

# Record of Service Podcast Episode 3: The Tomkins Brothers

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[Record of Service](#), a podcast presented by [The Memory Project](#), a program of [Historica Canada](#). In this series, we bring you interviews with Canada's veterans—their stories of life, loss and service. (Click [here](#) to view the entire series.)

Following in the footsteps of his brothers and many members of his [Métis](#) community, Frank Tomkins enrolled in the Canadian Army in 1945. His story touches on his family's connection to the [North-West Resistance](#), [Cree Code Talkers](#), and the benefits denied to Indigenous veterans after the [Second World War](#).

Music Credits: Kai Engel – Summer Days, Marcel Pequel – Six

stories of survivors, their families, and communities and to commemorate the history and legacy of Residential Schools in Canada.

**Riley Burns:** “I didn’t want to be an Indian, I didn’t know who in the hell I wanted to be. I wasn’t accepted by the white man; I was accepted by my own people in my reserve.”

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**Frank Tomkins:** “One of my brothers, he was a code talker, too. His name was Peter. He was a hardworking man, you couldn’t find a better man to work, but come pay day, you know, we’d go on a toot, ‘til it was time to go back to work, and he’d drink to get drunk and then he’d cry, sit there and cry, ‘I should have been killed, I should have been killed.’”

**Maia Foster:** Welcome to “Record of Service”, a podcast presented by Historica Canada. I’m your host, Maia Foster. In this series we bring you interviews with Canada’s veterans—their stories of life, loss, and service. In this episode, we hear from Frank Tomkins.

Just a warning to those that may be listening with young ones around, today’s story contains mature content.

At 18, Frank enlisted in the Canadian Army. It was 1945 and near the end of the Second World War. Frank had been inspired by his four brothers who had gone overseas. Here he talks about why members of his community joined up:

**Frank Tonkins:** "In our part of the country they'd just about cleaned out all the men because in those days there was a shortage of work to start with. This was of course, [about] employment, as well as doing something for your country. There was a great number of people from my part of the country that [were] in the Armed Forces. Altogether, I think 27 of my immediate family group that [were] in the service here in the Second World War and I had a couple of uncles in the First World War."

**MF:** Incredibly, two of the Tomkins brothers served in top-secret roles as code talkers. While we don't have any information about Peter, Charles was recruited by the United States Army Corps Head Quarters.

**FT:** "This American officer approached my brother Charles and of course asked a few questions as to how many Cree-speaking and English-speaking people that he knew. And of course, he named my brother, Peter, and there [were] a few others from his hometown that he knew. There was McDermott,

languages and then were sent into the field, where another code talker translated the message back into English. The information and orders were then passed up to commanders. Some of the words, like plane, bomber, and machine gun did not exist in Indigenous languages. For these, code talkers needed to repurpose existing words. For instance, Charles Tomkins would translate Mustang aircraft to the Cree word for a wild horse: *pak-wa-tas-tim*.

During both World Wars, hundreds of Indigenous servicemen from across North America transmitted classified information in their languages and stymied the efforts of the enemy trying to decode Allied messages. Charles Tomkins did not reveal his secret role until the end of his life and many code talkers never spoke of their work.

**CT:** "My grandmother being a Plains Cree and a widow of Poundmaker, quite

Here's Frank describing his grandfather's experience after the fighting ended:

**FT:** "He ended up at the Trial of Louis Riel and he was really sympathetic with the Métis cause because he said that the Métis were right, and Louis Riel was, in trying to get something done for the Métis people. After that, later on, my grandfather got a job as a farm instructor in Poundmaker's reserve, and that's where he met and married my grandmother. And speaking Cree fluently, of

**FI:** There was discrimination after the war for most of the Aboriginal veterans. In the Legion, and you could say the same for just about any







