

# Korean War Veteran

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## Happy Father's Day – Happy Aboriginal Day

On this Father's Day holiday in North America, celebrated in both Canada and the U.S., it is also National Aboriginal Day in Canada. The office of Canada's Minister of Veterans Affairs has issued a statement under the name of Minister Erin O'Toole, commenting on some of the Aboriginal Veterans and their achievements.

Our publication, of course, does not wish to diminish in any way the Minister's statement. It must be appreciated by not only our thousands of Aboriginal veterans, but by their friends, their comrades who served with them, their families and neighbours.

But we would like to supplement it with reflections from our own experience.

To our American friends – including this publisher's children and grandchildren – we apologize that the wording in the Minister's statement with respect to the War of 1812 references "defeat of *the Americans*," as though America is not our closest ally, and possibly a shade sinister and menacing. We believe identifying the war would have sufficed. Our two nations are closer than "them" and "us."

Mention is made of Thomas Prince, with whom the publisher served under fire, *really under fire* with enemy bullets snapping at us and mortar bombs blasting around us on a position in Korea – not just in the same unit, but right at his side, including when he was wounded.



**Sergeant Thomas Prince, who was awarded the Military Medal and the Silver Star Medal in World War Two, in a photograph taken following his second tour of duty in the Korean War.**

Mention is also made of the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument in Ottawa, but not of the veteran who was responsible for it being there.

Korean War Veteran Claude Petit, from Wetaskiwin, Alberta, conceived of it, personally raised most of the million dollars needed to design, sculpt and construct it. He kept a strong hand in the design and liaised throughout with the artist, another man of Aboriginal blood, Lloyd Pinay.

It is one of the grandest, most eloquent monuments in Confederation Park in Ottawa. Yet Claude Petit's name is never mentioned with respect to it. It was so, even at the unveiling 14 years ago this day, though Claude had lived, managed sweated over the project for more than two years. He was still working on it on that very day. He was trying to raise more funds to complete it, for the purse was short. Even today, large elements of the monument still are missing.

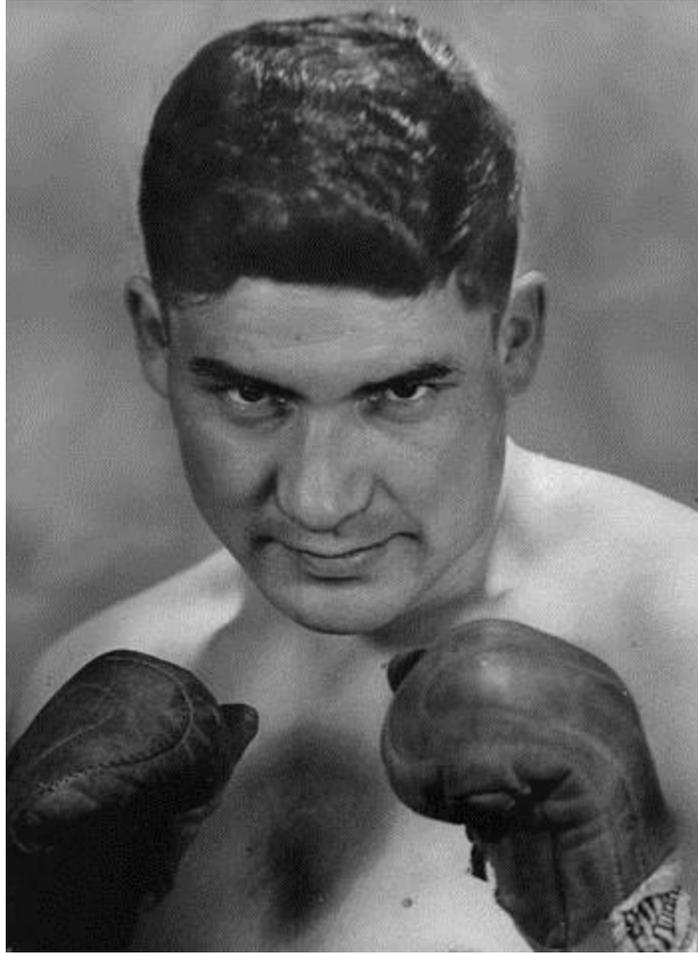


**The National Aboriginal Veterans Monument was unveiled in Ottawa on June 21, 2001 by then serving Governor General Adrienne Clarkson. No mention was made of its originator and the man responsible for it being there, Veteran**

**Claude Petit, president of the National Aboriginal Veterans Association. He had personally for two years beat the government's bushes and appealed to industry and civic groups for the roughly \$1 million needed to bring it to fruition. Today at 80, he is still working on it, for it still needs additional funding. The walls of the plinth are supposed to be encased in bronze tablets depicting contributions of Canada's Aboriginal veterans, both men and women, through the years of the nation's history. Claude Petit received no credit at the unveiling ceremony and the paucity of information about his major role continues today. The Veterans Affairs Canada website, which lauds the monument and its artist, Aboriginal Lloyd Pinay of Saskatchewan, makes no mention of Mr. Petit. Neither does the expository Wikipedia article on the world's Internet. Neither do the many articles published at the monument's unveiling, or in the 14 years since.**

Claude Petit was also on the same position with the publisher when Thomas Prince was wounded. Claude is a Metis, a Canadian of both Aboriginal and French bloodlines. He had turned 16 years old on the ship that carried him to Korea and was wounded in action less than two months after it landed.

Claude's older brother Norris Petit had been on the same ship. Norris Petit was 17. He was assigned to the battalion's anti-tank platoon.



**A Party in Hiro, Japan, the night before sailing aboard the Empire Pride transport ship to Pusan, Korea, and two weeks before their battalion counterattacked and relieved companies of Britain's Black Watch. Left, Norris Petit, 17 with his arm around his brother, Claude Petit, who turned 16 just two weeks earlier, and in the foreground between them, Private Bird, also 16 – maybe 15.**

Serving in the publisher's platoon and also badly wounded on a different position later was his good friend Vic Redman. Vic was a full First Nations Aboriginal.

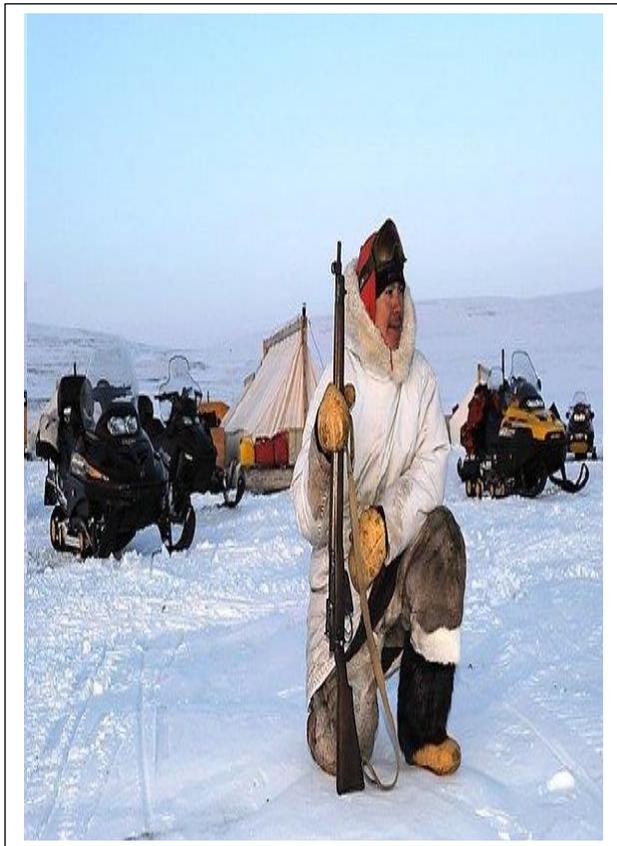
One acting section leader in another platoon on the position was Lance Corporal Albert Desjarlais, 17, also of Aboriginal bloodlines. Two of his men were killed in action within an hour of coming onto the position. A section leader is equivalent to a squad leader in the U.S. Army, and the rank of corporal is equivalent to a Sergeant E-5.

Albert's brother, Leonard Desjarlais, 18, was not on that position, but was supporting the battalion in the mortar platoon, of which he soon became the platoon sergeant.

The battalion's sniper corporal who served under Sergeant Thomas Prince was another brave Aboriginal soldier, Corporal Thomas Thomas. He had fought in France and Germany in World War Two and the publisher knew him very well. He took out many patrols and as a sniper, like Thomas Prince, was highly effective in his work.

In the same company and battalion of infantry, there were many, many other Aboriginal soldiers. The names of Ackerman, Bird, Eagle, Meisner, others were well known amongst us. Many names have faded and need to be looked up.

Most of those soldiers have passed away.



Claude Petit, a handsome, athletic young man who held the Canadian Army heavyweight boxing championship for several years, felt the discriminative scourge acutely. He served in the Canadian Army for 12 years. He then went into the sporting goods business and was highly successful.

He established boxing clubs and hockey clubs for Aboriginal youth, covering much of the expense personally. He put together the National Aboriginal Youth Hockey League, and still today manages the national tournament that is held in Saskatoon.

For his work with Aboriginal youth he was awarded the Order of Canada. For his work with and for the Metis People he was awarded the Saskatchewan Order of Merit. He currently is a candidate for South Korea's Order of Civil Merit, based on the decades of good work he has done since his war service in Korea.



**Claude and Ardis Petit in their official photograph following Claude being invested into the Order of Canada by the Governor General of Canada in ceremonies at Rideau Hall in 1998.**

The Veterans Affairs news release does not show the pervasiveness of Aboriginal Veterans in the units that served in Korea, except in broadest terms. This is understandable. We only mention it to emphasize that the picture is much bigger; that more is owed to them, than the Minister's statement conveys.

It also does not mention that throughout Canada's vast Arctic, where very few people dare to live - and where sovereignty is always potentially challenged by other nations wishing to lay claim to the islands that support sea navigation, and especially those that hold abundant mineral resources - the Inuit people and other Aboriginal people make up the backbone of Canada's Rangers.

These are the small teams of part-time soldiers who would go instantly into action to defend their regions if the need ever arose. They also do valiant work rescuing those in peril in that perilous part of our nation.

It also does not reflect that grand celebrations were held on the weekend in virtually every major city in the western and eastern provinces of Canada, but lesser so in Ontario and Quebec.

Also, of course, it does not mention the Canadian Government's recent report on the abusive, genocidal treatment of the culture of the Aboriginal peoples that existed in the residential schools the children were until recent years required to attend. Tens of thousands of children were sent to them forcefully. They underwent years of stern instruction aimed at eradicating their native language and cultural beliefs, and in the process, eradicated the self-worth of many of them.

Some 6,000 Aboriginal children died in those residential schools and thousands, many thousands, were physically and sexually abused by those paid to instruct and keep them under what was in many places no more than a brutal house arrest.

Even a few years ago, or it seems a few, when the publisher was doing some work in Canada's high Arctic, the children of Inuit (Eskimo) families were being taken from them at high school age and shipped to residential schools. In earlier times children were taken from their families at even younger ages.

The plight of Canada's Aboriginal peoples, the continuation of the reservation system that segregates and keeps tens of thousands of First Nations people out of general society, are sores in the Canadian makeup that badly needs urgent and long lasting treatment.

All these ills were there in the wars Canada has sent its sons and daughters to fight in. They were certainly there when so many Canadians of Aboriginal origin fought with us in Korea. Yet they were enormously proud of their Canada, even knowing that at home they faced a horrid discrimination, not only within the populace, but by one that was institutionalized by their national and provincial governments.

Some of them went to war to escape the horrible one they faced every day in the country in which they had been born. Beyond the reservations, Canada was not open to them.

We should never forget our veterans.

We should never forget our Aboriginal People, what they have been through, and what they still suffer with.

Here is the laudatory statement sent out over the name of Veterans Affairs Minister Erin O'Toole, which is a step in the right direction, and our Aboriginal comrades must surely appreciate it.

One wonders if they might appreciate more some special steps taken by Veterans Affairs Canada to offset some of the ills they still face. Maybe something like scholarships for the children of Aboriginal War Veterans, to show their offspring that their government and their country really does care for the service of their forebears, and for their people today.

## **Statement by Minister of Veterans Affairs on National Aboriginal Day**

OTTAWA, June 20, 2015 /CNW/ - The Honourable Erin O'Toole, Minister of Veterans Affairs, today issued the following statement to mark National Aboriginal Day.

"Today we pause to remember and honour the immense contributions, sacrifices and impact made by Aboriginal Canadians in defining our country and military history.

"In the War of 1812, First Nations answered the call to war as allies to help protect Canada from advancing American forces. Aboriginal warriors Tecumseh, John Norton and John Brant were instrumental in helping lead a united native, Canadian and British force in the eventual defeat of the Americans.

"During the First World War, Tom Charles Longboat, an Onondaga from the Six Nations Grand River Reserve and champion long distance runner, left his racing career behind to enlist with the 107th Pioneer Battalion in France and become a dispatch carrier.

"Tommy Prince, a Manitoba Ojibwa and one of Canada's most-decorated Aboriginal war Veterans, served in both the Second World War and the Korean War. A member of the famed First Special Service Force, the "Devil's Brigade," he was awarded the Military Medal by King George VI for bravery during a mission in Italy where he provided invaluable intelligence on German positions with no regard for his own safety. He was also awarded the United States Silver Star with ribbon for his courageous service during the Second World War.

"The National Aboriginal Veterans Monument in Ottawa is a sacred memorial to the brave Aboriginal Canadians who have served our country over the years, including the more than 7,000 who enlisted and more than 500 who died in service during the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War.

"Their contributions have also been immortalized in the names of Canadian warships, like HMCS *Iroquois*, *Cayuga* and *Huron*.

"Today, we honour the immense contribution and price paid by Aboriginal Canadians who have served and continue to serve our country during times of conflict and peace."

## **Déclaration du ministre des Anciens Combattants à l'occasion de la Journée nationale des Autochtones**

OTTAWA, le 20 juin 2015 /CNW/ - L'honorable Erin O'Toole, ministre des Anciens Combattants, a fait la déclaration suivante aujourd'hui afin de souligner la Journée nationale des Autochtones.

« Aujourd'hui, arrêtons-nous un moment pour commémorer et honorer les immenses contributions et les grands sacrifices des Canadiens autochtones et la grande incidence qu'ils ont eue sur notre pays et son histoire militaire.

« Lors de la guerre de 1812, les Premières Nations ont répondu à l'appel en tant qu'alliés pour aider à protéger le Canada contre les forces américaines attaquantes. Les guerriers autochtones Tecumseh, John Norton et John Brantont joué des rôles de premier plan en aidant à mener la force autochtone, canadienne et britannique unie qui a éventuellement défait les Américains.

« Durant la Première Guerre mondiale, Tom Charles Longboat, un Onondaga de la Réserve des Six Nations de la rivière Grand et un champion de la course de fond, a mis en veilleuse sa carrière de coureur pour s'enrôler avec le 107<sup>e</sup> Bataillon de pionniers où il a servi en tant qu'estafette.

« Tommy Prince, un Ojibwé du Manitoba et l'un des vétérans autochtones les plus décorés du Canada, a servi durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale et la guerre de Corée. Un membre du célèbre détachement appelé la Première Force de Service spécial, aussi surnommée la Brigade du diable, il a été décoré de la Médaille militaire des mains mêmes du roi George VI pour bravoure durant une mission en Italie, où il a réussi à recueillir des renseignements précieux sur les positions allemandes, et cela, sans égard pour sa propre sécurité. Il a aussi été décoré de la Silver Star ornée d'un ruban, des États-Unis, pour actes de bravoure durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale.

« Le Monument dédié aux anciens combattants autochtones à Ottawa est un monument sacré érigé à la mémoire des braves Autochtones canadiens qui ont servi notre pays au fil des ans, y compris les plus de 7 000 qui se sont enrôlés et les quelque 500 qui ont perdu la vie en service durant les deux guerres mondiales et la guerre de Corée.

« Leurs contributions ont aussi été immortalisées dans les noms de navires de guerre canadiens tels que les NCSM *Iroquois*, *Cayuga* et *Huron*.

« Aujourd'hui, nous honorons les immenses contributions et sacrifices des Autochtones qui ont servi et qui continuent de servir notre pays en temps de conflit et de paix. »