

Otis W Leader, WWI Code Talker

Corporal Otis W Leader, another hero of World War I, entered the army at the age of thirty-five. He was in the 1st Division, 16th Infantry. Upon his arrival in France, Leader was being trained by the French "Blue Devils" when he caught the eye of French artist Raymond Desvarreaux. This was an acclaimed artist who had been commissioned by the French government to paint a portrait of the "ideal" American soldier. Handsome, 6 foot 2 inches, Choctaw/Chickasaw Indian Otis Leader was selected as his model. The painting is now in Paris in their Army museum, and a reproduction is at the Choctaw museum at Tushka Homma.

Awarded the Purple Heart, Silver Star, Victory Medal, Battle Stars for Sommerville, Ansauville, Picardy, Cantigny, Second Marne, Saint-Mihiel, Meuse-Argonne, Mouzon-Sedan and Coblenz Bridgehead, the French Croix de Guerre with Palm, French Verdun Medal, French Fourragere, Leader was called one of the "war's greatest fighting machines" by General Pershing.

On the night of November 2, 1917, Leader's company drew the first relief assignment, moving into the trenches at Bathelemont. The following day his company defended the flank in the first engagement of Americans in combat of WWI.

On May 28, 1918, Leader was wounded and gassed during the American offensive at Cantigny but rejoined his division near Soissons in July. In the next battle, he crawled through a ravine to attack a machine gun nest. Getting within sixty feet of the enemy, Leader picked up a rifle and fought with the infantry after his own machine gun crew had all been killed. Attacking the German positions, Leader captured two machine guns and eighteen enemy soldiers manning them. In 1955, the Oklahoma House of Representatives praised Leader as the Outstanding Soldier of WWI. He was buried at Coalgate in 1961.