

REMEMBERING:

A Look into Wartime Oliver

By Rachael Moores,
Collections Assistant



This booklet is dedicated to all men and women of Oliver who served or contributed during times of war.



LEST WE FORGET

Oliver is proudly known as Canada's Wine Capital, but what was it before that? The town was known as the Cantaloupe Capital of Canada because of its ability to grow succulent ground crops. Agricultural success could not be a part of Oliver's history without acknowledging the veterans who built irrigation systems and labored on the land. Other residents' contributions to World War I, World War II, and subsequent conflicts are just as important to our local history.

Let's take a brief journey through the military history of Oliver and look at some of the lives of the local people who experienced wartime. Through this we can appreciate all that Oliver has become since the town's establishment in the Okanagan Valley.

Soldier Settlement Act

In 1918, following the end of the First World War, the B.C. government bought 22,000 acres of land under Premier John Oliver's direction. This section of land in the South Okanagan Valley stretched from Naylinton (or McIntyre Bluff) to the United States border. The land was purchased for the soldiers returning from Europe as part of the Soldier Settlement Act legislation of 1919. It was intended to give soldiers land for agricultural development at a reduced price. John Oliver advocated for this piece of legislation on behalf of the soldiers returning from war, believing that they should be rewarded for their service.



Oliver Veterans of the 1920s

Soldiers from all backgrounds found their way to Oliver following the war. These men and their families came in search of a place to call home, and the Okanagan Valley was ready to welcome them. Some soldiers came from England, other regions of Europe, British Columbia, and across Canada. Here are some of the individuals who were part of the development of Oliver's agriculture and industry.

Sergeant Stephen Barritt (1880-1944)

Stephen Barritt was born in Lancashire, England and served in the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment (3rd vol. A.S. Coy, North Lancashire Regiment) in the Territorials Division. After serving with this division for 12 years he came to Oliver in 1921 with his wife Betsy Ann Barritt and their daughter Edith Mary Barritt. He came to buy land and build his life in Canada. Veterans were able to buy up to ten acres of land according to the Soldier Settlement Act. He planted an orchard and started fruit farming, including winesap apples and varieties of soft fruit trees.





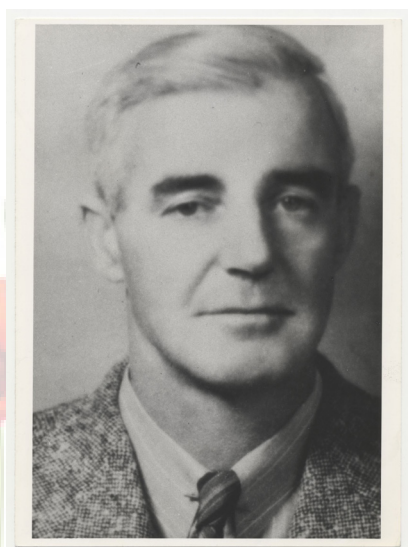
Lionel John Bettison (1890-1980)

Lionel Bettison served with the Canadian Mounted Rifles Cavalry (CMRC) in 1915. From Prince George, he was sent for training in Vernon, then to Winnipeg for artillery training, and back to Victoria before deployment. The CMRC was demobilized shortly after arriving in England. So, Bettison was put into the infantry where he was made a supernumerary officer. This meant he was sent wherever an officer was needed. He sustained injuries in battle and was sent back to England but refused to return to Canada.

He asked to join the 40th Battalion Canadian Field Artillery for the remainder of the war. Bettison moved to the Okanagan following the war.

Louis Deighton (1894- 1976)

Louis Deighton, born in Yorkshire England, moved to Canada in 1912. He served with the 9th Canadian Engineers Regiment during WWI. Following the war, he moved to Oliver on his own and worked for the Ditch Project as a blueprint reader. He later worked on the construction of the original



community hall. Until he was able to buy his own land just south of Oliver he spent his days living in a tent. His interest in eliminating food waste in orchards inspired him to sell juice in the community. He eventually developed his own cannery, which became Sun Rype Products Ltd.

Frank Venables (1899-1986)

Frank Venables was born in Walsall, England in 1899. With his family he moved to Alberta at the age of six. In 1916 Venables joined the 175th Battalion in Alberta and went overseas. There, he met Vera Martin and they got married in 1918 in Europe. When the war ended he returned to Canada with Vera and moved to Oliver for the Soldier Settlement Act. Venables spent some time living in a tent along the ditch like many other men before he could establish himself with an orchard. He was able to purchase 15 acres of land south of Oliver. He is known for his active involvement in the education system, serving on the school board for over 42 years. Venables is pictured here (on the right) with his friend Andy Moore (on the left).



Oliver at War: Loss and Devotion

The Second World War sent a call across Canada for enlistment. With agriculture booming in the South Okanagan Valley, it was difficult to answer this call in 1939. Many of the local people were farmers and needed to provide food for the Canadian military overseas. The future of Oliver was uncertain as the residents were sent overseas. At home individuals did what they could to contribute to the war effort. Whether it was collecting scrap metal or canning fruits with water instead of sugar, extreme measures were taken and a sense of solidarity developed.



Cpl. Ernest Baptiste George
(1919-1944)

Ernest Baptiste George was the 5th son of Chief Narcisse of the Osoyoos Indian Band. His family remembers that he wanted to go fight for his country. He joined the 1st Canadian Division in WWII, serving in the Lanark+Refrew Scottish Regiment. This was at a time when indigenous people were treated as second-class citizens and most had no right

to vote in Canada. Despite this, he felt compelled to fight along with several thousand other indigenous people. There is unfortunately little recorded history about these men, but we know that at the age of 25, in September 1943, George was killed in Italy.

This is an image of his memorial, located behind the St. Gregory Mission Church in Oliver, BC.



Russell Frederick Wilkins (1920-1943)

Russell Wilkins was the son of M.E. and F. Wilkins. He was born in Spring Coulee, Alberta in 1920 but moved to the Okanagan with his family in 1929. He joined the RCAF but was killed in action not long after deployment on January 19, 1943.



Molly Deighton (1909-1990)

Molly Deighton (née Macintosh) moved to Oliver from Poland in 1926 where she met and married Louis Deighton a year later. During

the war, she and other local women gave their time to the war effort by rolling white bandages for the Red Cross in her living room. These bandages were sent overseas with other medical supplies. Many women worked to roll bandages and send home goods as a means of doing whatever they could to help win the war.

Katherine (Katie) Woodruff (1908-2011)

Katherine Woodruff (née Khonke) was born in Bellingham, MN to parents of German descent. In 1917 they moved to Saskatchewan where she met and married her husband Herbert Woodruff in 1924. By 1940 they decided to move to Oliver. When WWII started, her two sons enlisted to go overseas and as a way to contribute she was involved in many auxiliary activities both during and after the war. She organized card parties, welcomed war brides, assembled bandages and even knitted socks to give to the Red Cross for overseas use. She spent many years serving the community through her involvement in the Legion Auxiliary Branch 97. She died at the age of 104 in 2011, making her one of Oliver's oldest living residents at the time.



Flo Robinson (Born 1926)

Flo Robinson moved to Oliver in 1964. She is a notable woman for her involvement in the Canadian Women's Army Corps during the Second World War. Her job at the end of the war was to reunite war brides with their husbands, making sure they were not separated along the way. The emergence of

the Canadian Women's Army Corps in the Second World War was revolutionary for women's military involvement. Women wanted to serve their country and petitioned Ottawa until the CWAC was officially authorized as an organisation in August 1941. This allowed women to replace men in many non-combat duties.

John (Jack) and
Esther Thorp
(1915-2008 / 1917-1998)

Jack Thorp was born in Penticton and had several jobs throughout his career. In 1939 he married Esther Klatt of Oliver and they acquired 240 acres of land south of Oliver



on Sawmill Road. There they grew a variety of ground crops. When WWII started, they joined a special farming program with the BC Seed Cooperative that focused on seed production to provide for the war effort. At that time, Canada received many seeds from Holland and France, but the unrelenting battles destroyed accessibility to these essential crops. So, certain ground crops, such as zucca melons, lettuce, and onions were grown until they turned to seed. Then these seeds were harvested and laid out to dry. When the seeds were dried and bagged, they were shipped overseas along with zucca melon preserves. Pictured below are workers laying out seeds to dry in the sun.



Both photos are courtesy of the Thorp family

Pacific Coast Militia Rangers (1942-1945)

The PCMR were Civil Defense units organised to protect and monitor potentially targeted areas such as the Oliver Irrigation Project. Public pressure pushed for a coastal defense unit. Bomb threats and invasion by the Japanese were feared across BC. So, to ease fears the PCMR was made ready in case an emergency should arise.

The PCMR was comprised of men who were unable to go overseas. This gave them a unique opportunity to enlist and protect the home front. More than 200 men volunteered from the Southern Okanagan Valley between Vaseux Lake and the U.S. border. They practiced drilling, were trained in guerilla warfare, and patrolled areas that might have been a potential target. These men worked hard to protect the home front as volunteers, without the benefits of being paid.



Pictured here are ten local men who joined the PCMR. From left to right on the back row is Andrew Endreny, Jim Finch, George Lundy, Ciff Leighton and Norman Daerfler. The front row is Bob Kelly, Milton Garward, Lorne Richmond, Chic Wilkens, and Cliff Iretons.

War affects us in all in different ways. Here is an untitled poem by Jaymie R. Couch and Lynn Couch-Alaric, written for the Year of the Veteran in 2005, expressing the loneliness and destruction of war.

In the name of our Country
To the women and men who are fighting
And who have fought for our freedom

In the name of freedom

Your life so young, your future ahead...
With hearts brave and bodies strong...

In the name of freedom you were asked to fight...

You left into the night...
A world of trouble upon your shoulders...

And as we snuggle warm in our beds...
We will never know the life you led...

If you could have, you probably would have fled...
For in the trenches among the dead is where you bled...
Cold...hunger...pain...sorrow...blood & guts...
But oh, where was the glory?
For this the people will be forever sorry...

As the skies exploded above you...
As you crawled through blood-soaked mud...
We washed our clothes in the sunshine...

Lying in trenches filled with death
A soft breeze blows on hills far away
A whisper of peace if only for a moment.

Who can right the wrong of war?
Who can say what all those soldiers were dieing for?

In the name of freedom...lest we forget

All the sacrifices made, all the lives lost
...there is no glory in war...

Written by Jaymie R. Couch and Lynn Couch-Alaric: Oliver, BC

The contents of this package were gathered
from selected information found at the Oliver
& District Heritage Society Archives

If you have information, photographs,
or records of other local veterans and
individuals that you would like to share,
please contact us at:

250.498.4027

Oliver Archives

430 Fairview Rd, Oliver BC

<https://www.oliverheritage.ca/>



For more information you can browse our website:

<https://www.oliverheritage.ca/>

Give us a visit at the Museum and Archives:

430 Fairview Rd, Oliver BC (Archives)
474 School Ave, Oliver BC (Museum)

Or give us a call:

250.498.4027 (Archives)
778.439.3100 (Museum)



/OliverHeritageS/



@OliverMuseum



@OliverMuseum