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Chief Joe Dreaver: Indian Statesman, Patriot And Soldier

Solomon Sanderson (Reporter), Communication Director

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Chief Joe Dreaver, grandson of Chief Mistawasis who was one of the many chiefs that signed Treaty No. 6 in 1876. 

He is the son of Chief George Dreaver, who served as Chief of his tribe for 55 years.

Chief Joe Dreaver served in the same capacity for 25 years on the Mistawasis reserve which is 70 miles west of Prince Albert. Now retired, he is a life time member of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians Senate and at 79 he is the oldest member.

He received several medals during war services. He was with the 107th Battalion in World War I, he fought along side men like Tom Longboat and Brigadier Martin. He won the military cross while serving with the Canadian Infantry. He enlisted again for another four years in the Second World War, serving as a member of the Veteran's Guard of Canada in Medicine Hat. Along with the Military medal he proudly possesses two Coronation Medals, one medal for each of the Great World Wars, a Jubilee and a Centennial Medal.

He is a proud father of a family of six. Four members of the family served with either the army, navy or air force and one acted as Chief while Chief Dreaver served in World War II. With his wife the former Evelyn Cardinal, they make a handsome couple.

Dreaver Lake in Northern Saskatchewan was named after his son, Sgt. Harvey Dreaver, who was killed in World War II action.

He proudly recalled being the 1st N.C.O. in charge of six Indian athletes in the

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army. They won medals for high jumping and racing in England, France and Germany. Chief Dreaver and these six men were members of the Canadian army soccer team that won almost every game they played. He said because of their great speed the Indians were, often used as runners to carry messages on the battlefield and our Cree language being foreign to the enemy was also used to great advantage in radio communications.

In the 1920's he was part of the movement to get Indian people organized. He stated it was a pleasure to work with men

like the late Canon Edward Ahenakew, who represented Saskatchewan on many occasions at that time.

The 1930's depression saw the organization almost fade completely out of existence. During the depression many strong leadership qualities were displayed by many men. This resulted in splinter groups being organized in the province and in 1947 he saw his dream fulfilled. The Saskatchewan Union of Chiefs came into existence at this time and in 1958 became known as the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians.

As a leader, he recalled fighting for many changes. There was the permit system which was a form of control over the Indian people by the Government. Before anything was sold or even killed for a family's own use as food, a permit was obtained from the Indian agent. He sadly recalled that shortly after his return from World War I, where he fought and many died for freedom of the country, he was travelling from his reserve (Mistawasis) to a treaty day celebration at the Sturgeon Lake reserve (Saskatchewan), when he was met by two policemen and the Indian Agent. They demanded he produce a permit which allowed him to travel to Sturgeon Lake. He drew the Indian Agent's attention to the fact that he was over in Europe fighting for freedom and he was there on leave for four years without a permit. He was allowed to continue. Upon arrival at the treaty day celebration he learned that several of his tribesmen were already turned back from the celebrations as their permits had expired before they reached the treaty celebrations. These are things that Chief Dreaver fought to have changed along with improved services in education, health and welfare of Indian people.

In 1936, he was instrumental in organizing a jubilee celebration to mark the signing of the 1876 treaty, known as Treaty No. 6. At these celebrations Prime Minister McKenzie King was made Honorary Chief. We can certainly see Chief Dreaver playing a leading role in the planning of the 1976 Centennial Celebrations.

On many occasions Chief Dreaver was called on to represent the Indian people. On June 5, 1939 he was selected as one of the celebrities to meet the Royal train as the King and Queen sped across Canada and made a stop in Regina.

He spoke of one of the proudest moments of his life when he was made an Honorary Chief at Fort Qu'Appelle in 1966, at which time the Sioux Indians performed one of their honorary dances.

As he spoke of how pleased he was when the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians made him Honorary Chief in 1969 and a life time member of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians Senate. He stated "Our society is so warm, we show our appreciation of ones work before he dies and not after, that is the beauty of it all".

In his own words of wisdom Chief Dreaver said, "Give us responsibility, and we shall be found to be worthy of it."
