

Native people were fighting for this country before they were given the right to vote. We were fighting for our land.

Billy Nicholas

Passamaquoddy

Governor, Indian Township

Veterans

American Indians have served as members in every branch of the armed forces since the creation of the United States. Many Native communities honor veterans in a number of ways, recognizing them at events and ceremonies, and honoring them at community gatherings. Some tribes have a long legacy of warrior societies, and service in the military was a natural extension of cultural values. The Wabanaki did not have warrior societies, yet military service has played an important part in Wabanaki history.

Maine:

The Maliseet, Micmac, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot people have served in every armed conflict since the Revolutionary War, and in larger numbers, per capita, than the non-Native population. This dedication to military service is all the more impressive in light of the refusal by the U.S. Government even to recognize American Indians as citizens until 1924. Moreover, Native peoples in Maine were not granted the right to vote in federal elections until 1954, nor in state elections until 1967.

In 2003 the federal government designated November 7 as Native American Veterans Day, and in April 2009 Maine passed its own version of the law recognizing Wabanaki veterans for their courage and service each year on June 21. Passamaquoddy representative to the state legislature Donald Soctomah introduced the bill, citing the history of Wabanaki people fighting for this country when they were not even allowed to vote.

Veterans Newspaper Headlines:

Merci beaucoup: Penobscot Indian elder Charles (Norman) Shay to receive France's highest honor

By Aimee Dolloff

Bangor Daily News

November 6, 2007

(Charles Norman) Shay is a direct descendant of Chief Joseph Orono, who was an ally of George Washington during the Revolutionary War. He also is the grandson (sic) of a French trapper, Jean-Vincent d'Abadie, Baron of Saint-Castin, who married the daughter of the great Chief of the Penobscot tribe in 1678. Shay, now 83, was a combat medic in the 1st Infantry Division of the U.S. Army. He was part of the first wave of soldiers to arrive at Omaha Beach on June 6, 1944. He subsequently participated in the battles of

Mons, Aachen, the Hurtgen Forest and the Bulge. After crossing the Remagen Bridge on March 25, 1945, Shay was captured and spent six weeks as a prisoner of war.

On Wednesday [he] will be present when newly appointed French President Nicholas Sarkozy addresses a joint session of Congress. Shay will be given the title of Knight of the Legion of Honor.

Tribe member seeks separate Veterans Day

By Meg Haskell

Bangor Daily News

February 17, 2009

American Indians from Maine have served in every war since the American Revolution, according to decorated World War II veteran Charles Shay of Indian Island, and it is time they were honored for their heroism and patriotism.

Maliseets mark Native American Veterans Day

Bangor Daily News

June 23, 2009

A solemn crowd gathered at the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians' reservation Monday afternoon as the tribe marked Native American Veterans Day in the state.

The bill's primary sponsor, tribal Rep. Donald Soctomah of the Passamaquoddy Tribe, said the holiday would promote greater public awareness of American Indians' contribution to national defense.

Penobscot Indian veterans honored at Army ceremony

By Meg Haskell

Bangor Daily News

December 11, 2009

With commendation certificates and letters signed by Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr. and by Secretary of the Army John McHugh, the Penobscot Indian Nation's historic support of the U.S. Army was recognized, from the Revolutionary War through the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Veterans, Wabanaki Quotes:

We haven't recognized our veterans to the fullest, but we're changing that by creating a memorial that will open in the spring, and recognizing them at events. The bill that was passed was a good effort, but what happens from here is up to us.

Billy Nicholas

Passamaquoddy

Governor, Indian Township

I hold these people in the highest regard. You can't talk about the history of the United States without talking about the Wabanaki being involved with every conflict.

Kirk Francis

Penobscot

Chief, Penobscot Indian Nation

The tribe doesn't offer any specific services for veterans. This was the first year we have been recognized.

Kenneth Hanning

Maliseet

The new bill has brought awareness to our Native American veterans that's long overdue, even within our own community. It has helped us as individual members to know who served, and gave us the opportunity to acknowledge them.

Brenda Commander

Maliseet

Chief, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians

Native American Veterans Day is important because it puts Native people and Native veterans on the radar, and every time we have a chance to be seen it's good. It's good to be recognized as human and contributing to our society.

Donna Loring

Penobscot

It's been within the last five years or so that the Penobscot have started honoring veterans. I never thought of serving as a conflict of interest, that would have been a luxury! I just needed something to survive. Initial needs have to be met first, and then later things like patriotism come in.

Donna Loring

Penobscot

For me there isn't an "us against them" mentality. We live in America, we go to their schools, we live in their society. We are a part of the landscape. For me, serving in the military was more of an assertion of my place in this landscape rather than asserting my otherness from this society.

James Eric Francis, Sr.

Penobscot

Tribal Historian, Penobscot Indian Nation

I have had to reconnect myself with my community and my people again because I have been away in the military service for twenty years, followed by forty years living in Vienna, Austria, the home of my wife, where I was also employed by the International Atomic Energy Agency for twenty years. When I ask someone their name, I have to ask who their parents were, and in some cases even who their grandparents were to make a connection as to who they are and what family they come from.

Charles Norman Shay

Penobscot

I think the military and the people of this country honor Native Americans for their service to this country. That makes me feel good. I never had a problem with discrimination in over twenty years of military service.

Charles Norman Shay
Penobscot

Nothing has really been done for our veterans until about eight months ago, and that's sad. Last year we had a dinner, which was nice, but only about a dozen veterans came and I think there are more in the community. Their concern is that we don't have a graveyard for our people with a designated area for the veterans. We are trying to buy some land for this.

Victoria Higgins

Micmac

Chief, Aroostook Band of Micmacs