



REMEMBRANCE DAY

NOVEMBER 11, 2018

Lest We Forget

■ NEWS

THERE ARE MANY UNTOLD RACIALIZED WAR STORIES: HISTORIANS

DOMINIK KUREK
dkurek@toronto.com

On Remembrance Day, you'd be forgiven for thinking of the young white Canadian men who served this country during the First and Second World Wars.

But, it wasn't just white men or women who supported the Canadian war efforts. Members of a variety of Canada's diasporas also fought and died for this country, including those who experienced prejudice on home soil and some of whom continued to be discriminated against by their own countrymen on the war front.

Those stories of men and women who are Black, Indigenous, Chinese, Jewish, Sikh and others are many, but are largely unknown, including to their own people.

The Toronto District School Board aims to rectify that with a Remembrance Day panel that marks the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War and discusses the efforts of Canada's racialized communities.

It happens today at Danforth Collegiate and Technical Institute for 700 Grade 10 students from the region. It's not open to the public.

"Our kids do learn this, but just on the very surface," said school board spokesperson Shari Schwartz-Maltz. "We thought how incredible it would be for our kids to hear from communities who served our country but who faced challenges, obstacles, and let's face it, discrimination in the recruitment period, in the training period, and overseas and when they came back."

For Jewish-Canadian historian, author and journalist Ellin Bessner, these messages of discrimination are especially important today.

"The country (during the Second World War) went through the same issues that we're going through now. When you have hate, racism, discrimination, especially from south of the border, but we had it in Toronto, we had



Sandra London-Rakita family/photo

Canadian Jewish soldiers gather in Reykjavik, Iceland in October 1940 to conduct Yom Kippur prayer services, the first ever Jewish religious ceremony to be held in Iceland. Many of them were later sent on the Dieppe Raid in August 1942, to be killed or taken prisoner of war by the Germans. (Below) Tom Lock, front row-third from right, was part of Operation Oblivion, a plan to parachute Chinese-Canadian troops behind Japanese lines, during the Second World War. Following the war, Lock became the first Chinese-Canadian to be admitted to and graduate from the University of Toronto.

the Danforth shooting, we had the North York terrorist attack, we have hate speech ... this is what happens," she said.

The panel occurs a little more than a week after the Pittsburgh synagogue shooting that killed 11 people.

Bessner's own family survived a similar experience in Quebec in 1944. Her uncle and grandfather were inside a synagogue when it was torched. They survived.

More than 17,000 Jews, most of whom came from Montreal, Winnipeg and Toronto, fought during the Second World War.

But, they were often turned away at the recruitment offices and had to apply multiple times, when they got accepted their comrades discriminated them against, and if the Germans captured them, because their dog tags identified them as Jewish, they faced a

dark fate.

Chinese-Canadian historian Arlene Chan said local Chinese were discriminated against before and after both wars. There were more than 100 anti-Chinese pieces of legislation then in Canada. But, the Second World War was a turning point for them. China and Canada were allied against Japan, so the local Chinese became highly engaged, both enlisting in the war and buying war bonds to support the efforts.

In 1947 the laws started to change and Chinese-Canadians were given the right to vote and take professions.

One soldier, Toronto's Tom Lock who participated in Canada's secretive Operation Oblivion in Southeast Asia and married a Chinese-Australian woman, was left separated from his bride due to Canada's Chinese exclusionary law that forbade any Chinese person from entering Canada. But, he received



Lock Family/photo

a special order from the government and was reunited with his wife Jean in Canada.

In 1947, he was allowed to enrol at the University of Toronto and was the first Chinese Canadian to graduate from U of T's school of phar-

macy. He went on to open Toronto's first Chinese pharmacy in Chinatown.

There are tons of war stories of Canada's minority groups, said Pardeep Nagra, the school board's manager of employment equity and executive director of the

Sikh Museum of Canada, but few are known, including that of his own people.

"People who look like me, most of whom don't know we served in the war, yet the Sikhs were one of the largest per capita serving groups in World Wars I and II."