

Indigenous Veterans Day recognized on Nov. 8

Written By **AUGUST BETTINELLI** Special to the Free Press

Throughout the years, Indigenous soldiers have played a role in helping to maintain the peace and stability Canadian society strives for.

Chief Tecumseh and his soldiers fought alongside the British, led by General Sir Isaac Brock, in the War of 1812.

Contributions of Ojibwa, Odawa, Pottawatomi, Shawnee, Six Nations, Algonquin, Mohawk, Huron, and Abenaki warriors played a significant role in winning several battles, an act that would not have been done without their efforts.

In World War One, around 4000 Indigenous people served in uniform; bringing patience and stealth — both critical skills — to the armed forces as snipers and reconnaissance scouts.

A total of 3,000 Indigenous soldiers fought in the Second World War, serving in the Navy, Air Force and Army.

Along with roles of scouts and snipers, Cree speaking Indigenous soldiers translated sensitive radio messages into their own language to be passed along, this way they would not be understood if intercepted by the enemy.

Contributions on the homefront included donations and granted use of reserve land for rifle ranges, defence installations and airports.

Many soldiers returning from their service in World War Two re-enlisted to serve in the Korean War as well, among these were several hundred Indigenous peoples.

Despite their efforts, Indigenous Veterans were not treated equally to others, unable to lay wreaths and have their own formed guards at Ottawa's National War Memorial on Remembrance Day until the mid 1990s.

First established in 1994 in Manitoba, Nov. 8 is now recognized as 'Indigenous Veterans Day', and is to honour the upward of 12,000 soldiers that have been fighting for freedom and peace.

'Throughout our history, Indigenous Veterans have not always been treated equally. Today serves as a reminder of their important contributions and bravery,' said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in a statement on Nov. 8.

'As we continue to walk the shared path of reconciliation, the government is working to ensure that all Indigenous veterans receive the recognition, the support, and the care they deserved.'

On Nov. 8, the Royal Canadian Legion issued a statement, thanking Indigenous Veterans for their service, and acknowledge the contributions of all soldiers, past and present, some of which gave the ultimate sacrifice.