

ALGONQUINS IN THE GREAT WAR

THE WAR WILL BE OVER BY CHRISTMAS

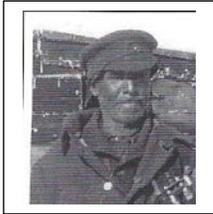
It would take many pages to explain why the Great War happened. In short, the competition for economic domination in Europe between Great Britain and Germany was the reason it did. The Germans produced most of Europe's steel, which gave them the upper hand as a power player in European politics, but Great Britain still had a stronger navy. Basically, the British were not about to be pushed aside by the new kid on the block, Germany. The sabers started rattling in Europe and the smaller countries began allying themselves with either Great Britain or Germany. By 1913, Europe was a powder keg waiting to explode. The spark came on June 28, 1914, in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, when a Serbian nationalist assassinated an Austrian Duke and his wife. The Austrian Duke was an ally of Germany. The Serbs were supported by Russia. Russia was allied to France. France was allied to Great Britain. It was a domino effect. The great armies were mobilized. On August 4, 1914, Germany invaded Belgium to attack France. The British army sailed across the English Channel to attack the Germans. Germany's generals were confident that they had the resources, manpower and technology to win the war by Christmas 1914. The British and French generals believed they also had the combined resources and technology to win the war by Christmas. The generals never thought the war would drag on as long as it did. Germany had a larger population than Great Britain, which meant they could replace soldiers faster than the British. Great Britain needed help from its colonies, one of those colonies being Canada, which had a small population of eight million people. One in eleven Canadians joined up.

In 1915, an Algonquin man working as a lumberjack earned between 75 and 90 cents a day in the lumber camps, or roughly twenty dollars a month. The Canadian army promised one dollar and ten cents a day, or thirty-three dollars a month. That was a good deal for a single man, but it was even better if he was married with children; the wife left behind got twenty-five dollars a month as separation allowance, plus an extra fifteen dollars a month for each child. This was better money than these men could ever make in the bush and the army would feed, clothe and furnish them with extra socks and boots that they could never get from the lumber camps. War is hell, but it paid better. The extra money meant that their loved ones could eat better and buy warm clothes, and they wouldn't have to beg the Indian Agent for handouts anymore.

These are their stories: the Algonquin men of River Desert who enlisted in the Great War...

The Men of the Canadian Forestry Corps

Private John Baptiste Cooko, 297235. Enlisted on March 13, 1916.



John was born on September 12, 1873. He was married to Bridget Chabot when he joined the 224th Canadian Forestry Battalion. After training at Camp Valcartier, John and his comrades of the 224th Battalion embarked on the train that took them to Halifax, Nova Scotia. On April 18, 1916, they embarked on the troopship SS *Missanabie*. John landed at Liverpool, England, ten days later on April 28, 1916. The 224th Battalion was posted outside London, England, where John worked chopping trees into lumber for the war effort. John weighed 145 pounds

on a 5 foot 8 inch frame. The average height of men for this era was 5 feet 5 inches, which made John taller than most. He must have been doing an excellent job lumberjacking in England because on June 19, 1917, John received his transfer orders to the 46th Company, Canadian Forestry Corps in France, where he remained until the end of the war. He came home on the SS *Aquitania* and walked down the gangplank at Halifax on January 27, 1919. From the moment he enlisted in March 1916 and until he received his military discharge at Ottawa on February 20, 1919, John assigned fifteen dollars of his monthly pay to help his wife and three small boys: Louis, 6, Dominic, 4, and Michael, 2.

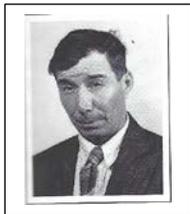
Seven Algonquin men signed up in the summer of 1916 at Maniwaki with the 238th Canadian Forestry Battalion. They were all seasonal lumberjacks. Some were living at River Desert and others at Baskatong. They were all sent to Camp Valcartier near Quebec City, where they took their basic training and were indoctrinated into the disciplined existence of army life. On September 7, 1916, the seven Algonquins boarded the train that would take them from Camp Valcartier to Halifax, Nova Scotia. At Halifax, they embarked on the troopship SS *Scandinavia*. On September 11, 1916, the SS *Scandinavia* set sail for an eleven-day voyage to England with the seven Algonquins on board. They disembarked at Liverpool,

England on September 22, 1916. They were, in chronological order of enlistment:

- Joseph Carle, enlisted June 22, 1916.
- James Brascoupe, Sr., enlisted June 27, 1916.
- Peter Dancey, enlisted June 27, 1916.
- John Carle, enlisted July 15, 1916.
- Joseph John Baptist, enlisted July 15, 1916.
- Jocko McDougall, enlisted July 16, 1916.
- Pierre Clement Jocko, enlisted July 29, 1916.

The seven Algonquins were posted at Witley Camp, England and remained together until October 19, 1916, when John Carle and Joseph John Baptist were transferred to the 14th Company, Canadian Forestry Corps, assembling for labour duty in France. On November 6, 1916, James Brascoupe, Joseph Carle, Pierre Clement Jocko, Peter Dancey and Jocko McDougall were transferred to the 224th Canadian Forestry Battalion. The 224th was based outside London, England and there they met up with fellow Algonquin John Baptiste Cooko, who had been there since the previous April. They were together until June 19, 1917, when John Baptiste Cooko was transferred to France with the 46th Company, Canadian Forestry Corps.

Private Joseph Carle, 1036077. Enlisted June 22, 1916.



According to the church records for Maniwaki compiled between the years 1842 and 1899, Joseph was born on January 29, 1896, but on his enlistment papers he gave his date of birth as January 15, 1895. Discrepancy aside, he was the son of John Carle and Marie-Anne Chibayatig. Joseph's mother died on May 10, 1897. Mary-Ann Budge of Maniwaki became Joseph's foster mother and raised him.

Joseph was of average height and build at 5 feet 4 inches tall and 130 pounds. He had a good service record while working as a lumberjack with the 224th Canadian Forestry Battalion at London, England. Joseph remained in London until he received his sailing orders for Canada on June 24, 1919. He was discharged at Ottawa on July 7, 1919. During his three years of service, he assigned 20 dollars of his monthly pay to his foster mother, Mary-Ann Budge, at Maniwaki.

Corporal James Brascoupe, Sr., 1036156. Enlisted on June 27, 1916.



A big lumberjack who stood 5 feet 10 inches tall and weighed a strapping 170 pounds, he was known as "Kichi-Jim." Big Jim was born on April 15, 1888, to parents unknown, but was adopted and raised by Xavier and Maggie Brascoupe of River Desert. Big Jim was posted to the 224th Canadian Forestry Battalion based near London, England. Being stationed close to London [...] Big Jim met a young Scottish girl there. Her name was Marguerite. They courted and Big Jim asked the permission of his commanding officer to marry Miss Marguerite Alexander. On March 21, 1918, he did. On March 31, 1918, he became Corporal James Brascoupe. Big Jim and his war bride received their sailing orders for Canada on August 8, 1919, disembarking at Quebec City on August 17, 1919. Big Jim was discharged that same day and he and Marguerite jumped the train for Ottawa and then to Maniwaki, where they spent the rest of their lives together.

Private Peter Dancey, 1036159. Enlisted on June 27, 1916.



Peter was born on April 20, 1876. He was the smallest of the bunch at 5 feet 3 inches tall. He worked as a lumberjack with the 224th Canadian Forestry Battalion based near London, England. He came home on May 11, 1919, aboard the troopship *SS Saturnia*. He was discharged at Kingston, Ontario on May 26, 1919. For the thirty-five months that Peter was in service, he assigned twenty dollars of his monthly pay to help his wife, Sosie Sheesheeb, and their two children, Julia and Angus.

Private John Carle, 1036272. Enlisted on July 15, 1916.



John was born on August 31, 1871. John was a rugged, powerfully built man at 5 feet 10 inches tall and 180 pounds. This was a *massive* man in a time when the average height for men was 5 feet 5 inches tall. On November 27, 1916, John went to France with the 14th Company, Canadian Forestry Corps. The 14th Company was sent to a forested area in Normandy called Bois Normand to fell trees and cut sawn-lumber for the British and Canadian armies fighting in France. John finished out the war there as a lumberjack. He even had the opportunity to visit Paris on a two-week Leave from February 10 to February 24, 1918. Finally, the Armistice ended the war on November 11, 1918. John and the members of the 14th Company were confined to their camp until December 11, 1918, when they received their orders to report to the Canadian Military Base hospital at Etaples, France for a routine medical inspection prior to their return to England. When John's turn came for inspection, the camp medical officer discovered that John had lost part of the index finger on his left hand in a childhood accident. Also missing was the third toe of his left foot in a logging accident twenty-three years earlier. None of these disabilities had prevented John from putting in a full day's work, but the medical officer declared him Unfit for Further Military Service—one month after the war ended and three and a half years after he enlisted! He was sent to England on December 14, 1918. John left England on January 13, 1919, aboard the ocean liner *Empress of Britain*, disembarking at Halifax on January 22, 1919. He was discharged at Ottawa on February 15, 1919. John is best remembered for having the amazing ability of locating drowning victims and for having lived to the age of one hundred years old.

Private Joseph John Baptist, 1036274. Enlisted July 15, 1916.



"Joe Batchisse" was born on August 21, 1868. He was three years older than his chum John Carle when they enlisted together at Maniwaki. The two men were both sent to the 14th Company, Canadian Forestry Corps based at Bois Normand, France on November 27, 1916. Judging from the disciplinary "incidents" that suddenly began to be noted into Joe Batchisse's Conduct Sheet, it would appear that he had left behind an ailing wife. On the morning of November 12, 1917, Joe Batchisse reported late for duty after spending the previous night at a local French pub. He was confined to barracks and that should have been the end of it. Instead, Joe Batchisse escaped confinement and returned to the pub that night. He was sentenced to seven days of Field Punishment Number Two: he was tied by his hands and feet to a cartwheel —

outdoors, for three days and then put to hard labour for the remaining four. He was released from field punishment on November 19, 1917, but nine days later he reported late for duty again. He got another seven days of Field Punishment Number Two for that episode. After that, he shaped up and never got into any more trouble. He even got Leave and John Cade went to Paris together. Joe Batchisse was fine until December 15, 1918, when he took ill and had to be taken to the Canadian Base Hospital at Etaples, France. His wife Mary died in Maniwaki on December 18, 1918. Joe Batchisse never went back to the 14th Company at Bois Normand. He was sent to a depot camp in England, where he remained until August 9, 1919, when he sailed for Halifax on the troopship SS *Caronia*. Joe Batchisse was discharged at Kingston, Ontario on August 19, 1919. A few months later Joe Batchisse went on to be reunited with Mary.

Private Jocko McDougall, 1036293. Enlisted on July 16, 1916.



He was a widower when war was declared. He signed up in Maniwaki and gave September 1, 1871 as his date of birth to the recruiting officer. Even the medical officer who pronounced Jocko "fit for overseas service" judged his appearance to be about "45 years of age." Old Jocko made it to England and joined the 224th Canadian Forestry Battalion outside London, England on November 6, 1916. Somewhere the secret slipped out and on June 28, 1917, Jocko was discharged from further military service. He was sixty-five years old! He was born in 1852 and was rumored to have served during the Boer War as a riverboat man. On August 14, 1917, the Canadian military authorities put Jocko aboard the troopship SS *Megantic* and sent him home.

Private Pierre Clement Jocko, 1036446. Enlisted July 29, 1916.



He sailed aboard the SS *Scandinavia* with fellow Algonquins John Carle, Joseph Carle, Joe Batchisse, Big Jim Brascoupe, John Cooko and Jocko McDougall. Pierre Clement went with Big Jim, Joe Carle and Peter Dancey to the 224th Canadian Forestry Battalion based outside London, England. He finished the war there and received his sailing orders on May 7, 1919. Pierre Clement was discharged at Ottawa on May 17, 1919. For the 34 months he was in service, Pierre Clement assigned twenty dollars of his monthly pay to his wife.

Three Brothers

Their names were Joseph, Louis and Isaac Cooko. A few Algonquins remember Joseph and Louis, but hardly anyone remembers Isaac. Isaac Cooko was born at River Desert, but he was living in Cutler, Ontario when he enlisted. Cutler is a small dot on the map somewhere on the Serpent River near Spanish, Ontario. All three brothers joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Unfortunately, the War Department had restrictions about who went overseas and who didn't. Of the estimated 630,000 Canadian men and women who were in uniform during the Great War, about 450,000 went overseas. The rest were stuck in Canada, never to see the sights of London and Paris. This is what happened to the Cooko brothers.

Private Joseph Cooko Sr., 649372. Enlisted on May 16, 1916, at North Bay, Ontario.



Joe Cooko was born on June 1, 1888, which made him the oldest of the three brothers at twenty-eight years old. He was of average build at 5 feet 6 inches and 135 pounds. Joe Cooko was sent to the 159th Overseas Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force and it was during the medical inspection that Joe Cooko's disabilities were noted: he was missing three fingers. He had lost the little finger of his right hand to frostbite and the little finger and third finger of his left hand had been severed when his hand was crushed between a log and a flatcar bed. Joe Cooko was not considered fit for overseas service, so he was posted to guard duty with the 2nd Battalion, Canadian Garrison Regiment at Niagara-on-the-Lake. Joe Cooko finished the war there and was discharged with a good conduct sheet at Toronto on December 4, 1918.

Private Louis Cooko, 3037785. Enlisted on October 12, 1917 at Sudbury, Ontario.

Louis was born on April 12, 1895. He was twenty-two years old and single upon enlistment, which should have made him an immediate recruit for frontline duty in France. The problem was his *size*: Louis was too small at 4 feet 8 inches tall and 115 pounds. Even though he was a lumberjack and accustomed to working and living in harsh conditions, the army was strict about its physical requirements for military service. Small men like Louis, the army reasoned, would collapse under a heavy pack. Louis made it as far as the 1st Depot Reserve Battalion at Toronto. His number was never called in the reinforcements drafts going to France. He was discharged on December 1, 1918, at Toronto, Ontario.

Private Isaac Cooko, 2250460. Enlisted on April 28, 1917, at Sudbury, Ontario.

Isaac Cooko joined the army but a hand injury and a bad knee suffered from work in the lumber camps prevented him from going overseas. Instead, he was posted to the Forestry and Construction Battalion at Camp Borden, near Toronto, Ontario. Isaac stayed there sixteen weeks. On the night of August 15, 1917, Isaac walked out of the camp and went home. With no hope of ever going overseas and confined to the strict military regulations of an army camp, men like Isaac simply walked away from the army and never looked back.

The Men Who Were Turned Away

Private Gilbert Commanda (a.k.a Gabriel Commandant), 648178. Enlisted on October 15, 1915, at North Bay, Ontario.



The recruiting officer probably heard "Gilbert" when Gabriel gave his name at the recruiting desk that day. Gabriel was a rugged and powerfully built man at six feet tall and 175 pounds. Gabriel made it as far as Camp Borden with the 159th Overseas Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, where he was discharged as "medically unfit for further military service." Gabriel had badly injured his left knee in an alumber accident four years earlier and it kept swelling up during the long distance training marches at Camp Borden. The medical officer who signed Gabriel's discharge sheet wrote that it would take several major operations to repair the tissue and vein damage to his knee. That was the end of his military career, but Gabriel is remembered for being the man who discovered gold some time during the 1920's in the Abitibi region. A town of gold miners immediately sprang up there. That town became Val d'Or, Quebec. A creek called "La Source Gabriel

Commandant" was named in honour of the man whose discovery of gold gave birth to the present-day cities and towns of the Abitibi-Temiscamingue regions. The creek flows about 30 kilometers north of Val d'Or. Gabriel was immortalized in a French language book entitled *L'Algonquin Gabriel Commandant* by Jean Ferguson.

Private James Brascoupe, 3320095. Accidentally conscripted on January 8, 1918.



James was born on April 10, 1895, to Xavier Brascoupe and Mary Ann Kaponichin of River Desert. During the war, First Nations men were not obligated to fight overseas in a European war, though we know that many did. First Nations men were also exempt from conscription, meaning that the government could not draft Indians. James' French-Canadien surname was the most likely reason why he received a draft notice to report to Hull for mobilization. So he did. And he was in the army until six weeks later when his First Nations status was discovered. The Canadian government went and drafted an Indian. On February 8, 1918, James received a honourable discharge from military service. The handwritten remark in his discharge sheets stated that he was "erroneously ordered to report."

Private Harry Brennan, 1003102.



Harry enlisted on May 4, 1916, at Sudbury, Ontario with the 227th Overseas Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force. He was discharged six months later as medically unfit for further military service because of a nagging injury he suffered before joining up. But he was also fifteen years old, which may have also contributed to his discharge. Harry enlisted again on September 18, 1918, and this time he was pronounced fit for active service. Harry never made it overseas. He was in an assembly camp in Toronto when the war ended on November 11, 1918.

The First River Desert Algonquin to Enlist

Private William Michel, 62268. Enlisted on February 18, 1915, Le Regiment "22".



William was the oldest son of Kate Keillor and Thomas-Michel Kakijasiketc. He was born on January 12, 1895, which made him twenty years old when he left his job as a lumberjack up at the Eagle River Depot on a cold February day and walked to Hull with twenty dollars in his pocket, his last month's pay. At the Hull Armoury William signed up with one of Canada's most prestigious fighting units, the famed "Van Doos." The Van Doos trained at Camp Valcartier until May 16, 1915 when they embarked by train for Halifax. On May 20, 1915, the men of the Van Doos, William included, crowded the decks of the troopship SS *Saxonia* as it steamed for the open Atlantic and England beyond. Gradually the lights of Halifax Harbour grew fainter until they were extinguished. William landed at Liverpool, England on May 29, 1915. After three months of training and

indoctrination into trench warfare, the Van Doos set sail for France on September 15, 1915. Three weeks later the Van Doos took their turn in the front line trenches at a Belgian town called Ypres. William, like all members of the Van Doos, participated in the deadly night raids into the German trenches less than five hundred yards away. When the Van Doos were ordered back into the rest areas behind Ypres three weeks later, the men were "blooded." William was now a veteran combat soldier. The Battle of the Somme was one of the most brutal battles ever fought in human history. Nearly one million British, Canadian, Australian and German soldier died there in a span of only four months. On September 9, 1916, a German hi-explosive shell suddenly screamed down into a section of Canadian trench and exploded. The blast was so severe that it jarred William's right cornea out of place. William was evacuated to England, where it took eye specialists five months to nurse his cornea back into place. On March 1, 1917, William rejoined the Van Doos at Vimy Ridge. On April 9, 1917, the Canadians went over the top to take Vimy Ridge from the Germans. The Germans did not take kindly to being kicked off the ridge by the rookie Canadians and they harassed them with long-range artillery fire for weeks afterwards. One of those shells ended William's combat career on May 16, 1917. It was a gas shell. William got his gas mask on quickly, but the gas burned his right cornea. William's war was over. He came home on board the troopship SS *Olympia* and disembarked at Halifax on December 14, 1918. He was discharged at Ottawa on January 14, 1919.

The Forgotten Soldier

Private Sam Gagnon, 145502. Enlisted on November 13, 1915, at Ottawa with the 77th Overseas Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force.

Sam's real name was Simon Kaponichin. He was born on March 9, 1888 to Thomas Kaponichin and Cecile Natawesi. Simon took the name Sam Gagnon after his widowed mother married William Gagnon. Sam-Simon was a powerfully built man at 5 feet 6 inches and 165 pounds. After six months of constant training and drills at the military parade grounds in Ottawa, the 77th Overseas Battalion sailed for England on June 19, 1916. Sam-Simon was transferred to the 87th Canadian Infantry Battalion on July 4, 1916. Two months later, Sam-Simon was at the Somme battle.

It wasn't war at the Somme; it was slaughter. **Hi-explosive** shells rained down into the Canadian trenches and on October 20, 1916, one of those hi-explosive shells found Sam-Simon. The violent blast threw Sam-Simon into the air and he landed hard. He survived it, but his right eyeball was completely purple and bulging from internal bleeding. Sam-Simon was immediately evacuated to England, where eye specialists stopped the bleeding inside his eyeball, but he was now legally blind in one eye. His war should have been over at this point, but he went back.

The 87th Battalion was holding the front lines at Passchendaele on November 21, 1917, when another German shell came looking for Sam-Simon. A chunk of shrapnel smashed into his heavy greatcoat. The combination of mud and heavy clothing stopped the force of the shrapnel from slicing into Sam-Simon's chest, but the blast knocked him out. He was evacuated to the Canadian base hospital at Etaples, France. Blinded in one eye and concussed from the shell burst at Passchendaele, Sam-Simon was finished as a front-line soldier. In that hospital at Etaples were thousands of Canadian soldiers wounded in the Passchendaele fighting. Many of them were dying. In one of those beds lay a badly wounded soldier, feverish from a dangerous shoulder wound that was draining blood to prevent gangrene. If Sam had come across him, he would have recognized the suffering soldier. His nick-name was Joker and he was the last surviving son of the widowed Xavier Odjick at River Desert.

Letters from the Front

"My poor wife I am so lonesome..."

His name was Frank Maheux. He was the husband of Angelique Kaponichin. Frank Maheux was a career soldier, already having served as an infantryman with the Canadian contingent of the British army during the Boer War in South Africa. War was in Franks' blood and he couldn't resist the call when Canada went to war again in 1914. He walked fifty-six kilometres from, Baskatong to sign up in Maniwaki on November 20, 1914. He was 34 years old. Frank was sent to the 21st Canadian Infantry Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force. In September 1915, Frank and his unit entered the front lines at the Ypres Salient in Belgium. What they saw there was nightmarish beyond comprehension: the Germans were shelling-the Canadian front lines and skeletons were hanging in the barbed wire. The rats had eaten them to the bone. A letter from Frank managed to get through the army censors and it described this to

Angelique. aritidian soldiers were not allowed to write about stiOlike this, but they did anyway. The army censors took scissors and cut out the horrific parts. What each soldier did to circumvent the censors was to write as many letters as they could in hope that one might get through. Frank played that game too, flooding the Canadian army postal service with letters. The ones that got through to Angelique are hard to read because hidden between those rough lines were the images that Canadian veterans could never bring themselves to speak about after it was all over. Frank-mime home to Angelique_in 1920. The Maheux family of Ottawa are the keepers of Frank's letters sent home from the front.

Sons of the Creator

When the Creator made the first Anishinabe man he knew the job was not finished yet. All the animals had a mate, but Anishinabe Inini didn't. So the Creator gave Anishinabe Inini a mate. She had dark hair, like her eyes, and she offered him a cautious smile. Anishinabe Inini liked Anishinabe Ikwe immediately because he knew by her careful smile that she could love him or fight him, whichever he wanted, but she wanted to be liked first. Anishinabe Inini decided to like her. She, in turn, became his wife and bore him children. The Creator made Anishinabe Ikwe to bring children into the world. To make her love those children, the Creator made her suffer pain for it. From pain came sacrifice and Anishinabe Ikwe loved those children she birthed because from tears of pain also flowed tears of joy. But Anishinabe Ikwe knew that the Creator intended for her to give life to His children and that in the end they were all His. It hurt Anishinabe Ikwe when her sons went off to fight war, to lose them after having sacrificed many tears for them, but they were never really her sons to own.

They belonged to the Creator.

These were His sons...

Private Joseph Odjick, 805655. Killed In Action, September 2, 1918.



He was a good-looking boy when he went to war. He was twenty years old when he joined up. His nickname was "Joker" because he liked playing pranks and telling jokes. He was gregarious. Tall and gangly at six feet tall and one hundred and forty pounds, he was tough enough to work as a lumberjack. Joker was born on July 26, 1895, the second and last son of Xavier Odjick and Philomene McDougall. Joker's older brother was Basil, born on May 1, 1894. Joker was one month shy of his fourth birthday when his mother died on June 23, 1899. Basil died six months later. Xavier was left alone with a motherless four-year old boy as the world brought River Desert into the twentieth century...and war.

Joker enlisted on March 26, 1916, at Maniwaki with the 136th Overseas Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force. Joker trained at Camp Valcartier and on September 25, 1916, he sailed for France on the troopship SS *Corsican*. Somewhere on the cold, dark North Atlantic Ocean, Joker wrote his will and left all of his possessions to his father Xavier. He also assigned fifteen dollars of his monthly pay to his father. Joker stepped off the troopship on October 6, 1916, at Liverpool, England. The next day he was transferred to the 39th Reserve Battalion, where he trained as a front line combat soldier. On December 7, 1916, Joker got his orders to France. He was going to war and on December 24, 1916, Joker joined the 75th

Canadian Infantry Battalion at Vimy Ridge. At dawn on April 9, 1917, the Canadians went over the top at Vimy Ridge. Through a diving snowstorm, the Canadians fought their way to the top of the vaunted ridge. Joker was there with fellow Algonquin Joseph Michael Stoqua of Golden Lake, Ontario, also of the 75th Battalion. Joker got off without a scratch through the ferocious fighting to take the ridge, but Stoqua died of wounds suffered in the battle. The capture of Vimy Ridge was Canada's crowning achievement, and after the battle was over, the sun came out. But then things got dark again at Passchendaele. No man who was there would ever forget Passchendaele. It was horror on a grand scale that could never have been imagined: men drowned in the mud. Thousands of them who went missing there are still resurfacing nine decades later.

On November 14, 1917, the 75th Battalion was holding its section of the line. A German shell screamed in and exploded in the air—the air bursting shell sent scraps of hot shards spiraling down into the Canadian trenches below. One of those hot fragments tore into Joker's greatcoat and cut through his shoulder, lodging two inches deep inside and just barely missing his jugular vein. His comrades carried Joker to a nearby Australian Casualty Station, where the medics hurriedly used scalpels to cut into his shoulder and pull out the hot shell splinter. Joker was evacuated to the Canadian military base hospital at Etaples, France. This was long before penicillin was discovered and the infection of metal and dirt was already siphoning away Joker's life force. They evacuated him to England. It took Joker five months to recover from that wound. He rejoined the 75th Battalion on April 16, 1918. In September of 1918, the Canadian Corps was called on by the British to break the German Hindenburg Line and end the war for good. On the morning of September 2, 1918, the 75th Battalion went over the top to take a German strongpoint known as the Drocourt-Queant Line. The Germans had pillboxes set up there. When the 75th went over the top, the Germans met them with relentless machine gun fire. The 75th fought their way through the barbed wire and they took the German position that afternoon. It was only after the surviving Germans surrendered that the men of the 75th took a moment to look back at the battlefield they charged over. Fifty-eight of their comrades lay dead in shell holes and in the German barbed wire. They buried them that evening. Joker was one of them. Private Joseph Odjick, 805655, is buried at Dury Mills Canadian Military Cemetery near Dury, France.

Private Frank James Gagnon, 410276. Killed In Action, November 18, 1916.

He was the brother of Sam-Simon Kapinichin. Frank was Cecile Natawesi's boy. Cecile married William Gagnon after Thomas Kaponichin died. Frank was Bill Gagnon's son, born on March 12, 1896. He was eighteen years old when he signed up in Ottawa with the 38th Canadian Infantry Battalion. Frank was a big kid at 5 feet 10 inches and 170 pounds. When he got to France he wrote his will. He was nineteen years old. No nineteen-year-old boy should ever write a will. Frank, did and he left everything he ever owned to his three year old sister Bernice. Frank was at the Somme when he was wounded in the left thigh by a shell burst on October 30, 1916. It was only a superficial wound and on November 6, 1916, Frank was released from the field hospital to rejoin his unit. On November 18, 1916, the Canadian artillery barrage opened up on the German trenches and when it suddenly ended, the 38th Battalion went over the top to take Regina Trench. The German defenders, the machine gunners, were waiting inside their dugouts below ground, waiting for the bombardment to end and start the Canadian assault. When they heard the Canadians coming across no man's land, they rushed out of the dugouts and set up their machine guns. They opened fire into the onrushing soldiers of the 38th Battalion. The men of the 38th took Regina Trench. They lost a lot of men on the rush over. One of them was the boy Frank James Gagnon, dead at twenty years old. Private Frank James Gagnon, 410276, is buried at the Regina Trench Canadian Military Cemetery on the Somme, France

The Last Men Standing

Private Holenger Gagnon, 410098. Enlisted at Ottawa on February 24, 1915, in the 38th Battalion, CEF.

A big lumberjack who stood five feet nine inches tall and weighed 170 pounds, Holenger was in the 38th Battalion with his brother Frank James *when they went over the top* on November 18, 1916, to assault Regina Trench. Holenger was hit in the hip by shrapnel. Holenger was evacuated to the Canadian Base Hospital at Etaples, France. Frank James, who was three years younger than Holenger, was buried at Regina Trench. Holenger rejoined the 38th Battalion at Vimy Ridge on December 23, 1916. Holenger fought at Vimy Ridge on April 9, 1917. He survived all of the major battles throughout the summer of 1917, even the murderous Passchaendaele battle in November of 1917. At Passchaendaele, Holenger developed a tumor in his lower jaw until he was finally unable to eat. He was evacuated to England on December 8, 1917. Antibiotics had not been discovered yet and it took Holenger five months to recover from the operation that removed the tumor. On May 28, 1918, he was discharged from the hospital and sent for retraining with the 6th Reserve Battalion at Witley Camp, England. He was awaiting orders to rejoin the 38th Battalion in France. They never came. He was still in England when the war ended on November 11, 1918. On December 12, 1918, Holenger received his sailing orders, disembarking at Halifax on December 22, 1918. He was discharged at Ottawa on January 11, 1919.

Sapper Joseph Michel, 814438. Enlisted at Ottawa on April 1, 1916.



"Joe Michel" was born on August 15, 1897. He was William Michel's brother. Joe Michel landed in England on October 6, 1916. Joe Michel kept getting sick while in England. He was in and out of hospital until he regained his health and was then posted to the 3rd Canadian Engineer Battalion in France on May 31, 1918. Joe Michel was trained as a "sapper," which meant that he was assigned to the unenviable job of deactivating unexploded shells and German booby traps. When the Canadian Expeditionary Force spearheaded the attack at Amiens, France on August 8, 1918, this began the "last one hundred days" that would push the German army back inside its own borders and end the war. Joe Michel and his unit followed closely behind the advancing Canadian army, repairing telephone lines and bridges and deactivating German booby traps and trip wires. Joe Michel and his comrades were also trained infantrymen and they had to take on last-ditch German snipers while going about their work. At 11 o'clock on the morning of November 11, 1918,

the guns finally fell silent on the Western Front. The war was over. Joe **Michel** came home on June 11, 1919, aboard the troopship SS *Aquitania*. Like his brother William, Joe Michel **as-signed** twenty dollars of his monthly army pay to **his** mother, Kate Keillor. After the war, Joe Michel worked for the Canadian Pacific Railways on the Maniwaki-Ottawa train run. He is shown with his daughter Edna in 1928.

The Battle of Vimy Ridge

At dawn on the morning of April 9, 1917, 30,000 Canadian soldiers of the first wave climbed out of their trenches in a driving sleet storm and advanced across the mud and shell holes of no man's land to wrest away a fortress ridge from the Germans that the vaunted French and British armies could not. The place was Vimy Ridge in France. It was this battle that

brought Canada together as a nation, because it was the first time that the entire Canadian Corps fought together as a unified force, all four infantry divisions of 100,000 men. Vimy Ridge was a Canadian show. The battles at Ypres and the Somme had blooded Canada's army of volunteers and the British High Command knew that only one Allied force could take the ridge—the Canadian Corps.

Every community and race in Canada : "as represented on the morning of April 9, 1917, at Vimy Ridge. Men ranging from British Columbia on the west coast all the way to Prince Edward Island on the east coast went over the top at Vimy Ridge. They came from all walks of life, from educated bankers and lawyers in Montreal and Ottawa to salmon fishermen on the west coast and crab fishermen on the east coast. There were carpenters, store clerks, drifters, farmers, hunters, lumberjacks, miners, railroad men, university students and even adventurers from the United States. They were English, French-Canadian, Scottish, Irish, Ukrainian, Polish, Italian, Japanese and the original people of this country, our First Nations boys. Canada was a melting pot of races and languages but at Vimy Ridge, when they went up against a common enemy who was shooting to kill because they were all wearing the same uniform, they forgot their differences and fought for each other.

A Cree sniper from Hobbema, Alberta won the Military Medal there when he took on a nest of German snipers who were killing Canadian soldiers. His name was Henry Norwest and he saved the lives of a lot of Canadian boys at Vimy. His heroism was just one of many that day as the Canadians took on pillboxes and machine gun nests, and then fought their way to the top of the ridge.

On April 12, 1917, after the last German positions still holding out were mopped up, Vimy Ridge was declared secure. The Canadians had taken it. Three thousand Canadian soldiers were killed there, another seven thousand wounded. This was Canada's gift to France. The grateful French never forgot this and they in turn gave Vimy Ridge to Canada. Vimy Ridge is sovereign Canadian territory on French soil because the blood of her sons was spilled there. Canada's Unknown Soldier was taken from Vimy Ridge and brought to Ottawa in the year 2000. Vimy Ridge is hallowed ground. The shell holes are still there and so is part of the Canadian front line trenches where Joseph Odjick, William Michel and Holenger Gagnon went over the top on the morning of April 9, 1917.

THE MOISE COMMANDANT STORY

Private Moses (Moise) Commandant, 648211.

A big man who stood five feet nine inches tall and weighed 175 pounds, Moise was born at Beaucage Nipissing Reserve on April 25, 1894. He visited regularly at River Desert Reserve and eventually married Philomene-Marie Oumont from River Desert. In May of 1914, Moise was at his father's cabin at Beaucage when the Ontario provincial game wardens arrived to confiscate their beaver traps. When Barney Commandant protested, a game warden drew a revolver and was about to shoot him when Moise whacked the gun away with a stick. Moise and Barney were arrested for aggravated assault causing injury (the game warden's hand was bruised) and both sentenced to one year in prison in Sudbury. A sympathetic judge took up their cause and petitioned Indian Affairs. Moise and Barney were released in June of 1915, after serving eight months. Moise enlisted at North Bay on February 3, 1916. Moise was a machine gunner with the 1st Canadian Machine Gun Battalion. He arrived at the Front on September 10, 1917 and was at the battle of Passchaendaele in November of 1917. There were two Algonquin brothers in Moise's unit: Samuel and Eli Commandant of Gibson Reserve. Being in a machine gun unit was a dangerous occupation because the Germans targeted Canadian machine gun positions. During a German counterattack at Passchaendaele on November 17, 1917, a poison gas shell landed near Moise's machine gun crew. Moise got a dose of poison gas, but he remained with his comrades until evacuated to England on April 30, 1918, suffering from respiratory problems and severe headaches from the lingering gas. Moise never returned to the Front. He finished the war with the Canadian Forestry Corps in England. The two Algonquin comrades he left behind fought on until August 28, 1918, when Eli was badly wounded from a German shell that landed in his machine gun position and buried him alive. He was dug out and then evacuated to England with severe head and facial wounds. Eli survived. Samuel was killed in action two days later. Eli and Samuel were the sons of Dinah Commandant of Gibson Reserve. Moise's two younger brothers, Angus and John, also served in France. Moise's name is carved into perpetuity on two memorials: the Algonquin Veteran's Memorial at Kitigan Zibi and also at the Nipissing Veteran's Memorial in North Bay. (The author would like to thank Juliette Mcleod of Nipissing First Nations at North Bay for providing the background on Moise Commandant.)

Conclusion

Xavier Odjick gave up his last surviving son for Canada and he lost everything when Joker was killed in France. Willie Michel came home to River Desert and he lived out the rest of his life disabled and unable to work, but surviving on a barely adequate arm pension. Sam-Simon Kaponichin moved to Alberta and was never heard from again. Holenger Gagnon talked about Passchaendaele, but he never spoke about Frank James' death at Regina Trench. Joe Michel kept war to himself. These men will always be honoured and remembered for their sacrifices.

The Missing Soldier

The old soldier Jacko McDougall, who had lied about his age to get into the Canadian Expeditionary Force, passed away on July 20, 1922. He was interred at the main cemetery in Maniwaki. Like all veterans of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, he was entitled to a military headstone inscribed with his name, rank, regimental number and military unit. The army shipped the headstone to Maniwaki. In those days, all transactions between the government and the Algonquins were handled by the Indian Agent, which meant that the Indian Agent took receipt of the headstone. The Indian Agent must have had other concerns on his mind because the headstone was never placed on Jacko's grave. It was accidentally discovered nearly four decades later inside an old wooden storage shed at the Algonquin cemetery on Bitobi Road, packed away inside a deteriorated wooden crate. The Algonquin cemetery at Bitobi Road was opened in 1952, thirty years after old Jacko was buried at the cemetery in town. This cemetery, Cimitiere #1, was closed in 1942 to make room for a new cemetery, Cimitiere #2. When the Algonquins went to Cimitiere #1, they could not locate Jacko's grave. Somewhere over those years, his grave marker was either removed or the years weathered away the inscription on his cross. This means that his grave was lost forever. He became a soldier with no known grave. So, the Algonquins picked a spot in their cemetery on Bitobi Road upon which they installed Jacko McDougall's headstone. There is no body under Jacko's headstone in the Algonquin cemetery. He had served temporarily with the Canadian Forestry Corps during the Great War. The fact that he was overage when he tried to get into the war needs to be acknowledged, for his memory if for no other reason. Jacko McDougall's story is not unique to First Nations veterans who came home after the Great War. Their contributions and sacrifices were quickly forgotten about or were simply ignored by the very country that they went overseas to defend. But at least in telling Jacko McDougall's story in this book, his name will live on and we hope that his spirit will find closure. His story was told.

Source : Traduit de McGregor, Stephen, *Since Time Immemorial : «Our Story»*. *The Story of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinàbeg*, Kitigan Zibi Education Council, Kitigan Zibi, 2004, p. 228 à 240. With the permission of the Kitigan Zibi Education Council.