

MEDALS AND MEMORIES MINUTES



Private Buckam Singh's grave is the only known Sikh Canadian soldiers grave in Canada.

Photo: sikhmuseum.com

Chandi Kaur, Medals from a Far Land

In 1907, 14 year old Buckam (Bukkan | Buk Am) Singh, born in Malipur, Punjab came to Canada to make a future. He left behind a child bride, Pritam Kaur, to whom he had been betrothed when he was 10 years old—as was the custom of that day. Buckam worked in mining camps in British Columbia before moving to Toronto. For six months, until April 1915, he worked on the farm of Wm. Henry Moore of Rosebank, (now Pickering) Ontario. Then, as the Canadian call for soldiers became louder, Buckam made his way to Smith Falls to enlist with the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force, 59th Battalion. Described as 5'7" tall and of "swarthy complexion" on his enlistment form, Buckam was one of nine Sikhs who served in integrated Canadian units in France and Belgium.

His mother Chandi Kaur, in Malipur, did not know that her son sustained a shrapnel wound to his head in June 1916. When a bullet shattered his left leg below the knee in Belgium July 20th, she did not know that he was treated in the Canadian Hospital run by Dr. John McCrae, the author of Canada's famous poem, "In Flanders Fields". She did not know that his life was ebbing from him as he suffered from tuberculosis. The first news she had of her 25 year son's soldiering for Canada came when she received a death notice and a Silver Cross. The child bride, Pritam, who had never really known her husband, received a Silver Cross as well. The Memorial Plaque and Scroll which only Buckam's mother received bore the words, "He died for freedom and honour." Although Chandi Kaur may not have been able to read the words in English, the Sikh-Canadians who celebrated around the grave stone of Private Buckam Singh in Mount Hope Cemetery, Kitchener, November 2008, proudly understood their meaning. Toronto war historian Sandeep Singh Brar, who has documented the life of Buckam Singh one of the first Sikhs to live in Ontario, stated, "As Sikhs, we can feel we're no longer outsiders. We helped form Canada's history."

Documentary: *Sikh-Canadian Heroes of the First World War* by David Gray
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