

## **Norbert Thomas Eagle.** (1932-2009)

Tom Eagle was a founder of the Manitoba Metis Federation (1966), the National Indian Brotherhood (1967) and the Native Council of Canada. He was also responsible for the revival of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

Tom Eagle was born at Skownan Manitoba on June 6, 1932. He was raised at Tootinaowaziibeeng (Valley River), Manitoba. He attended the Pine Creek residential school. He enlisted in the Canadian Army at age 19 with hopes of being assigned to the Korean conflict, however, he was sent instead to Germany as part of the NATO peacekeeping force. Within six months he was promoted to Corporal and later while serving with the United Nations peacekeeping force in Cyprus, he became a platoon commander and attained the rank of Sergeant.



In 1955, Tom married Margaret Muriel Strynadka and over the next six years they had five children. Tom was later stationed in Victoria, Winnipeg and Yellowknife. While in Winnipeg he became actively involved in Aboriginal issues and helped to form many Aboriginal organizations.

Between 1968 and 1969, Tom acted as chief spokesman for Metis people at the Federal Housing Task Force, the House of Commons and Senate Committees for Constitutional Reforms and the Senate Committee on Poverty. As a result of this he was successful in developing the government of Manitoba's Remote Housing Program in 1969. He was also responsible for the development of the Kinew Housing Corporation in Winnipeg.

While in Winnipeg Tom became involved with the Indian and Metis Friendship Centre movement. He served as a director of the Winnipeg centre from 1965 to 1970. He later became involved in developing Friendship Centres throughout Canada's north. He headed up the Tree of Peace Friendship Centre at Yellowknife as executive director from

1979 to 1984, and then again from 1986 to 2002. After he became chair of the Northwest Territories/Yukon Friendship Centre Association, he helped establish centres in Fort Smith, Fort Simpson, Hay River, Fort Providence, Rankin Inlet and Behchoko.



Of all his accomplishments, Eagle was especially proud of his military career. He joined the Canadian Army in 1951 at the age of 19, and was honorably discharged with the rank of sergeant after a 25-year career that included two tours of military duty in West Germany and service with the United Nations peacekeeping force in Cyprus.

His awards and honors include the Canadian Forces Decoration, Queen's Jubilee Medal, Citation from the Government of Canada for his contribution to community work and the Veteran's Affairs Commendation. After a short illness, Tom passed away on September 29, 2009.

Tom served as chair of the NWT/Nunavut Aboriginal Veterans Association, National Chairman of the First Nations Veterans of Canada, and also worked on the Veterans Affairs file for the Assembly of First Nations. He was an active member of the Royal Canadian Legion.



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell  
Coordinator of Metis Heritage and History Research  
Louis Riel Institute