

**St. James, Emily
Remembrance Day
10 November, 2024**

Québec licence plates bear the Québec motto *Je me Souviens*, I remember. Today and on Remembrance Day we will remember.

At the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of the year 1918 hostilities in Europe ceased. The Great War, the war to end- all- wars had ended. The war that cost so many lives of young men and women, came to a close. Finally there was peace. So many said “never again”. But twenty-one years later war broke out again in Europe.

Canadians have fought in many wars: defending Canada during the War of Independence in 1776, the war of 1812 – 1814, the last war fought on Canadian soil, the Boer War and on and on right up to this twenty-first century. I’ve read that today there are fifty-five conflicts happening around the world. We know about the ones in Gaza and the Ukraine, but there are many others. War is still a reality.

I’d like to tell a story about a soldier. This is the story of a local man who, at the age of twenty in 1942, volunteered and joined the army. He went through basic training and then trained in Kingston as a lineman in the Signals Corps. His job was to install poles, string lines and set up equipment for communications. He, along with others boarded a ship to take them to France, two days after D Day. As he waited, on board, a bomb struck the ship and disabled its rudder. After transferring to another ship he sailed to France and was given the task of installing lines from Juno Beach to Brussels and beyond. He worked in the midst of live fire, setting poles and stringing wire, and was fortunate to escape serious injury. The war was happening around him. When the enemy surrendered, he was stationed in Germany to setup communications with London. Of the trip back to Canada he said: *It was a nice trip. The weather was good. We had pretty good food on the boat, but I never was so happy as when I saw the skyline of Halifax coming over the horizon. I remembered that old Sir Walter Scott poem: “Breathes there the man with soul so dead, who never to himself hath said, ‘This is my own, my native land.’”* This young soldier was **Murray Whetung** of Curve Lake First Nation. He later became a United Church minister and served at churches in Alderville and Curve Lake. Murray died on February 26, 2021. Later that year the Ontario Government passed the **Murray Whetung Community Services Award Act** which provides for an award to be given each year to a cadet in each of the armed services who has demonstrated exceptional citizenship and volunteerism within their community. Activities that were important to Murray. Murray, like so many in midst of battle, prayed to God. When they survived an attack, they could say with the psalmist – *I love the Lord because he has heard the voice of my supplication, because he has inclined his ear to me whenever I called upon him. The cords of death entangled me; the grip of the grave took hold of me; I came to grief and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of the Lord: O Lord, I pray you, save my life.* So often it is in the time of trouble, of danger, violence or fear that we, like these soldiers, turn to God in prayer. That’s when we feel closer to God. Today we remember

those who served in past wars, the sacrifice of so many young men and women, the many that died and the others that carried the physical and psychological scars of war for the rest of their lives. We will remember them. Today, we here in Canada, live in peace. There's no denying that there are problems, homelessness, violence, fraud, inflation among others, but most of us live peaceful lives with all the benefits of fully stocked shelves, the availability of goods and services and our wonderful St. James family. We are truly blessed, a blessing that comes, in part, from the sacrifice of those who defended our freedom. We give thanks to God.

Our reading from the Book of Wisdom reminds us that those who died are not forgotten by God, but as Solomon wrote, *The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them... their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction; but they are at peace.* Their torment is over. God heard their prayers and ours. I would like to return to Murray Whetung's story. Many First Nations people volunteered to serve in the armed forces. Some even acted as code speakers. That is, communicating information and orders in the Anishnabe language to another Anishnabe speaker who would translate the information into English at the other end. In this way the enemy would not understand what they were saying. This ability was vital in the war effort. If a First Nations serviceman or woman served for four years, according to the Indian Act, they would lose their status and would not be allowed back on the reserve. As well, they would not receive the benefits and pay level that the other military personnel received. Yet, many still served in the armed forces. Fortunately, Murray Whetung did not lose his status. This is a little known fact of the treatment of First Nations peoples during both wars. We need to know about it. Je me souviens. I remember. We remember. What can we take away from this Remembrance service? Those who served loved Canada and were willing to fight to preserve our freedom, our way of life. Many, in the midst of battle, showed a faith that should inspire each of us. Jesus, in the Gospel reading, said: *Anyone who comes to me I will never drive away.* There are many stories of soldiers, sailors and airmen and women, in the depth of the war really feeling the presence of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit.

One story that comes to mind is that of **Fred Ebberlin**, later an Anglican deacon, who served in the Airforce. This didn't happen in wartime but it speaks of similar incidents. Fred was the squadron leader during a training mission, flying off an aircraft carrier. They were flying above the Atlantic, above the clouds when Fred noticed that they were very low on fuel. They couldn't see the aircraft carrier for the clouds. The situation was critical. Fred turned to prayer. *Dear Lord, let us see the aircraft carrier.* At that moment the clouds gave a small opening and there, right below them, was the aircraft carrier. Down they went to a safe landing. God answers prayer. As we remember not only those who gave their lives, who never returned to their native land, but also those who carried the emotional and physical scars throughout their lives, those who served in order to give us the freedom we enjoy today and witnessed their deep faith in God. May God bless them and us.

Je me souviens. We will remember.