

War and the Métis – Darren R. Préfontaine

Module Objectives:

The students will learn about:

- The impact of war had upon Métis communities and families.
- How military recruitment practices focused on the Métis and First Nations population.
- What socio-economic factors led to the participation of many Métis into WWI, WWII and the Korean War.
- Why people enlist when called upon and why people sometimes oppose going to war.
- Difficulties Métis war veterans faced when they returned from military service.
- The issues of race, class and gender in relation to Métis' participation in Canada's military.
- The so-called "Warrior ideal" to see if it has any resonance in fact and with Aboriginal people.
- How war has both a cynical and spiritual view through the study of wartime poetry, and from writing their own war poetry.
- The concerns of Métis veterans presented to the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples that studied the treatment of Aboriginal veterans in Canada.
- Tracing and researching family military history and obtaining military records.

Prayer for Métis Veterans

*As Métis we are standing
We'll bow our heads in prayer
"God Bless those Métis Veterans who
Saw war and who fought there*

*There are many of them buried
In far off foreign lands
So proud to serve because of them
Now Canada's freedom stands*

*In prayers we will remember
The awful price they'd pay
They gave up their tomorrows
for us to live day*

Author unknown

Since their beginnings as a people, the Métis have been involved in both regular and irregular military activity. They were traditionally guerilla warriors par excellence. Like other Aboriginal nations, the Métis preferred to fight short skirmishes using the element of surprise, knowledge of local terrain and superior marksmanship rather than engaging in pitched European-style battles. The

battles at Seven Oaks (June 19, 1816), Duck Lake (March 26, 1885) Fish Creek (April 24, 1885) were short skirmishes, in which the Métis surprised their opponents from bluffs or embankments with a precise and merciless volley of musket fire. It is not surprising that the mere threat of force by Métis warriors was often enough to get results. For instance, in 1849, a large and boisterous group of Métis riflemen "compelled" a Hudson's Bay Company magistrate to release free trader Guillaume Sayer and acquit him of contravening the Company's fur trade monopoly. Even the Métis' rivals accorded them respect for their martial prowess. The Canadian government, for example, hired Métis guides and scouts to patrol the US-Canadian border in the early 1870s.

Traditional Métis soldiers were well organized. The paramilitary organization of their buffalo hunts provided the Métis with a command structure and discipline, which few could match. For instance, on 13 June 1851, at the Battle of Grand Coteau, in present day North Dakota, 64 Métis men and 13 boys devised an ingenious strategy to defeat more than 1000-2000 Dakota Sioux, the most formidable warriors on the Plains. The Métis dug deep rifle pits around their improvised barricades consisting of Red River carts and supply packages. At each Dakota charge, the Métis picked off several warriors before they got close enough to fire their arrows into the barricades. After a long day of fighting, no Métis were killed and anywhere from 18 to 85, Dakota were slain. Unfortunately, a similar defensive strategy proved less successful at the Battle of Batoche (May 8-12 1885) since the Canadians and British had much greater fire power including modern infantry rifles, small arms, artillery and a machine gun.

After 1885, the Métis ironically began joining the very army, which had defeated and oppressed their ancestors. As early as the South African War (1899-1902), some Métis served in Canada's newly created volunteer regiments. More Métis men enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) during the First World War. Métis enlistees took part in the bloody fighting at the First Ypres (April 1915), the Somme (August 1916), Vimy Ridge (April 9, 1917), Passchendaele (October-November 1917), and the famed "One Hundred Days" (August 8 until November 11, 1918). One of the many Métis heroes of the First World War was Henry Nor'West (1880s?-1918), the best sniper in the CEF. Before he was killed at the Battle of Amiens, he had 115 registered kills. Ironically, in 1918, he too was killed by a sniper. Henry Nor'West might have had a promising rodeo career had he not been killed.

The Métis had an even more prominent role in the Second World War. Such regiments and battalions as the South Saskatchewan Regiment, the Regina Rifles and the Royal Winnipeg Rifles had large numbers of Métis soldiers. The Métis were really forgotten "warriors" in this war. Some such as the late Métis Nation of Saskatchewan Senator Vital Morin languished in German prisoner of war camp for several years. Still others such as the late Joseph MacGillivray of Cumberland House, who captured the infamous German general Kurt Meyer, received no government recognition for their service. Métis soldiers took part in the Defence of Hong Kong (December 7-25, 1941), the Dieppe Raid (August 19, 1942), the battle for Ortona (May 23-31, 1944), D-Day (June 6, 1944), the Falaise Campaign (August 7-16, 1944), the Battle of the Scheldt (October 31 – November 8, 1944), the Rhineland Campaign (February 1945) and the Liberation of the Netherlands (March 1945).

During both world wars, whole Métis communities such as Cumberland House, Saskatchewan, Grouard, Alberta and St. Laurent, Manitoba enlisted. Métis communities were greatly effected when the men left for war since many Métis women were forced to take over their husband's traplines and hunted game for their families' survival. Rose Fleury, a Métis woman, remembers that:

It was quite hard for us. Because the women had to do all the work and things like that. So we even stooked. I was old enough. I was only I guess thirteen – fourteen at that timee – and I was helping Mom stook for the farmers. Because they didn't have no men to do anything like that.

Moreover, many Métis returned emotionally scarred from war. When Métis veterans were discharged, they became influential leaders because they had gained self-confidence, and brought new skills and abilities to their home communities. Their treatment overseas often differed from that, which they received upon coming home. As the late Métis Nation of Saskatchewan Senator Edward King related: "As Indians and half-breeds we were really respected over there. I was surprised, because we could go into any place there, but back home not all of us could go in the bars".

The oral history indicates that men, and women (as nurses and support personnel), enlisted for a variety of reasons including: a sense of adventure, because their "chums" enlisted, patriotism, steady pay and health care, and the ability to acquire a trade or skills. Economic considerations weighed heavily on those Métis that enlisted. According to Métis veteran Mederic McDougall: "There were a lot of our people, the half-breed people, that were living under pretty poor conditions and of course, a lot of people think that anything is better than living under poor conditions". Military recruiters in both world wars also commonly held the stereotypical view of the Indian and Métis as ferocious

warriors. They tried to enlist as many Aboriginal recruits as they could, often by dishonest means. According to Pierre Vandale, "There was one fellow going around to dances and things like that and he would tell them "I'll hire you". And they would sign up or whatever...So a lot got involved in going to war. And they didn't know why they were going or where they were going".

Nobody knows for sure how many Métis served in the two world wars. During both world wars, the Canadian average for enlistment of males between 18-45 was roughly between 40-50%. The Métis almost certainly enlisted in the wars at a much higher rate proportionally. It has been estimated that 20,000 Aboriginal men and women served in the two World Wars and in the Korean War. The Métis also served in the Korean War and in the Canadian and American peacetime armies. The Canadian Forces has, in recent years, stepped up its efforts to recruit further Métis.

Within Métis communities, veterans are accorded great respect. Métis cultural gatherings such as Back to Batoche and the Prince Albert Métis Fall Festival always honour Métis veterans. However, after both world wars and to the present day, Métis veterans have struggled to receive benefits to which they were entitled, and have more often encountered racism from the wider society and neglect from Veterans Affairs Canada. In March 1995, to rectify these grievances, the federal government tabled a report on the treatment of Aboriginal veterans following the First World War, the Second World War and the Korean War. From these hearings, it was decided to create a yearly scholarship program for Aboriginal students interested in pursuing a post-secondary education.

A Brief Historiography of Métis Veterans

J. L. Granatstein, Canada's pre-eminent military historian, argues that Canadians have largely forgotten Canada's heroic efforts in 1914-18 and 1939-45.¹ If Canadians have little knowledge about the sacrifices made by past generations in war, what would they know of the role played by First Nations, Inuit and Métis veterans? Despite systematic racism, Métis Canadians have loyally served Canada in the world wars, United Nations police actions and in other military duties. Indeed, the Métis eagerly volunteered to fight for "King" and "Country".² However, the Gabriel Dumont Institute has produced the only book, which exclusively deals with the wartime experiences of Métis veterans, during World War One, World War Two and the Korean War.³ Some authors including the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples,⁴ Fred Gaffens,⁵ the Department of Veterans Affairs⁶, the Canadian Senate⁷, the Saskatchewan Federation of Indian Nations⁸, Daniel Byers⁹, Michael Stevenson¹⁰, R. Scott Sheffield¹¹, Maureen

¹ J. L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* Toronto: Harper Collins Publisher Ltd., 1998, pp. 111-35.

² Enlistment ratios for the Métis were high during both world wars. However, we are not certain of how many Métis people served Canada in war; many if not most, were listed as French or English Canadians. Furthermore, no government or religious and private agency has ever completed a thorough enumeration of Métis enlistees and conscripts. However, if enlistment ratios for English Canadians during the Second World War were at 45-50% for all able-bodied males between 18 and 45, and the First Nations component was even higher, one could assume that the Métis enlisted in equally great numbers. In both world wars, whole Métis communities enlisted, including Cumberland House, Saskatchewan and St. Albert, Alberta. This is the hidden history of the Métis, which all Canadians should know. For an estimation of First Nations enlistment ratios for the province of Saskatchewan consult the *Sweeney Report* (1979), which was produced by the Saskatchewan Federation of Indian Nations. For enlistment ratios for various ethnic groups in Canada during the two World Wars consult J.L. Granatstein and J. M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscripted in Canada*. Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1985, pp. 97-98 and 185-244. See also Serge Bernier, "Participation des Canadiens Français aux Combats: Evaluation et Tentative de Quantification", *Bulletin d'histoire politique*, Vol.3, Nos. 3/4, pp. 15-24

³ Gabriel Dumont Institute, *Remembrances: Interviews with Metis Veterans*. Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 1997.

⁴ Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 1: *Looking Forward and Looking Back*. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1996, pp. 545-98.

⁵ Gaffens, Fred. *Forgotten Soldiers*. Penticton, British Columbia: Theytus Books, 1985.

⁶ Government of Canada, Department of Veteran's Affairs, *Native Soldiers: Foreign Battlefields*. 1993.

⁷ The Senate of Canada, the Honourable Raynell Andreychuck, Chairperson and the Honourable Len Marchand Deputy Chairperson, *The Aboriginal Soldier After the Wars*, Ottawa: 1995, pp. 1-48

⁸ Saskatchewan Indian Veterans Association, *We Were There*. Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, 1989.

Simpkins¹² and Carrielynn Lamouche¹³ have written short histories of Aboriginal service people in war. There is very little Métis content in these books and articles; however, further insights are provided into the military lives of James Brady¹⁴ and Louie Nor'West¹⁵, two famous Métis service men. Métis filmmaker, Loretta Todd's "Forgotten Warriors"¹⁶ analyses the reasons, which compelled Aboriginal people to enlist and what social problems they faced when they returned home. Howard Margolian lists many of the Canadian service men, many of who were Aboriginal enlistees in the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, who were murdered during the Second World War by an armed branch of the Hitler Youth in July 1944¹⁷.

The Métis veterans interviewed by the Gabriel Dumont Institute insisted that they either did not encounter racism in the war years, or if they did, it was usually an isolated event¹⁸. Unfortunately, racism did occur after each group of veterans returned home to Canada, in 1919, 1945-46 and 1953. The misappropriation of Aboriginal lands during the two World Wars and the loss of First Nations' status for many Aboriginal service people are important issues,

⁹ Byers, Daniel, "Mobilising Canada: The National Resources Mobilization Act, the Department of national Defence, and Compulsory Military Service in Canada, 1940-1945", *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*. Vol. 7, 1996, pp. 175-205.

¹⁰ Stevenson, Michael, D., "The Mobilisation of Native Canadians During the Second World War", *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*. Vol. 7, 1996, pp. 205-226.

¹¹ R. Scott Sheffield, " 'Of Pure European Descent and of the White Race': Recruitment policy and Aboriginal Canadians, 1939-45", *Canadian Military History*, Volume 5, Number 1, Spring 1996, pp. 8-15.

¹² Maureen Simpkins, "The Sniper in the Shadows", *The Beaver*, August and September 1998, pp. 17-21.

¹³ Carrielynn Lamouche, "The Face of Service: Alberta Métis in the Second World War", in Ken Tingley, Editor, *For King and Country: Alberta in the Second World War*. Edmonton: The Provincial Museum of Alberta, 1995, pp. 33-38.

¹⁴ Murray Dobbin, *The One-And-A-Half Men: The Story of Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris, Metis Patriots of the 20th Century*. Regina: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 1981, pp. 138-44 and Gaffen, *Forgotten Soldiers*, pp.57-64.

¹⁵ Department of Veteran's Affairs, *Native Soldiers: Foreign Battlefields*, pp. 11-13

¹⁶ Todd, Loretta. "Forgotten Warriors: The Story of Canada's Aboriginal Veterans." National Film Board of Canada, 1996.

¹⁷Howard Margolian, *Conduct Unbecoming: The Story of the Murder of Canadian Prisoners of War in Normandy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.

¹⁸ Gabriel Dumont Institute, *Remembrances*, pp. 6, 14, 22 and 64.

which need further analysis. Many reserve lands were confiscated and many service people lost their status, even after serving over seas¹⁹. Also, more material is needed to analyse how those Métis who went off to fight overseas became many of the leaders in the struggle to establish Métis political organisations.

In Aboriginal communities across Canada and in academia, it is generally accepted that when First Nations and Métis veterans returned to Canada in 1919 and 1945-46, they were instrumental in forming the early Aboriginal political movements. The experiences they gained overseas gave them the self-confidence and understanding of non-Aboriginal society to represent their communities' long-standing grievances.

War and date	The Side the Métis fought on and their opponents
The War of the Conquest (1754-1763 the "Seven Years War" or the "French and Indian War).	The French Empire and most First Nations versus the British Empire and the Five Nations Confederacy.
"The Conspiracy of Pontiac: (1763)	Great Lakes First Nations versus the British Empire
The American Revolutionary War (1775-1783)	Great Lakes First Nations and the British Empire versus the American colonists.
The War of 1812 (1812-1814)	The Great Lakes First Nations and the British Empire versus the United States of America.
The Hudson's Bay Company and North-West Company "War" (1800-1821)	The Northwest Company versus the Hudson's Bay Company.
The Battle of Seven Oaks (1816)	Cuthbert Grant's men versus the Hudson's Bay Company under Robert Semple.
The Battle of Grand Coteau (1851)	The Red River Métis versus the Dakota.
The American Civil War (1861-1865)	The Union versus the Confederacy.
The Red River Resistance (1869-70)	The Métis versus the "Canadian Party".
The 1885 Resistance (1885)	The Métis versus the Canadian State and the British Empire.
The South African War (1899-1902)	The British Empire versus the Afrikaners.
The First World War (1914-1918)	The British Empire versus the German Empire and the other Central Powers
The Second World War (1939-1945)	Canada versus Germany, Japan and Italy.
The Korean War (1950-1953)	The United Nations versus North Korea

¹⁹ See Todd, "Forgotten Warriors" and Volume 1: *Looking Forward and Looking Back*. pp. 571-81.

The Vietnam War (1961-1975) The Gulf War (1991) The Yugoslavian War (1999) The War against Terror (2002)	and China. The United States versus North Vietnam. The West versus Iraq. NATO versus Yugoslavia. The United States, Britain, Canada and others versus al-Qaeda and the Taliban.
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Métis and War Questions and Activities:

Métis people have long honoured their Métis veterans who served in WWI, WWII, and in the Korean War. Despite various resistances (1869-70 and 1885), Canada's Métis have willingly served the state in various conflicts from the time of New France (1534-1763) and into the modern era. These questions and activities assist in analyzing the experiences of Métis veterans in Canada's twentieth century war efforts.

Study Questions:

1. What impact did war have on Métis communities and families?
2. What were some of the benefits Métis people gained from joining the Canadian military?
3. Discuss the various roles Métis women and men played in the military.
4. Explain the recruitment practices followed by the Canadian military.
5. What were some of the motivating factors, which led many Métis to enlist in wars not immediately affecting their lives? Were these motives any different from non-Aboriginal Canadians?
6. Was the treatment of Aboriginal soldiers different from that of Euro-Canadians during the war years? How would their treatment in the military differ from that of other visible minorities particularly African or Japanese Canadians?
7. What skills did Métis and other Aboriginal soldiers possess that made them appreciated by other soldiers?
8. What problems did Métis veterans face when they returned home to Canada from fighting overseas? Did Métis war veterans receive the same treatment as their non-Métis comrades?
9. Many Métis women served Canada in the two World Wars and in the Korean War. What roles did they play? The students should conduct some background research on WWI or WWII military service occupations for women. Were Métis religious (Nuns) involved in the war effort?
10. How did Métis women cope when their men-folk were off fighting? What opportunities were open to them in various fields? How was their story similar and different from their non-Aboriginal sisters?
11. Have the students read Wilfred Owen's poem "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" and John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields". These poems offer

either a cynical view of war or a solemn and spiritual understanding of its sacrifices. Once these profound poems are read, have them write their own poetry or a short story about war. Encourage the students to set in circle and read their prose compositions. If possible, have them go to a veterans' hospital or a Legion branch and have them read their poems to veterans, and have the veterans comment on them.

12. Have the students discuss the concept of war. What kinds of wars are there? Why do people fight in wars? What factors have guided humanity's quest to fight with their neighbours? Has Canada participated in any wars, both domestically and abroad, which could be considered "unjust"? Why do countries sometimes make war on their own people? Are there any "just" wars? Divide the students in two groups. Have one group of students make a chart listing all the factors, which would lead some countries to fight in wars. Then have the second group present a list of ideas why some people have chosen not to fight in wars. When this is completed, have the two groups present their ideas in a forum.
13. One of the major themes in the historical narrative has been the Aboriginal military mystic. Have the students enter a discussion circle and have them analyze the so-called "warrior ethic". Is it a stereotype or is there some truth behind this concept? There is a large body of literature by non-Aboriginal people, which can be consulted, particularly regarding the portrayal of Indigenous people in film, art and in literature. Ask the students to study why this theory developed and why the Canadian state was so eager to enlist Aboriginal people in its wars. Also, have them ask Aboriginal people at a Friendship Centre or any other Aboriginal meeting place. This exercise will allow the students to possibly analyze how Aboriginal societies were constructed prior to and after contact with Europeans.
14. Discuss the findings of the 1995 Standing Senate Committee, which studied the treatment of Aboriginal veterans in Canada. What were the Métis veterans' concerns as compared to other Aboriginal groups?
15. Read the stories of the Métis veterans Edward King, Dorothy Askwith, Edward King, Ron Camponi from the book *Remembrances: Interviews with Métis Veterans*. Discuss their stories in a circle talk.
16. Interview a Métis war veteran and make a collection of these interviews. Here are some sample questions usually asked of Métis veterans:
 - Where did you enlist?
 - Why did you enlist?
 - What regiment did you serve in?
 - Did other Métis serve in your regiment?
 - What were their names?
 - How were Métis and other Native people treated in the military?
 - Did you encounter racism during the war?
 - What was your rank and duties during the war?
 - Where did you serve?
 - At any time during the war, were you proud of your Métis heritage or did you hide it?

- Were you proud to be a Canadian despite the racism, which many Métis faced at the time?
- What was it like to return home to Canada? What changed? What stayed the same?

Major activity:

Create a role-playing game in which recruiter tries to enlist Métis and other people during either the First or Second World War. Think of and try to develop strategies, which the recruiter would have used. Have the students assume the following roles:

- A Métis woman working on the trap line.
- A **nativist**, who thinks that non-English-Canadians are not doing enough for the war effort.
- An English-Canadian recruiting officer
- Métis, First Nations and Euro-Canadian recruits
- A government leader who believes in conscripting people to fight the war
- A pacifist who is opposed to war
- A minister, priest or spiritual person
- A minute taker

Have the students get together and arrange a town hall meeting in a mythical community, which has Métis, First Nations, French, English and Multicultural Canadian residents. The recruiting officer must present arguments why people should enlist, and the rest of the students, in assigned or selected roles, will provide arguments pro and con. Have them discuss the war as a contemporary and living event. Then have them list its affects including conscription, the role of women and ethnic and linguistic minorities in war, patriotism, the price of war in human, financial terms and other motivations for recruiting. The students should then debate all these issues as if they were adults living in the war years. The meeting should have minutes taken of the role-playing situation and a play could be developed from the minutes.

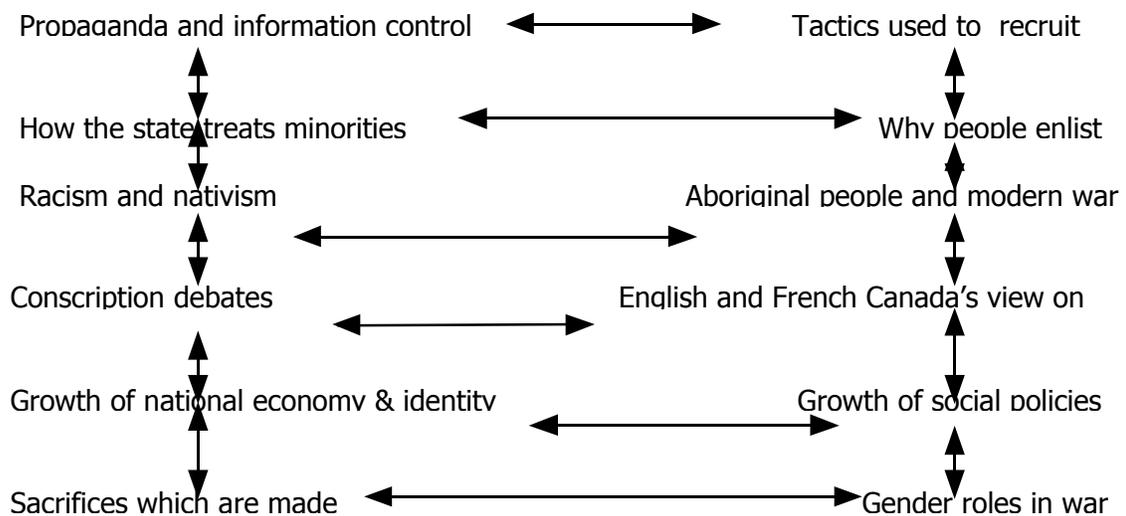
For this activity, the students and educators will have to consult:

- Newspapers, books and biographies printed during the war years
- Journal articles, documentaries, and academic and popular historical accounts of the war years
- Interviews with veterans should be encouraged.

As part of this exercise, find examples of wartime propaganda and recruiting literature and try to make effective arguments why people have to sometimes fight wars. By using examples from history and art history books, have the students create their own recruiting posters for Aboriginal, French, "multicultural" and English Canadians. Try and have the students figure out why separate recruiting posters and strategies would be needed for Canadians of different heritages. Ask the students why governments in democratic countries might have to resort to propaganda and information control in order to fight oppressive regimes.

Supplementary information:

Exercise Flow chart



Where information can be found about war veterans

Canadian military records are all kept in the National Archives of Canada. Personal records such as the recruitment forms and service records of all military employees are available; however, some restrictions do apply. For instance, not all World War II records can be released. Write the National Archives if you have any relatives whom served in WWI or WWII. This is a great addition to records of your family history.

National Archives of Canada
 Government Records Branch
 Personnel Records Centre
 Ottawa, Ontario
 K1A-0N3
 (<http://www.archives.ca>)

Key Terms and Concepts:

Patriotism is the love, which one feels for their country, and its history, culture and its traditions. Nationalism is a similar love of country, but it differs from patriotism in that it is mission-based. For instance, the mission of a Métis nationalist is to both preserve the culture and ameliorate the social conditions of Métis people, while ensuring that self-government and other aspects of Aboriginal heritage are recognized.

Nativism: Is a form of prejudice based on a mistrust of newcomers. At the centre of this ideology is a belief that non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants and Roman Catholics are potentially disloyal citizens because their first loyalty may be to the "home country" or to the Roman Catholic Church. This ideology was particularly strong during and following the two World Wars and the postbellum or post-war "Red Scares" in North America (1919, 1945-1949).

Sample interview with a veteran

On July 27, 1999, Darren R. Préfontaine (**DARREN**) interviewed Jim (**MR. LAVALLEY**) and Stella Lavalley (**MRS. LAVALLEY**). The interview discussed their life in the Métis community of Crooked Lake, traditional Métis life ways, their family, and Mr. Lavalley's experience as a soldier in the Canadian Army during the Second World War. Unfortunately, only 30% of the interview exists. Here are excerpts relating to Mr. Lavalley's experience as a veteran in the Second World War.

Excerpts:

DARREN: You forgot, like with Michif a lot of the old ways are tied to the language, like the way you see the world right? [Inaudible] I know in Cree that chairs and things like that are not inanimate that they are considered a living thing [Inaudible] can't speak Michif [Inaudible] At the Institute we recently put out a book about Métis veterans, have you seen it? [Inaudible] research that we do know is related to Métis veterans, both women and men, because of course women served [Inaudible] in Korea and beyond. So [then] we are trying to get a database of Métis veterans and try and get their story. [Inaudible] I'll ask you were any of your family that you know of did, they go to World War One?

DARREN And [sic] what was your uncle's name, please?

MR. LAVALLEY Jean-Baptiste.

MRS. LAVALLEY "J.B."

MR. LAVALLEY "J.B."

DARREN Jean-Baptiste Lavallée?

MR. LAVALLEY Yep.

DARREN And he fought in World War One?

MR. LAVALLEY Well I don't know if he fought, but he was in the army. Three brothers were there. My dad was not in. [Inaudible] I [had] seen pictures of them no too long ago.

MRS. LAVALLEY It seems I [had] seen [Inaudible].

DARREN Mrs. Lavalley did you have any family that served in World War One that you [Inaudible] From Crooked Lake there were probably a few people that would have went over.

MR. LAVALLEY My two brothers were in the army, but didn't go overseas.[Inaudible] They were able to go see, were able to go [Inaudible]

DARREN So [sic] they were in the Home Army then?

MR. LAVALLEY They were in the Home Guard, yes. One of them was discharged.

DARREN There were probably quite a few Métis that didn't go [Inaudible]

MR. LAVALLEY I [had] seen a lot of Métis from here [Inaudible] for sure there was two of us joined the army together and we were overseas together. [inaudible]

DARREN Mrs. Lavalley did anybody in your [Inaudible].

MR. LAVALLEY At Sun-Set Beach, they were taking names there and then they'd give you your transportation [Inaudible] send you by train from Regina and that's the way it goes. [Inaudible] the war started in thirty-nine [Inaudible].

DARREN [Inaudible] Patriotism, to get better jobs?

MR. LAVALLEY Well, not mainly. I used to work for a farmer. I was not around Crooked Lake at that time. I worked for a farmer. [Inaudible]

DARREN Watch out for him.

MR. LAVALLEY Watch out for me.

DARREN And [sic] for you too.

MR. LAVALLEY Yeah, but we visit in Regina here, and then [Inaudible]. I asked to go to re-enforcement [Inaudible] about three months [Inaudible] After I joined I was drafted in Nova Scotia. [Inaudible]

DARREN Oh, you went and trained.

MR. LAVALLEY I went trained as a re-enforcement.

DARREN Protect the garrison then?

MR. LAVALLEY Well, whatever it is, but I mean at time when I brother was in Nova Scotia [Inaudible] He said I got bad news for you, and I said "what kind?" [Inaudible]

DARREN So your brother, who you wanted to go serve with, is sent back and they sent you to Europe?

MR. LAVALLEY And I went on overseas.

DARREN With the Regina Rifles, you went overseas?

MR. LAVALLEY Yep...many, many people from all around "PA" and all over [Inaudible] we'd sit around and talk Michif.

DARREN That could be an advantage of being able to speak Michif with the Germans [Inaudible].

MR. LAVALLEY There was a lot of Native people that were [Inaudible] that had no education [Inaudible] and then they talked [Inaudible] to themselves and then they'd pass it on to their commanding [Inaudible] nobody but they were going to understand. [Inaudible] French, English different languages [Inaudible] European countries [Inaudible] some of them could understand except Native, they didn't understand. [Inaudible] Anybody in [Inaudible] that served in the Signal Corps [Inaudible] They talk about [Inaudible] Indian people with education were able to talk, communicate with one another, and pass it on [Inaudible]

DARREN It's a skill that the Métis [Inaudible] soldiers had. They were the best at that.

MR. LAVALLEY That was something that ah, ah [Inaudible] but those people there were talking and nobody else could understand them, except between themselves and they would pass it on to their commander. Nobody else on the radio could understand what they were talking about.

DARREN Would you say that the Métis and the Indians [Inaudible]

MR. LAVALLEY They got respect, a lot of respect. There was no such thing as an Indian or Michif.

DARREN English

MR. LAVALLEY Or English in the army, in the Canadian Army. They were all Canadians.

DARREN So [then] the racism didn't really cause a problem during the war?

MR. LAVALLEY No, no.

DARREN Even before going overseas?

MR. LAVALLEY Before going overseas, yeah I was plain Métis [Inaudible] I worked for a farmer, a Ukrainian farmer [inaudible]

DARREN So you, you are a , you thought of yourself as a Canadian before you went over or when your were in the war?

MR. LAVALLEY At that time I didn't think that I was Canadian when I was working [inaudible] I was just an ordinary guy. It's only after I joined the army that I would say I'm a Canadian, but they told me [Inaudible] I asked them what [Inaudible] What you are [Inaudible] you were nobody but a Canadian. In the army, it doesn't matter. [Inaudible]

DARREN When the civilians [Inaudible] had seen "Canada" on the sleeve of your jacket

MR. LAVALLEY I don't think that they were ever, pretty different. I think [Inaudible]

DARREN Where would you say things changed? [Inaudible] A lot of racism in your life personally?

MR. LAVALLEY No, I don't think that I ever had any.

DARREN [Inaudible] your rank and what were your duties?

MR. LAVALLEY A lance corporal and demoted to a rifleman.

DARREN Like a private?

MR. LAVALLEY Ah, it's above a private, but if you were a good shot well you gained in the regular [Inaudible] I was never a sniper. A sniper is, no I, we didn't , when I went in for a sniper we didn't get along. [Inaudible] if you didn't get along with the instructor [Inaudible]

DARREN So as a rifleman what were your general duties? [Inaudible] Belgium, did you serve in Italy as well or?

MR. LAVALLEY Yeah, I was in Italy.

DARREN [Inaudible] So [then] you were in [Inaudible] and Italy?

MR. LAVALLEY [Inaudible]

DARREN So [then] you were a "D-Day Dodger" and you were in Normandy as well? You were in the Falaise and all that, going into Belgium?

MR. LAVALLEY Um huh.

DARREN In the war [Inaudible].

MR. LAVALLEY Well either that or I think you'll never talk about war. That was something that you didn't like to talk about [Inaudible] You [sic] know the thing is you were never the boss of yourself. One day, when I was transferred from Regina Rifles to the [inaudible] they only gave me one hour [Inaudible]. I was in the army, I joined the army and we were always together in Crooked Lake, I could not tell him where I was going [Inaudible]. They'd tell you where to get off and there would be somebody there to meet you. Somebody to tell you. Then you'd go and start up, start making friends again. Those guys with who you are going, you [had] never seen them before. Start up again. It goes on and on. You'd pack [Inaudible]. You can't say "where am I going?" [Inaudible]

DARREN [Inaudible] That is your buddy, like the military is basically like [Inaudible] and it was more about looking after your own than carrying a Canadian flag. Would you say that was true of your experience?

MR. LAVALLEY That's true. You have to. Your friend was part of your eyes. [Inaudible]

DARREN Because you had to rely on everybody, and really [Inaudible] racism in Canada had no place because the guy you might be sharing a slit trench with [Inaudible] You had to rely on him for your life and yours.

MR. LAVALLEY He was a brother to you.

DARREN So [then] all the petty stuff it was just gone.

MR. LAVALLEY He was [Inaudible] they watch out for you.

DARREN In 1945, the war ended and [inaudible] when you came home to Canada what was it like, do you think the country changed a lot? And [then] how were you welcomed as a Métis veteran?

MR. LAVALLEY After the war ended, when we would chum around [Inaudible] that was Cochin. [inaudible] when you'd start talking that's [Inaudible] you went every year overseas [Inaudible]. Remember this [inaudible]. If you want to join the army, again in when you Canada you can do so, but from here [Inaudible].

DARREN So [then] they discouraged [Inaudible] the people that saw combat were withdrawing, yet they were going to send people who hadn't had much combat over to fight the Japanese.

MR. LAVALLEY That's right.

DARREN Did things change in Canada when you returned? Like with Métis people [Inaudible] things get worse, the poverty?

MR. LAVALLEY When I got back I don't think there were any changes.

DARREN No.

MR. LAVALLEY No. I didn't see any changes. I didn't see any changes of life or, they still lived the same way. I think the big change came around '52.

DARREN The Métis farm?

MR. LAVALLEY There was a Métis farm and the way that the farmers seem to have got [Inaudible] seemed to be going up well now. [Inaudible] The crops were getting bigger money, and that time a lot of people were still farming with horses, they were starting to buy tractors and combines. [Inaudible]

DARREN And [sic] that's basically the time that you decided to move to the city?

MR. LAVALLEY That's right. Years ago before that there was a thrashing gang, about six or seven teams. [Inaudible]. It was not long after that one man [Inaudible] the combine. Back then they could find work around that area. That's when we decided to [Inaudible]. We've got a family. We've got four kids. What about working, what are we going to do? [inaudible].

DARREN They didn't offer you an opportunity to go get a trade or go to school or [Inaudible].

MR. LAVALLEY No [Inaudible] unless maybe some did. I don't know, I didn't ask for these. They offered me a job when, before I was discharged in Regina. [Inaudible] this was the job that they offered me [Inaudible] a long, long time ago. When I went back to my community, I started farming again.

Wartime Biography of Armand Fisher, Métis Soldier, World War II and the Korean War

Private Armand Fisher; SK3774, 5th Canadian Armour Division, Westminster Regiment. Armand originally came from a Métis Road Allowance community around Lebret. His recollections of his life in a Road Allowance community can be viewed in METCOM Productions *The Road Allowance People*.

Armand served overseas in World War II, and in Canada during the Korean War. He came from a family, which served Canada in the First and Second World Wars and in the Korean War. His father, Edward, enlisted when war broke out in 1939, and went overseas with the South Saskatchewan Regiment. Armand's twin brother, James enlisted in 1943, and served with the 5th Anti-Tank Regiment. After the war ended, James would go on to become a career soldier, serving in the Canadian Forces for 25 years. Armand's younger brothers Edward Jr. and Lawrence enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) in 1951 and served for the duration of the Korean War. His sisters Velma and Jean also served in the RCAF. One uncle, William Fisher, fought in both world wars. Other uncles who served included Leo, Harry and Raymond Fisher and Paul, John and Frank Amyotte. His Uncle Paul managed to survive the disastrous Dieppe raid in 1942, and his Uncle Frank was one of the "D-Day Dodgers", who fought in Italy in 1944-45.

Armand enlisted during the spring of 1944, at Little Mountain near Vancouver, took his basic training in Calgary, and in December departed Canada from Halifax aboard the Queen Mary. Soon afterwards he landed in Liverpool and then went on to Aldershot, the home base of the Canadian Army in England. Just before he was to leave, lest one of them would not survive the war. There he underwent further basic training and combat training. Then he was shipped to fight in France, where he was part of the Canadian Army's efforts to liberate northwestern France and the Low Countries from Nazi forces. After four months of front-line combat, his regiment entered northwestern Germany, where Armand stayed as an occupying soldier from the date of Germany's Unconditional Surrender, in May 8, 1945, until August, 1945. He returned to Canada on the *Ile de France*, and was discharged in March 1946.

In Flanders Fields

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky,
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though the poppies grow
In Flanders fields.*

John McCrae

Dulce et Decorum Est

*Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we curse through the sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.*

*Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! -- An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.*

*In all my dreams, before my hapless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.*

*If in smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as Cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, --
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.*

October 1917, by Wilfred Owen, British Expeditionary Force.

"*Ducl et decorum est pro patria mori*" was written by the great Roman orator and poet Horace (85 BC- 27BC), and appears in his *Odes* (III .ii 13). The stanza literally means that it is sweet and fitting to die for your country.

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NA-1959-1 Glenbow Archives
Henry Nor'West spinning lasso, Red Deer area. 1912-14.

NA-2365-105 Glenbow Archives
Joe McGillis, Métis. 1914-1918

NA-2883-44 Glenbow Archives
Jeff Davis, son of D.W. Davis, Fort MacLeod, Alberta. 1900. He served with 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles and was promoted from ranks to Lieutenant. Killed in a farm accident in B.C. in 1906.

NA-1010-44 Glenbow Archives
Mrs. Kate Clark (nee McKay) and son Douglas. Kate was married to Lawrence Clark. Douglas served with Lord Strathcona's Horse during the south African war. 1900.

World War II Veterans:

NA-4712-3 Glenbow Archives
Métis Soldiers, South Saskatchewan regiment. 1941. Pte. J.P. Flammond, left; Pte. J.G. Poitras, right.

NA-4712-2 Glenbow Archives
Métis soldiers

NA-3686-26 Glenbow Archives
Pete and Justine Cardinal, Islay Alberta. 1939-45. Pete helped to guard prisoners of war in Alberta.

NA-4712-1 Glenbow Archives
Métis Soldiers

NA-3517-3 Glenbow Archives
James Brady, Métis in Holland. 1944 Brady served in 4th medium regiment,
Royal Canadian artillery during WW II.