blown up." Edith remembered a young 20 year old American patient with a neck wound. "We finally managed to stop the bleeding and settled the boy down The night after that he died. I got his mother's address in the States and wrote her telling her I was with her son when he passed away." After the war, Edith married and raised a family working part time as a nurse in the Six Nations Reserve Hospital.



After the Reading

- What characteristics or qualities did Joseph and Molly Brant have that are shared by their descendants?
- Peter Boggis and Dakota Brant are modern young people who took an interest in First Nations heritage. How was each rewarded by his or her search?
- If you are far from the center of events, you often feel less the need to be involved. Why then did Native Canadians from the most remote areas feel the need to serve in war?

Extensions

- Some First Nations groups, unlike those in the reading above, had grave concerns about serving in Canada's Armed Forces during WWI and WWII. Research their issues and discuss to what extent these issues have been resolved.
- Research the Spiritual Journey of 2005, during the Year of the Veteran and find out about the "Calling Home Ceremony". Why do you think these types of commemorative events bring significant meaning to those who participate? What other ceremonies or events do the same?
- November 8th is Aboriginal Veterans Day and June 21st is National Aboriginal Day. What does your school do to commemorate these days? When you plan for Remembrance Day or for the end of the school year, build in a First Nations Commemoration that starts with: "Today we give thanks ..."

Sources

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