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The Dreavers Of Mistawasis - A Saga Of Service

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Joe Dreaver as a chief..



... and a soldier

Earlier this week Joe Dreaver from Mistawasis dropped by my office with a collection of press clippings and other mementos of his family's and reserve's involvement in the last Great War.

The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix entered the following report on October 21, 1944.

The day that war was declared Chief Joe Dreaver of the Mistawasis Indian Reserve between Leask and Mont Nebo arrived in Saskatoon with all the boys of military age on the reserve, 14 of them, among them his three sons, to enlist in the Canadian army. The years of war have seen that little group scattered but on October 6 it suffered its first death, Sgt. Harvey Dreaver being killed in action in Italy. His uncle, Pte. Sam Dreaver of Leask, has been wounded.

Chief Dreaver, who has an outstanding military record from the First Great War and who is now a member of the Veterans' Guard of Canada guarding Nazi prisoners of war at Medicine Hat, is meeting with his sons, George, discharged after service overseas, and Henry, the acting chief, his daughters, Myrtle of the C.W.A.C. and Gladys of the R.C.A.F. (W.D.), and his wife and two younger children who live at the Alexandra Apartments in Saskatoon, prior to returning to the reservation for a memorial service a week from Sunday for Sergeant Dreaver.

Sergeant Dreaver's widow and small daughter, Doris, live at the reserve.

Harvey, who has been mentioned in dispatches, spent some time training in Scotland where he met relatives of the original Dreaver who came to Canada as a Hudson's Bay Company factor. Pictures of the Diamond Jubilee celebration at Carlton carried in the Manchester Guardian put the people in Scotland in touch with the descendants were. When Harvey arrived in Great Britain they lost no time in inviting him to the Orkney Islands and other parts of Scotland to entertain him.

On November first a story datelined "Leask" carried the story of the memorial service for Harvey Dreaver.

A memorial service was held Sunday, October 29, in the Mistawasis Indian Reserve Memorial Church, for the late Sgt. Harvey Dreaver, who was killed in action in France on October 6.

Representatives of the services and the Legion were present from Camp Lake, Shell Lake, Shellbrook, Prince Albert, Mont Nebo, Saskatoon, Leask and Avebury. Telegrams of sympathy were received from Prime Minister Mackenzie King, and from officials of the Presbyterian Church in Toronto. The late Sergeant Dreaver was a staunch member of the Presbyterian Church and was on the board of managers.

Following a silence of one minute A. W. Robinson of Saskatoon recited the poem, "In Flanders Fields."

The missionary conducting the service referred to the outstanding qualities of the late Sergeant Dreaver, which were apparent in his boyhood. He loved sports and specialized in hockey and football, said the speaker, demonstrating his good qualities even in this phase of his life. These qualities made him loved as a man and respected as a soldier.

A story in a Scottish paper reflected the admiration that Britons had for "Red Indians". These "braves", whose forebears once fought the white man in the New World, are here to aid the Old World in its hour of peril. From the Indian reservations and the wide spaces of the Far West, they have come to answer the call.

When the call came, "Big Child" Samuel Dreaver laid aside his hunting rifle on the Mistawasis Indian Reservation at Carlton, Saskatchewan, and went off to the nearest recruiting depot to enlist.

"My brothers fought in the last war," Pte. Dreaver told me when I saw him, with many other Red Indians, during a tour of the Forces of the Empire somewhere in southern England: "I am proud to be able to do my bit now for Britain."

In the last war, one of Pte. Dreaver's brothers was killed in the capture of Vimy Ridge, another died of wounds, a third, Joseph, is now chief of the Mistawasis tribe. The family's Indian name Mistawasis, means "Big Child", Pte. Dreaver explained.

During the last war Indian people signed up and served their country. At pow-wows the flag is lowered at sunset and all the veterans are invited to assemble around the flagpole. Invariably a lot of men step forward. People who claim that Indian people have not made a contribution to Canada have obviously not met Joe Dreaver or heard of his reserve's contribution in the last war.
