

The Life and Service of Moses Neptune

By

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Fig. 1. Moses Neptune

Moses Neptune, one World War One soldier out of many, has a unique story that is not known by many. Bringing his story to light gives recognition to him and a different angle on the war. I chose Neptune for several reasons. First of all, he was a Native American. Because of this, he was only recognized recently for his service. In addition to this, he was one of the last soldiers to die before the armistice; his death was just one day before it was signed.¹ By creating this biography, I hope to bring light to the life of one soldier that is overlooked by most.



Fig. 2. The symbol of the Passamaquoddy

Moses Neptune was born in 1898 in Pleasant Point, Washington, Maine.² The Pleasant Point community was one centered around fishing, as it was located on the coast.³ Neptune's mother, Margaret Neptune, born in 1871, and his father, William Neptune, born in 1875, were



Fig. 3. Pleasant Point c.a. 1910

both basket makers, and only his father was literate.⁴ His father later became the Governor of the Far East Tribe of Passamaquoddy Indians when he was elected in 1916.⁵

Neptune had 4 siblings: Elizabeth, born in 1901; Susan, born in 1904; Benjamin, born in 1906; and Francis, born in 1909.⁶ He also has three step siblings, Joe, Leroy, and Jennie Nicholas, who were born in 1895, 1890, and 1892, respectively.⁷ In the house he lived in, owned by his father in Pleasant point, there were two boarders, Mary and Frank Mitchell, a married couple who were also basketmakers.⁸ Around the 1900s, basketmaking, as seen above was the most common

profession at Pleasant Point.⁹ Unfortunately, the 1900s were a time of poor relations with the US government for the Passamaquoddy people and other Native American groups. The US government did not recognize the nation and hoped that its population would just continued to decrease from its already low count of 1000.¹⁰ It was not until 1924 that all Native Americans were made citizens and 1954 that they could vote in Maine.¹¹ Despite this mistreatment, Neptune, along with 24 other Passamaquoddy Indians, enlisted to serve their country on April 14, 1917, soon after the US joined WWI.¹²

In WWI, Neptune fought as a private in Company I, 103rd Infantry.¹³ The 103rd and 104th Infantry made up the 52nd Infantry Brigade, which was controlled by Brigadier General Charles H. Cole.¹⁴ Neptune arrived overseas on September 27, 1917.¹⁵ Initially, he trained in Massachusetts for several months.¹⁶ After leaving Massachusetts, he went overseas to Le Havre, France, in mid October, where he trained



Fig. 4. Neptune and other Passamaquoddy soldiers

under French officials until he began to fight in April.¹⁷ Through their entire involvement in the war, the the brigade did not lose any ground, took 1500 prisoners, and took 30 kilometers of enemy territory.¹⁸ During the war, Neptune fought in the Battle of St Mihiel, the Champagne-Marne Offensive, the Aisne-Marne Campaign, and the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.¹⁹ Each of these battles were important, but what was more unique was what was left behind by the Passamaquoddy soldiers. In underground quarries in France that American troops lived in, carvings were discovered.²⁰ These carvings depicted canoes and traditional Passamaquoddy

headdresses, among other things.²¹ These carvings were examined by historians and proven to



most likely be from the Passamaquoddy soldiers that fought in the war.²²

These not only served as a way to show that they were there, but it also allowed the soldiers to bring a piece of their culture with them.

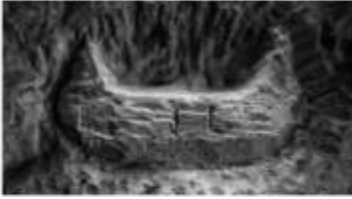


Fig. 5. Carvings of traditional Passamaquoddy headdresses and a canoe in a quarry in France.

Neptune died at the age of 20 on November 10, 1918, just one day before the armistice was signed.²³ He was killed by a shell while fighting in the Meuse-Argonne offensive.²⁴ He was buried along with 10 other men that had died that day on November 12, 1918.²⁵ The grave was located at the edge of Bois-de-Ville, the farthest advance of the

103rd infantry.²⁶ No apparent obituary was written for Neptune, but after his death, the company's chaplain sent a letter back to his father, William Neptune:

"Dear Governor Neptune: Your son gave his young life for freedom on the day the Armistice was signed. He was in the last great drive, at the so-called second battle of Verdun. Tenderly we carried the bodies to a beautiful spot on the hillside and laid your boy with ten of his companions to rest. The entire battalion gathered around them. The American flag was spread over them, while touchingly and fitting the band played 'Nearer, my god to thee.' After the Christian service, the army guns salute was fired and the bugler blew Taps, the call in the army which summons soldiers to rest. Just as the service was finished we noticed 3 German officers coming, flying the white flag of surrender. It was a most fitting close; the very thing for which your son and his comrades had given their lives had come to pass. I am sure that from Heaven they looked and saw that they had not lived in vain. We marked their graves with crosses, and the cemetery

with a large white cross that could be easily seen from a distance, and sent the exact location to Washington. "That is a good letter", was the quiet comment of Governor Neptune and turned back to re-read another paragraph of Moses' last letter. "I am glad the service flag is raised and that our people went to Holy Communion for soldiers in the army. I am proud of my people; school children and all who help."²⁶

This letter home showed care for Neptune, who was relatively unknown, and it put his death in context, showing that it was not in vain.

Several months after the armistice was signed, the 103rd infantry received a unit commendation (June 20, 1918).²⁷ In addition, after Neptune's death, US relations with the Passamaquoddy people started improving. In 1920, Portland celebrated its centennial and invited the Passamaquoddy to share their culture, so they stayed at Deering Oaks Park during the summer.²⁸



Fig. 6. William Neptune at the Portland Centennial celebration

This, however, did not represent the Passamaquoddy how they lived in areas such as pleasant point and showed their more traditional practices.²⁹ In 1924, Coolidge granted citizenship to the Native Americans with the Indian Citizenship Act, and in 1954, Maine granted the right to vote to all Native Americans



Fig. 7. A Passamaquoddy veteran's family member with the eagle feather and flag

in the state.³⁰ On July 18, 2016, Neptune and five other Passamaquoddy men that served with him finally received the formal recognition that they deserved for their service.³¹ Officials from

the state gave each veteran's family a pin, written commendation, American flag, and military service medals.³² The families also received decorated eagle feathers from each family. Although Neptune went unnoticed in his time, it is not too late to bring him the recognition he deserves.

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Fig. 1. *What Do Native American Carvings In French WWI Quarries Mean?*

Fig. 2. "Pleasant Point Tribal Government."

Fig. 3. "Pleasant Point, Maine," St. Croix Historical Society, May 1, 2016, accessed June 10, 2018,

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Fig. 4. Lora Whelan, "WWI Veterans from Passamaquoddy Tribe Honored in Maine," The United States World War One Centennial Commission, accessed May 20, 2018,

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Fig. 5. *What Do Native American Carvings In French WWI Quarries Mean?*

Fig. 6. Candace Kanes, "Indians at the Centennial."

Fig. 7. Bill Trotter, "Nearly 100 Years Later, Passamaquoddy Army Veterans Honored for Service,"

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