

Sikh Community Participates in Memorial Day Parade

BY A STAFF WRITER

— ROLLING MEADOWS, ILL.

Sikh-Americans participated in the Memorial Day Parade on May 24 with a float, flags, posters, banners and a walking contingent to commemorate sacrifices by Sikhs in the World Wars. The banners featured photos and quotations highlighting the contributions of Sikh soldiers to the success of the Allied Troops during World War I and II.

This was the third year that the community was participating in this annual parade, organizers said in a press release.

As part of the British-India Army, these Sikh soldiers fought bravely in France, Belgium, Italy, Israel and many other fronts. "In the two world wars, 83,005 turban-wearing Sikh soldiers were killed and 109,045 were wounded for the freedom of Britain and the world during shell fire with no other protection but the turban, the symbol of their faith," a banner at the parade read.



Sikh contingent at Memorial Day parade in Chicago May 24.

"It was wonderful to see the Sikh Americans amongst the marching men and women who serve in the military. Sikhs have a strong military heritage, it would be ironic not to let them serve their country in uniform due to their articles of faith, beard and turban," Rajinder Singh Mago, a

prominent member of the Sikh-American community said.

The two-hour-long parade organized by the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events began at noon and proceeded south on State Street from Lake to Van Buren. There were more than 150 contin-

gents. The Sikh participation was coordinated by Sarwan Singh Raju. The Chicago parade, started in 1870, is considered one of the largest Memorial Day parades in the nation.

Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Iraq war veteran Lieutenant Colonel Tammy Duckworth, the

former Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs, were the grand marshals of the parade. Congresswoman Duckworth struggled to hold back tears during the wreath-laying ceremony to honor fallen soldiers. She lost her legs and partial use of an arm when a rocket-propelled grenade hit the Black Hawk helicopter she was piloting in Iraq in 2004.

The Sikh community also participated in another Memorial Day Parade in Itasca, Illinois, coordinated by Kuldeep Singh Makkar. The parade started from Bryn Mawr and Catalpa streets and ended at the Itasca train station. Sikh martial art "Gatka" was demonstrated and volunteers served bottled water to hundreds of spectators.

The Chicago Sikh community also participated in Memorial Day Observance Ceremonies at Hoffman Estates Veterans Memorial Cemetery Site and at St. Peter Lutheran Church in Schaumburg, Illinois. The ceremonies ended with a picnic in the garden decorated with posters of Sikh soldiers from the World Wars.