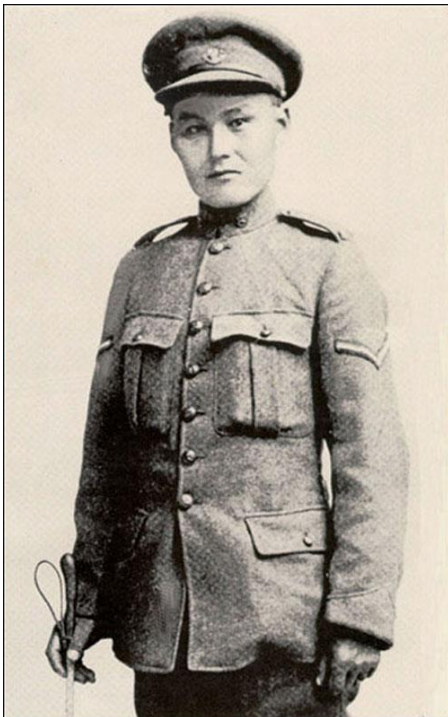


War Memories across Canada Conversation Kit:

The Sniper from Rigolet, Lance Corporal John Shiwak Royal Newfoundland Regiment Rigolet, Labrador



Lincoln Shiwak/Veterans Affairs Canada

Lance Corporal John Shiwak of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment is a decorated First World War hero. He is from the remote Inuit community of Rigolet, Labrador. Shiwak's skill as a marksman earned him the reputation as one of the best snipers in the British Army. He was described as a writer, poet, "a great favourite with all ranks, an excellent scout and observer, and a thoroughly good, reliable fellow in every way." Shiwak died in November 1917 from shell fire in the Battle of Cambrai. He is buried close to the site of the battle and the village of Masnières. He was 28 years old.

Discussion Questions:

In 1911, John Shiwak met novelist William Lacey Amy on a ship travelling from Rigolet to St. John's. Amy wrote about Shiwak in *The Empire's Only Eskimo*, published in *The Wide World* magazine in 1918. [Read the article](#). What does Amy's tone, style and voice tell you about his perception of Shiwak and the Inuit way of life? Compare Amy's story to other accounts of Shiwak's war service and death. How much of Amy's account do you think is true, and how much is fiction?

How did Shiwak's life as a trapper and hunter prepare him for the daily hardships of war and make him particularly suited to become one of the best snipers in the British army?

Describe John Shiwak's contribution to the war, personally and symbolically. How does his story capture that "sense of legacy and sense of loss" that is the essence of the Great War? How do you think this is felt by Shiwak's descendants and other members of the community of Rigolet to this day?

In what way is Indigenous participation of special importance and relevance to Canadian history and war remembrance?

Activities:

Create a picture, model or written description of daily life in the remote community of Rigolet during Shiwak's lifetime. Then depict life on the front lines of France during the First World War.

Research accounts of other Aboriginal soldiers from different parts of Canada. How many survived and returned to their former lives? Are there any accounts of how they were able to reconcile their war experience with their traditional way of life? How did their participation impact their communities, even to this day?

Visit the Masnières Newfoundland Memorial in France where Shiwak was killed. If you can't visit the site in person, you can find out more on the [Veterans Affairs Website](#).

What does the site commemorate? Why did the Newfoundland Regiment earn such special recognition? Why is John Shiwak's contribution significant to the overall contribution of Newfoundlanders and Canadians during the First World War?



Rigolet, Labrador - Bibliothèque et Archives Canada – Library and Archives Canada/PA-099266

Resources:

Websites

Aboriginals in the First World War - Newfoundland & Labrador in the First World War

<http://www.heritage.nf.ca/first-world-war/articles/aboriginals-first-world-war.php>

Website also available in [French](#).

The Great War Virtual Exhibit – The Rooms Provincial Archives

<https://www.therooms.ca/thegreatwar/the-beginning/entering-the-great-war>

Labrador War Memorial

http://www.themdays.com/memorial/honour_roll.html

Includes an honour roll of veterans from Labrador as well as a quarterly magazine documenting the oral history of Labrador.

Royal Newfoundland Regiment

<http://www.rnflr.ca/regiment.aspx>

The website of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment.

Books

For King and Kanata : Canadian Indians and the First World War, by Timothy C. Winegard. University of Manitoba Press, 2012.

Into the Blizzard: Walking the Fields of the Newfoundland Dead, by Michael Winter. Doubleday Canada, 2014.

An account of Winter's pilgrimage to the First World War battlefields. He documents the sacrifices of Newfoundland and Labrador soldiers.

Three Day Road, by Joseph Boyden. Penguin Canada, 2005.

A novel about two Cree men from Northern Ontario who volunteer as snipers in the First World War.

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