

**Major Ed Borchert: “Calling Home the Aboriginal Veterans”**

Major Ed Borchert (PPCLI) recalls his vision for "Calling Home the Aboriginal Veterans". Major Borchert is a former president of the National Métis Veterans Association. He currently lives in the Interlake region of Manitoba and is a member of the Manitoba Métis Federation.



Mr. Borchert recalls how the Aboriginal Spiritual Journey was conceived, and how it was important in order to bring the spirit of fallen warriors home.



## **Ed Borchert**

Mr. Borchert was born in 1944, in Red Deer, Alberta. In 1964, Mr Borchert joined the Canadian Forces at Currie Barracks in Calgary and became a member of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI). Throughout his 31 years of service, Mr. Borchert served overseas and in every province in Canada. He remains very proud of his service, and appreciative toward the Canadian military for the opportunities it provided him. Mr. Borchert ended his career as the Regimental Major of the PPCLI and began fighting for Veterans rights. Today he holds the position of president of the National Métis Veterans Association campaigning and working for his people to gain recognition and benefits for their military service to Canada.

Interviewer: Your experiences, your service brought you to participate in the Aboriginal Spiritual Journey. Can you explain that to me, what that meant to you?

For me, for me it was a vision in 1998. I had gathered here at the museum of the regiments, with a number of Veterans. And many of them stood and talked about never having a chance to say goodbye to their friends. And it wasn't a matter of saying goodbye to their friends in having somebody there, it was goodbye at home. When we talk in the Aboriginal community about Joe, who served in World War II, and he came home, but we talk about Uncle Bill who served in World War II and we say, "He's just not home right now." It means that Uncle Bill is buried in Europe, he hasn't come home. And for our people, we're a very spiritual people, that spirit is not here, or was not here. And I sat and I thought about this, and I had a vision, had a vision, and I stood in, out in my horse paddock with Mary Wuttunee. I discussed it with Fred Eagletail, Clarence Wolfleg. And I had a vision, that we should go to Europe to call home those spirits. Do a ceremony, in Europe, on the battlefield.

And as I spoke to those elders, those Veterans, and I said, "What do you think?", there was a great eagle flying overhead, and that eagle came and sat on the fence post next to us, a short distance away. And I sat and talked and I said, "Well, if we go to Europe, to call home the spirit, do we have to go to each battlefield?" And I thought, no we don't, we just have to be on the battlefield. I said, "What would attract those spirits to want to come home? To want to be with us?" And I thought, our children's laughter, the sound of our drum, and I remembered a good friend of mine, Archie Hodgson, who said at the end of World War II, as he sat on the docks at Antwerp. Off in the distance he heard this fiddle playing the 'Red River' jig. And he ran down the dock, and he knew for the first time, he was going home. My friend Archie died a year ago, he couldn't be with us on the journey. But I remembered, we needed the drums, we needed the laughter of our children, our dancers, our fiddlers, our jiggers. And we needed to gather the pipes from all across Canada to do this ceremony, because it wasn't about the Métis, it wasn't about the First Nation, it was about the Nation.

So we gathered all of the pipes from across Canada, the Inuit lamp, because it's the woman that lights the way. And for us we believe that you must have that light, that knowledge in order to move anything. So, I wrote the proposal, and I agreed to do that with these Veterans. And as soon as I said, "Alright I'll do it." that big eagle took off, and he flew overhead, and went back to the mountains. I wrote the proposal in eighty-nine, in ninety-eight. February, 2005, I got a phone call, I was on the road, I broke down and wept, the Government of Canada had finally agreed to call home the spirits of our fallen soldiers. And I was so blessed because I met Doug Clorey, Bob Gardham, Robert Mercer, and the Minister, who had agreed that this was important for our people.

And I travelled to Europe, we prepared a lodge, and for four days we had the pipes of all Nations sit as one. This has never happened in our history as Aboriginal people. All pipes gathered for one cause, to bring home those spirits of our fallen warriors. And we've done that, and now for the next four years we will celebrate having those spirits at home with us. We got to take our Veterans, our Veterans, World War II Veterans who had never been back. We got to take our youth, to recognize we also served. We had an opportunity to spend time with the children as we built our lodge for ceremony, to teach them why we were there, that we also served. So we taught the children of Europe who we were, and the people of Europe, but we also taught Canadians that we also served. And most of all, we found within our communities, that our communities learned that we served. We served with dignity, and we were bringing back our warriors, the spirits of our warriors, back home where they belong and that was the blessing. And I was so honoured and I thank Veterans Affairs and I thank Indian Northern Affairs, for allowing our people to do this, our Nations. And I'm so humbled by that.



Source: <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/video-gallery/video/6684>.



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