



Biographies

This panel exhibition, presented in partnership with the Niagara Military Museum, highlights the service and sacrifice of 22 Black men and women from the Niagara region and Southwestern Ontario, from the American Revolution to the present day.

Richard Pierpoint was a former slave who fought for his freedom, and later served in the War of 1812 as a member of Butler's Rangers.

William Chandler was a farmer from Fort Erie who crossed the border to serve in the American Civil War.

Arthur Alexander was a respected member of the Niagara community who wrote to the Canadian government to demand equal rights for Black Canadians during the First World War.

William White was the son of formerly enslaved parents, and, as a chaplain captain, one of the few Black commissioned officers in the army during the First World War.

James Grant, MM served as a driver and gunner with the 23rd (Howitzer) Battery fighting at Vimy Ridge, Passchendaele, and other sites along the Western Front. He was awarded the Military Medal, the first of only six known Black Canadians to receive the honour.

John Bright, MM served as a Lance Sergeant with the 1st Battalion of the Canadian Corps on the Western Front and was awarded the Military Medal for being "exceptionally courageous" under shell fire during the Battle of Passchendaele in late 1917. He was killed in battle on August 30, 1918.

Gerald "Gerry" W.A. Bell enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1936, and served as an aircraft technician in Canada and overseas during the Second World War.

Everett "Pudge" Dawson enlisted in 1940 and served as a gunner in the 8th Canadian Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment and the 102nd Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, Royal Canadian Artillery. After the war, he continued to fight for equal rights for Black workers in the United Auto Workers union.

Junius Lyman Hokan served as a Flying Officer with 401 Squadron, Royal Canadian Air Force. While on patrol on September 26, 1942, his Spitfire crashed in high winds, and he was killed. He is commemorated on the Runnymede Memorial in Surrey, England.

Edward Robertson Smith enlisted in 1944, and served as a private with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada. He was killed in Germany on March 7, 1945, and is buried in Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery in the Netherlands.

Clarence Lapierre was a paratrooper with the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion, and was dropped into Normandy on D-Day. He was killed the next day — on June 7, 1944 — and is buried at Ranville War Cemetery near Caen, France.

Charles E. Harper, Jr. served as a private with Royal Canadian Army Service Corps units during the Italian Campaign of the Second World War, driving trucks filled with ammunition, food and fuel to supply front-line units. He was Mentioned in Despatches for his diligent service, and was gravely wounded in action on March 22, 1944. He died of his wounds five days later, and is buried in the Moro River Canadian War Cemetery.

Connie Brown was born in Brantford. Along with her twin sister Kathleen, she served in uniform during the Second World War. She worked in several posts with the Canadian Women's Army Corps, including repairing small arms at a depot in Toronto.

Kathleen Brown served as a leading aircraftwoman with the Women's Division of the Royal Canadian Air Force. Her twin sister, Connie, is also featured in the exhibition.

Douglas Melford Johnson was one of four brothers who served in the Canadian military. He enlisted in 1941, and served with the Irish Regiment of Canada.

Clarence Johnson was one of four brothers who served in the Canadian military. He was conscripted at the end of the Second World War. He had strong beliefs against war and killing, and was distraught about being forced into service. After the war, he became a much-respected minister.

Beverly Johnson was one of four brothers who served in the Canadian military. He enlisted in the Royal Canadian Navy in 1947. He received the Canadian Forces' Decoration for completing twelve years of service and served in the navy until 1969.

David Johnson was one of four brothers who served in the Canadian military, as a wireless operator with The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada, 2nd Battalion. He fought during the Korean War.

William "Bill" Hokan served with Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. From 1951 to 1971, he was posted across Canada and to Korea and Germany. He played side drum in military bands, and was a Golden Gloves boxing champion. His sister, Phyllis Jean Nicholson, is also featured in the exhibition.

Phyllis Jean Nicholson served with the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps. She cared for members of the Canadian Armed Forces as a nurse in many units, hospitals and camps. Her brother, Bill Hokan, is also featured in the exhibition.

Edward "Ed" Smith served for 25 years with the Royal Canadian Air Force. Rising to the rank of major, he had a rewarding career, serving throughout Canada and as a UN peacekeeper in South Sudan.

Warrant Officer Stephen Thomas, MB, CD completed his first tour in Afghanistan in 2004 and returned with The Queen's Own Rifles of Canada's parachute company on a second deployment. He was awarded the Medal of Bravery for his actions during a suicide-bomber attack in Afghanistan in 2006.

Wilma Morrison was a community organizer and champion for the original exhibition at the Niagara Military Museum. This exhibition was her last project, following decades of historical work to ensure that Black Canadian voices of the past were not forgotten.