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THE SONGS OF INDIAN SOLDIERS DURING THE WORLD WAR

By FRANCES DENSMORE

EVERY Indian mother raised her boy to be a soldier. Fighting was a career open to every young man, and a war was going on most of the time. There were large expeditions, preceded by much singing and drumming, with a dog-feast; and there were small forays, got up by one or two men whose horses had been stolen. Scalps or horses—a boy breathed in the desire for one or the other as he frequented the places where the warriors told their stories.

Education in the white man's way did not kill this desire. The young men tried to be good farmers, but when the bugle blew they trooped to the white man's flag. They came from the woods of Wisconsin and Minnesota, the prairie of Dakota, the plains of Oklahoma, the Northwest and Southwest. From every reservation came young Indians who were finding what it meant to be twentieth-century Americans.

More than 8,000 Indians served with the military forces of the United States: about 6,500 in the Army, 1,000 in the Navy, and 500 in other military work. Many from northern reservations enrolled in Canadian military-organizations before we entered the war. They did not wait for the draft. A report of the Provost Marshal regards their representation in camp and actual warfare as "furnishing a ratio to population unsurpassed, if equalled, by any other race or nation." The same report states that "the ratio of Indians claiming deferment was negligible as compared with the average for all registrants."¹

The Indian's ideal of life is that it should be one big problem after another, each taking everything there is in him. Between times he takes a little rest, and the white man who happens along at his rest-period says he is "another lazy Indian." An Indian wants a definite objective. The old loggers knew this, and used to select a Chippewa Indian to figure out the key log in a jam, when the logs were piled high in the spring freshets. Give an Indian a clear idea of a task before him, let him realise his responsibility, give him time to get this

¹ "Second Report of the Provost Marshal General to the Secretary of War on the Operations of the Selective Draft System to December 20, 1918."

straight in his mind—and he will go the limit. Talk with returned Indian soldiers, as I have done, and you will see that the statement of a regimental commander concerning one Indian² applies to hundreds of others—“he was always a volunteer for the most dangerous missions.” His discharge papers bear record of two special citations for bravery. His regimental commander states: “Sergeant Thomas E. Rogers, Co. A, 18th Infantry. Non-commissioned officer of great courage, initiative and intelligence. . . . Has throughout his service with this regiment on the front given proof of the highest qualities of the soldier, notably during the attack on Cantigny, May 28th, 1918, and the battle south of Soissons, July 18th to July 22nd, on both of which occasions his service with the Intelligence Section of this regiment proved him to be a soldier of the highest type.”

I knew a young Indian who wanted to go to France but stayed in Waco, Texas, in hospital work. He told me some of his experiences during the “flu” epidemic. He stood face to face with death as truly as on the battlefield and yet there was no cheering—only the long quiet of the nights with the stars overhead. There were Indian heroes who won their victories on American soil.

There was a cattleman in Oklahoma, three-fourths Choctaw, O. W. Leader by name, who enlisted to show his loyalty. He fought at Cantigny, Chateau-Thierry, St. Mihiel, and at Argonne Forest, being twice wounded and gassed. The French Government selected him as model for the painting of the original American soldier, and his picture hangs on the wall of the French Federal Building with types of all the allied races.

Someone had to swim the Meuse under terrific fire with a cable for a pontoon bridge. Corporal Walter G. Sevalia of Wisconsin, in Co. F, Seventh Engineers, did the trick and was cited for “extraordinary heroism.” Later he carried another cable over the Est Canal and across an open field covered by enemy machine-guns.

Many received the Croix de Guerre, among them being Ordnance Sgt. James M. Gordon of Wisconsin, cited for rescuing, under shell fire, a wounded French officer. One was cited for bravery in swift running as a messenger at Bellincourt,³ another “crossed No Man’s

² Sergeant Thomas E. Rogers (“Charges Alone”), an Arickara from the Fort Berthold (N. Dak.) reservation. Volunteered for service, transferred to Company A, 18th Infantry, 1st Division.

³ Chester Armstrong Fourbear, a full-blood Sioux from South Dakota.

Land many times to get information concerning the enemy and to assist his wounded comrades." His citation for the Croix de Guerre came from Marshal Pétain and tells how he "dashed to the attack of an enemy position, covering about 210 yards through barbed wire entanglements and captured 171 prisoners, turned the captured guns on the enemy and held the position four days, in spite of a constant barrage of large projectiles and of gas shells."⁴

General George Custer had an Indian scout named Young Hawk—one of the best in his service. Young Hawk's son was wounded on the Soissons front when he was surrounded by five Germans and captured. Watching his chance he killed three and marched the others into camp. Joe Young Hawk refused to discuss this bit of action, except to say that he broke the men's backs over his knee. The record of Indian coolness under fire, of bravery and individual heroism is one of which the United States should be proud.⁵ One young man, Philip Jim by name, went over the top more than 30 times, came home, walked into the recruiting office at Quincy, Ill., and laid down \$100.00 for a Victory bond, saying he had finished fighting and wanted to help some other way. Then he went straight home to his farm and began planting a garden.

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We know what the white soldiers sang about. They sang of the "long, long trail" and the way they felt or wanted to feel. But the Indian sang chiefly about the flag and his responsibility to it. The flag was a symbol, and he was used to symbolism. Some of his songs mention the Kaiser, without any hatred or bitterness. There is mention also of the Germans, but the main theme is the Indian's love of the flag and his purpose to defend it.

When an Indian says that songs were composed, he may mean that two or more men got together and made up tunes, experimenting until all were satisfied; or he may mean that new words were put to old melodies. It is said that both methods of composing songs were practised by the soldiers in France. Songs were composed also by their friends, for use at the dances after their return.

⁴ Pvt. Joseph Oklahombi, full-blood Choctaw of Company D, 141st Infantry.

⁵ The foregoing data is from Library Bulletin 15, Office of Indian Affairs, 1927, entitled "The American Indian in the World War."

Andrew Black Hawk and his friend Jim Carimon were Winnebago soldiers in the 128th Infantry (Rainbow Division). Together they composed melodies while they were in France, and I recorded some of them in connection with my study of Indian music for the Bureau of American Ethnology. One song had these words:

Early in the morning the bullets passed by us so thick, and I am scared.

There is a shuddering rhythm in the melody, which has a compass of ten tones. With three exceptions, the intervals are minor thirds and whole-tones.

Black Hawk fought at Château Thierry, and was in other major battles. Both he and his friend were gassed, Carimon living a few years after his return, and Black Hawk, when I knew him, being a brave, pathetic sufferer. After they came home, they composed a song about the flag, the following words of the song being given exactly as translated by the interpreter:

I love my flag, so I went to the old world to fight the Germans. If I had not loved the American flag it would not have come back, but now we are still using it.

Among the songs that mention a love of the flag is one composed by Sam Little Soldier who saw three years' service abroad with the Thirty-second Division. His Winnebago name is Wicawakceptskaga. The words of his song are:

We love our flag and so we go to you, and why do you give up? Why do you raise up your hand?

"We love our flag"

Voice ♩ = 80
 Drum ♩ = 92
Drum rhythm eighth notes

The musical score is written on four staves in bass clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The time signature is 3/4. The melody is characterized by a shuddering rhythm, with many notes beamed together in groups of three. The first staff contains the first six measures, the second staff the next six, the third staff the next six, and the fourth staff the final six measures. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

A buoyant, vigorous melody was composed by the Thundercloud family in honor of Adam, a nephew who served in France. Like all Indian war-songs it is moderate in tempo. The words are:

It is I who burned up your airplane.

Airplane Song

Voice $\text{♩} = 92$
 Drum $\text{♩} = 92$
 Drum *rhythm quarter notes*

The musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is for the voice and the lower staff is for the drum. Both are in the key of G major (one sharp) and use a 2/4 time signature. The tempo is marked as quarter notes equal to 92 beats per minute. The melody is composed of quarter and eighth notes, with a simple, rhythmic pattern. The drum part consists of quarter notes, providing a steady accompaniment.

The same family made up a song with a compass of only five tones and with none of the jubilant quality that marked the song about burning up the airplane. It contains only these words:

I shot a German. When I met a German I killed him.

These and similar songs were sung at the dances after the boys returned, and each soldier rose and danced when his song was sung at the drum. A Winnebago song contained these words:

They brought back the German scalp and are dancing with it.

At a Pawnee dance which I attended, the mother of one of the soldiers carried a German helmet on a pole, and doubtless the Winnebago also brought back some mementos and carried them in the first dances after their return. Their dance-drum is decorated with a flounce of red flannel, and on this I saw many brass buttons, brought from the battlefields and "given to the drum," a proceeding with a symbolism that a white man cannot understand. The returned soldiers did not spare the slackers and, at every dance, they sang this song:

Our beloved flag went across the ocean and came back.
 Are you really glad to see it back again?

Song Deriding a Slacker

Voice ♩ = 84
 Drum ♩ = 84
 Drum rhythm eighth notes

The musical score consists of three staves of music in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff is the vocal line, starting with a quarter rest followed by eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, G4, A4, B4, C5. The second staff is the drum rhythm, consisting of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, G4, A4, B4, C5. The third staff is the accompaniment, starting with a quarter rest followed by eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, G4, A4, B4, C5. The music is in 2/4 time and features various rhythmic patterns including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests.

The Pawnee tribe was represented in France by 40 young men, all except one returning in full health and vigor. One died from disease. Several were with the Rainbow Division, four volunteered for exceptionally dangerous service, but none were wounded. This was attributed to the prayers of their friends during their absence.

I was present at the two-days dance which was held on June 6 and 7, 1919, in celebration of their return. The first day's dance was reserved for the Indians themselves; the second day's was shared by white visitors. Old war-songs were sung with new words mentioning airplanes and submarines. Two white horses were led into the lodge and given to the returned soldiers. Lawrence Murie, son of the chief, wore the khaki uniform in which he had served with the artillery at the front, some of the soldiers were in "civies" and others in full Indian regalia, while the young soldier who directed the dances carried a sword that had belonged to an ancestor. It was a mixed but jubilant affair, with many songs and speeches. The German helmet was on a pole topped by a captured knife, like a lance head. The young man who gave it to his mother acted in accordance with an old Indian custom in which scalps were handed over to the women, in whose defense the warriors had gone forth.

An Indian in khaki looks like a well-tanned white man, but, in many instances, the resemblance is only skin-deep. Indians do not change their tradition and heritage when they become American citizens. Lee Rainbow, a Yuma, is said to have been the first Indian who died in France. His body was returned to his people who held the tribal cremation ceremony, the body and casket being burned on a huge pyre. I recorded the ceremonial songs of this cremation, and witnessed a similar event, in 1922.

There is an old Indian belief that a warrior may command the spirits of the men he has killed, and this is carried down to the present time. At a Winnebago camp, three years ago, a little Indian woman died. Her name was Hino'nika, and she was the wife of my friend Tom Thunder. I arrived at the camp soon after her death, and was in close touch with the Indians during the strange events that followed. The little body was laid to rest but the spirit was believed to linger four days, and during that time they sent for four young men who had served in the World War. A gathering was held each night, and the young men talked at these gatherings, telling of their exploits in France. It is probable that many songs, composed in France or pertaining to these young men, were sung at these gatherings which lasted all night. On the fourth night, just before morning, the spirit of Hino'nika was to begin its journey to the spirit land, and each ex-soldier addressed the spirit of a German soldier whom he had killed, telling him to accompany the spirit of the Indian woman, to bring wood for her evening fire, to carry her tobacco and provide her with food, and to assist her while she travelled the difficult way. Four days she would be on the road; then her friends would come out from the spirit-village to meet her, and the spirits of the German dead would be released from their mission. So they sang as the night wore on, and when the sun reached the top of the trees the spirit of the little Indian woman went away, protected by four stalwart spirits in the uniform of the German army. There was no animosity; on the contrary, the Indians considered that they were honoring the spirits of the foe by this commission, showing they trusted them because of their bravery. They could show no higher honor to the German spirits than to entrust them with Hino'nika, helpless to meet the dangers of her strange journey.

War was a task to be done, and every Indian soldier did it to the best of his ability. He did not know much about democracy, nor care much about the evils of imperialism; but there was a flag to be brought home, and that was enough for him.