

News Release

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First Nations, Métis and Inuit Veterans Journey to Battlefields of Europe

Ottawa - First Nations, Métis and Inuit people who gave their lives in wartime will be honoured during events in Europe this fall, Veterans Affairs Minister, the Honourable Albina Guarnieri announced today.

Aboriginal spiritual leaders from across Canada will conduct Calling Home Ceremonies, incorporating the customs and traditions of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people, to return the spirits of fallen warriors to their homelands and put them to rest with their ancestors in Canada.

Twenty Aboriginal Veterans of the Second World War and 13 Aboriginal youth, representing every region of Canada, will accompany the Spiritual Leaders and will visit a number of commemorative sites related to the First and Second World Wars, including Ypres, Vimy Ridge, and Juno Beach in Normandy. Visits to Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemeteries will offer an opportunity for the delegation to pay their respects to the fallen. In addition, an Inukshuk will be constructed and placed at an appropriate overseas location to serve as a permanent reminder of the contribution of Canada's First Peoples in service to their country.

"Our warriors did not have a chance to receive their traditional farewell," said Ray Rogers, Chairman of the First Nations Veterans of Canada. "Bringing home their spirits is an important journey of healing and closure. It unites the past, the present and the future."

"The Calling Home Ceremony is a vision from the spirits of the warriors of old brought to Veterans on the wings of a Great Eagle from the Creator. A cry from the ancestor for the spirits of our fallen warriors to be reunited to their ancestral homelands. To bring closure to our families and our Nations while teaching our children and Canada that we also served with honour," added Ed Borchert, President of the National Métis Veterans Association.

"We want Canada to know that our Aboriginal soldiers were in every major battle won by Canadian regiments. We are proud of our Dene warriors and those who paid the ultimate sacrifice with their lives. This spiritual journey will offer a peace of mind to us, and an opportunity to pay our respects to our fallen warriors with thanksgiving prayers, and spiritual ceremonies. We shall remember them," said Tom Eagle, representing Veterans North of 60.

The delegation will assemble in Ottawa on October 25. They will return to Canada on November 4 and participate in the launch of Veterans' Week 2005.

Aboriginal Spiritual Leaders and leaders of organizations representing Aboriginal Veterans proposed the overseas ceremonies, which are being undertaken with the support of the Government of Canada through Veterans Affairs Canada and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

“I hope this unprecedented *Year of the Veteran* event will cast new light on the significant wartime participation, contribution, and sacrifices of Aboriginal people from all across Canada,” said Minister Guarnieri. “This will be a unique opportunity for Canadians to join together in recognition and gratitude.”

“As an expression of Canada's gratitude, the Government of Canada has undertaken a commitment to preserve and pass on the contributions and achievements of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Veterans to future generations,” said the Honourable Andy Scott, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians. “I hope that the Calling Home Ceremony and associated events will highlight the significant sacrifices that First Nations, Inuit and Métis people have made for their country.”

Thousands of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people served Canada in the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War. More than 500 known Aboriginal war dead are buried in Commonwealth War Graves Commission and other cemeteries around the world.

2005 is the Year of the Veteran: Celebrate. Honour. Thank. Remember. Teach.

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