

A new look at our veterans

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Every year, Canada sets aside Nov. 11 to remember veterans. Who are they? The common thought is that veterans are those old men at the Legion from the First and Second World Wars.

Many are no longer with us. They served their country when asked; when the need was over, they returned to their lives. The First World War ended on Nov. 11, 1918 -- exactly 90 years ago tomorrow. There are but two of these veterans left in Canada, which had over 600,000 men and women serve overseas. The Second World War ended 63 years ago -- and many of its veterans are no longer with us. Once all these people have left, will Canada have any veterans?

To answer that, think about how Saskatchewan introduced veterans' licence plates a couple of years ago. When you see one of these plates, how old is the car's occupant? He or she is not necessarily the old "legionnaire" of popular myth. Often, you see someone who is in his late 20s to mid-30s. Is he or she a veteran? Yes.

It was only in 1989 when Canada and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization won the longest war in recent history: "The Cold War". Over the course of the Cold War, Canada had over a million men and women in uniform in defence of this country's ideals. Since the end of the Korean conflict, Canada has had members of our armed services overseas, serving Canada either directly or through international agencies like the United Nations or NATO. These personnel continue to serve this country, and preserve and protect our rights and freedoms.

Recently, Canada has been suffering casualties at a higher rate than at any time since Korea. The media has taken up the torch for those who return to Canada before their time: bridges over the MacDonal-Cartier highway between Trenton and Toronto are crowded with those who pay their last respects to Canadians who made the ultimate sacrifice. All of these people are Canada's veterans.

I recently retired from Canada's military after almost 37 years. Though I don't feel like a veteran, I must include myself as one of these who has sacrificed a career in business in order to serve his nation so that Canadians could pursue their own lives and careers without the worry of persecution from governments or outside influence. Canada's veterans come in all age groups. Many display their pride by wearing some identifiable symbol: a t-shirt, lapel pin or ball cap; others pass as just another Canadian who enjoys hockey, Tim Horton's coffee and a happy family life.

Find a Canadian veteran and give him or her a hug and say "Thank you!" Nov. 11 should always remain a day to pay our respects to all Canadian and allied veterans for everything they have done for us.

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(Nicks is a member the Bombardier aviation training team at 15 Wing. He has served his country from coast to coast as well as in Germany.)