

## **President's Message**

### **July 21, 2014**

This past Sunday, I attended the opening ceremonies of the North American Indigenous Games taking place this week in Regina. I am so proud of all the athletes and recognize the hard work they've done, and the dedication they have, that brought them to this level of competition. They are all winners by being there and participating in the games. Team Manitoba has over 60 Metis athletes at the games, along with their coaches and trainers.

I was honoured to see the Metis athletes of Team Manitoba fly the Metis Nation flags and the MMF Government flag. They waved these high above their heads. Their pride in the Metis Nation and their Metis identity was clearly evident and the Metis could not be missed when they came into the stadium. We were all excited to be there. I wish them good luck in their competitions. I thank their coaches, trainers, families and others for the support they have given.

On Saturday this past weekend, I was at Batoche for the honouring and remembrance of our Metis Veterans and the unveiling of the Metis Veterans Memorial. As I said on this week's Metis Hour, this was a beautiful, awe-inspiring, and moving experience. It is very important that we recognize our Elders and our Veterans. Without their teachings and sacrifices for their families, nation, and country, we would surely be living in a different world today.

The Metis have been called the "Gens libres" as well as "Otipemisiwak." We are the free people and the people who own themselves. Our Metis Ancestors have always stood for freedom and rights, not only for our own community but also for others. Louis Riel and our other Metis Leaders, in the creation of Manitoba, created the first Bill of Rights in Canada and established a province that was to respect the language, religious, education, and other rights of its citizens. It is the legacy we protect today.

Across our Homeland, the Metis Veterans stood strong in 1816, 1870, and 1885, before and during the building of Western Canada. Abroad, the Metis fought in the South African War, World Wars I and II, as well as the Korean, and, for some, the Vietnam War. Although they stood side-by-side with their brothers-in-arms, upon their return the Metis were not dealt with like other veterans. They did not receive their lands or other supports that were expected and granted to others. In effect, the Metis were told to go back to our trap lines.

As you recall, the year 2011 was specially recognized by the Metis Nation to pay tribute to the Metis Veterans. We must remember not just for one year but every year. Our Veterans were young people, 17, 18 or 19 years old in most cases, and fought for people they didn't know and for a country that did not treat them as equals or with respect before or after the conflicts. Many left but many didn't come home. When they came back there was a promise. We will take care of you. But the promise was not kept.

Treated with clear disrespect, it is time our country fully and properly recognize our Veterans and their families' sacrifices. We must continue to fight for this recognition. Japanese-Canadians have been compensated for their incarceration and losses during the war. First Nations Veterans have received payments in recognition for their wartime experience. Our Metis Veterans have received little to nothing.

Our Metis Veterans upon returning home, faced these challenges, advocated for Metis nationhood, identity and rights, and started our Metis Governments. We must always honour our veterans. They fought for protection of our community and for recognition and protection of human, civil and aboriginal rights. They fought to make sure the Metis Nation flag would fly alongside that of Canada - our negotiating partner in Confederation.

I want to thank Mr. Leonard Morin for his leadership role in ensuring the Veterans Memorial at Batoche was realized and a success. I also want to thank the Gabriel Dumont Institute's Executive Director Jordy McCaffrey and the staff and Board of Directors for their work and for hosting the unveiling. I also thank Metis and non-aboriginal governments, companies, and individual funders who contributed to its creation. And, most of all, I humbly thank our Veterans for protecting our Nation, our Country, and our Way of Life.

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