



Aboriginal Soldiers

The Forgotten Warriors of
WWI & WWII

The Great War

Initially, in the Great War Prime Minister Borden forbade Aboriginals to enlist to fight, thinking they were “savage... and a fear that this stereotyped view would result in the inhumane treatment of any Aboriginal people who were taken prisoner.”

By 1915, Borden realized the need for more troops and he allowed Aboriginals to enlist. 4000+ Aboriginal soldiers, one in three able-bodied Aboriginal men, enlisted and fought in the Great War.



The Great War



Band councils requested official recognition as independent nations from the British government in exchange for military help. The government refused.

January 1918, after conscription was introduced, Aboriginal soldiers were excluded from mandatory service, but many still continued to volunteer. Some reserves saw every eligible man sign up to fight.

The Great War

Aboriginal enlistment was no easy feat. Many reserves were isolated, news of the war was hard to come by, and recruiting centres were difficult to get to. Many Aboriginal soldiers didn't even speak English and had to learn during training.

Reasons for enlisting were similar to other non-Aboriginal Canadians included patriotism, the need for a wage, desire for adventure, and because friends and relatives were also signing up.



The Great War

The Aboriginal soldiers in the Great War were recognized for their talents and bravery as snipers and scouts. The most decorated Aboriginal soldier was Francis "Peggy" Pegahmagabow, an Ojibwa from the Parry Island Band in Ontario. He was a highly skilled sniper and a scout and he participated in the battles of Ypres, the Somme, where he was shot in the leg, and Paschendaele.



The Great War



The most famous sniper of the Great War was a former ranch-hand and rodeo performer, Henry Louis Norwest, a Metis. He recorded 115 fatal shots and was awarded the Military Medal and bar, among many other awards. He originally enlisted under the name Henry Louie and was discharged for bad behavior. He re-enlisted under Henry Louie Norwest and he gained respect for his skill and dedication. He played an important role in the Canadian victory at Vimy Ridge. Henry was shot and killed 3 months before the war ended, a shock to all who knew him.

The Great War: More Famous Soldiers

- Alexander Smith Jr. (Six Nations, Ontario)
- Charles Smith (Six Nations, Ontario)
- George McLean (Okanogan, BC)
- Sam Glode (Micmac, Nova Scotia)
- William Cleary (Montagnais, Quebec)
- Joseph Roussin (Mohawk, Quebec)
- Tom Charles Longboat (Onondaga, Ontario)
- Edith Anderson Monture (Six Nation, Ontario)

The Interwar Years

The surviving Aboriginal soldiers came home to Canada, many sick with Tuberculosis and the Spanish Flu, both diseases quickly spread among Aboriginal communities.

After the Great War, Aboriginal people also had to battle a political war with the Canadian government with the Potlatch ban, Residential Schools, Land Claims, and lack of rights as Canadian citizens.



The Second World War

Again, Aboriginal people enlisted for Canada's battle in the Second World War, including 72 women. When conscription was instated in Canada again, Aboriginal people were not exempt, causing division and controversy in Canada. Many Aboriginal people still continued to sign up. The reasons for enlistment were similar to the Great War, but now there was even more economic hardship, and the fear of the spread of Nazi ideologies.



The Second World War: The War at Home

Aboriginal people in Canada also contributed to the war effort in many different ways. They increased their agricultural output to help with food supplies, they wrote letters to British orphans, and they patrolled the coast in BC, looking for signs of Japanese invasion.

Some reserve land was “borrowed” by the Canadian government to use as airports, rifle ranges and defense posts, with the promise that this land would be returned after the war. Much of this land was never returned to Aboriginal people and the land claims continue today.

The Second World War



Charles Byce, a Cree, of the Lake Superior Regiment earned a Military Medal for his bravery during a reconnaissance mission at the age of 23. He then went on to earn the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his "*magnificent courage and fighting spirit*" under heavy fire south of Hochwald Forest.

The Second World War

Thomas George Prince, of the Brokenhead Band at Scanterbury, Manitoba, was an expert in reconnaissance in WWII. Prince was a member of the 1st Special Service Force, known as the Devil's Brigade to the Germans. He was a paratrooper sent behind enemy lines to sabotage, raid, and perform reconnaissance duties. Prince once dressed as a farmer and repaired a communication line in plain view of the Germans. For his bravery and skill in the Devil's Brigade, Prince earned the Military Medal and the Silver Star.



The Second World War: More Famous Soldiers

- Willard John Bolduc (Ojibwa, Ontario)
- Dr. G.C. Monture (Mohawk, Ontario)
- David Georges Greyeyes (Muskeg Lake Cree Band, Saskatchewan)
- Chief Joe Dreaver (Mistawasis Cree Band, Saskatchewan)
- Oliver Milton Martin (Mohawk, Ontario)
- Jack Beaver (Alderville Band, Ontario)
- John McLeod (Ojibwa, Ontario)
 - 7 of his children also enlisted
- Tom Longboat (Onondaga, Ontario)
 - Tom Longboat Jr
 - Theodore Longboat

After The Second World War

Many Aboriginal soldiers had to become enfranchised before they could sign up to fight in the Second World War, this meant that when they came home, they no longer had Indian status. Many soldiers were encouraged to give up their status when they came home so they would get veteran benefits. These benefits included the Veterans' Land Act, which gave veterans a loan to purchase land. Status Indians could not get the full loan, and Indian Agents held any loan money in trust for Aboriginal veterans. The wait for the application process was so long, many people gave up and pursued jobs and land elsewhere. Many reserve lands were "cut off" and given to non-Aboriginal veterans, while many Aboriginal veterans weren't even aware of the benefits that they were entitled to.

Aboriginal Veteran Issues



Aboriginal veterans were not allowed to march as a group in Remembrance Day ceremonies until 1994. Before 1995 Aboriginal veterans were not allowed to lay a wreath either. The reason given was that the monument was too crowded.

Aboriginal Involvement Both Wars

The Great War

- 4000+ enlist
- \$44 000 donated to war relief
- 50 medals won
- 300 soldiers died

The Second World War

- 3000+ enlist
- \$23 000 donated to war relief plus another unknown amount donated individually directly to charities
- 18 medals won
- 200 soldiers died

Not Forgotten



Thousands of Aboriginal veterans risked their lives for Canada, yet they did not have many basic rights as Canadian citizens, like the right to vote in Federal elections. Their stories must be told.

"We, your sons and daughters of today, remember you, spirits of past wars and battles. We stand for peace on this planet called Mother Earth. ... We are armed not with the terrible weapons of technology but with the wisdom of the Elders. We have not forgotten, we will not forget. We will live for our children and the future."

-*"And to Tomorrow,"* AMMSA, 2, 35 (November 9, 1984), p. 9.

Teacher Resources

- **Forgotten Warriors (Video).** National Film Board of Canada (**MGR**), 1996. 51 min. Dup. order no. V4902.
- http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/content/history/other/native/natives_e.pdf
- [http://www.vac-acc-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=history/other/native](http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=history/other/native)
- <http://www.mentalfloss.com/blogs/?paged=202>
- <http://www.isfeldbc.com/text/remembrance.html>
- **Campbell, Kenneth, Menzies, Charles, Peacock, Brent. B.C. First Nations Studies. Vancouver, B.C.: Pacific Educational Press, 2003**