

Grave confirms early Sikh 'fought for Canada'

Victory Medal found in England leads to Kitchener tombstone of World War I 'hero'

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The mystery is slowly unravelling.

Until some months ago, nothing much was known about the nine Sikh-Canadians who joined the Canadian army and fought in World War I — at a time when Sikhs weren't even allowed to immigrate to Canada.

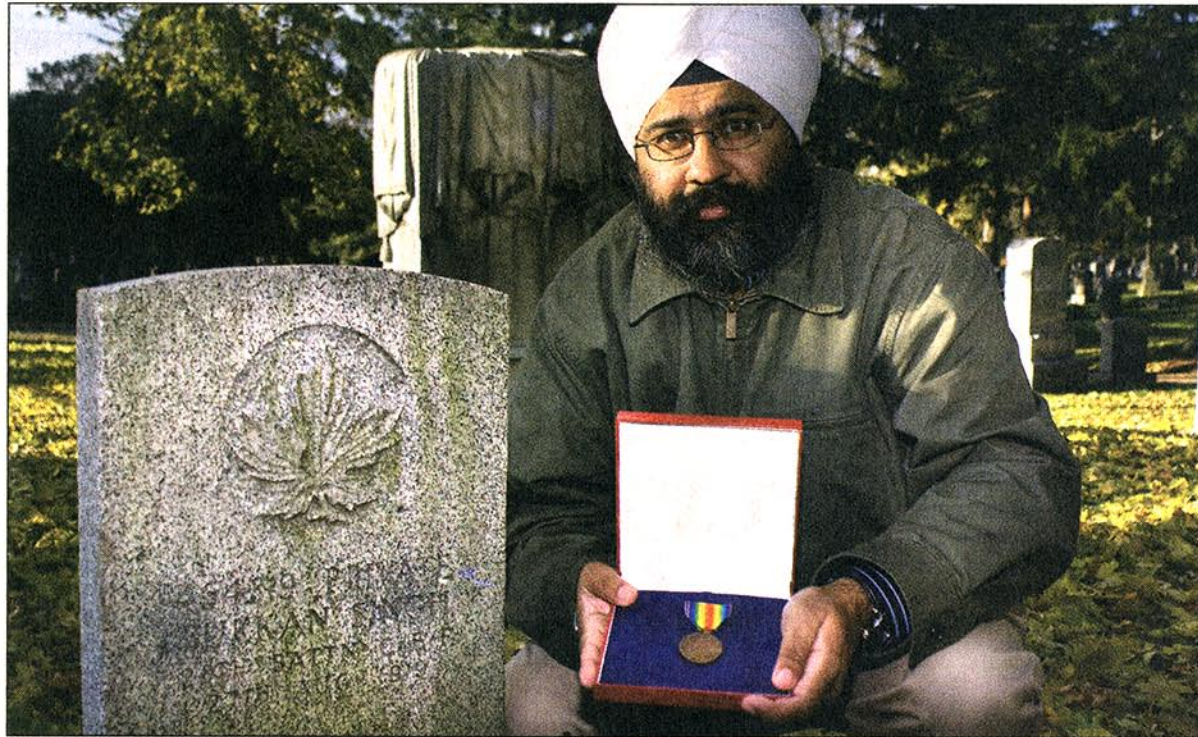
Then an amateur historian bought a Victory Medal that led him to a Kitchener graveyard and he found the tombstone of Pte. Buckam Singh.

"That man was a real hero," said Sandeep Singh Brar of Brampton, who found the grave.

"He fought for Canada, came back and died alone in a hospital."

The Sikh-Canadian, whose grave drew little attention for 90 years, recently attracted about 50 people for Remembrance Day Sikh prayers at the Kitchener cemetery.

T. Sher Singh, a Guelph lawyer who attended the ceremony, said the discovery of the grave is significant for the community. "It means that we have a history in the build-



SIKHMUSEUM.COM PHOTO

Historian Sandeep Singh Brar found Pte. Buckam Singh's grave in Kitchener's Mount Hope Cemetery after buying this medal from a dealer in England. Buckam's name has seen various spellings over the years, as seen above.

ing of this nation," said Singh. "Not only have we built the railroads and cleared the forests and slaved in the lumber mills, but we have given our lives when it was necessary."

But the story of the Sikh-Canadian, who fought at Flanders Fields, was wounded twice in battle and

died in 1919 at age 25 after returning to Canada, likely wouldn't have been told if it hadn't been for the medal. Brar bought it from a dealer in England about a year ago believing it had been bestowed upon a British-Indian soldier.

He got a shock when he carefully

read the inscription on its rim: Singh had been a member of the 20th Canadian Infantry and the medal listed his name, rank and registration number.

Over the next few months, Brar went to Ottawa many times to track down military records. He discov-

ered Singh had fought in Flanders Fields and was injured by shrapnel in the head, and again by a bullet in the leg. The *Toronto Star*, then called the *Toronto Daily Star*, reported his injuries on Aug. 9, 1916, in a list of Canadian soldiers wounded in battle.

Singh was treated at a hospital in Boulogne, France run by Guelph's Lt. Col. John McCrae. He was shipped to England in 1917 where, while recovering, he contracted tuberculosis and was sent to the Freeport Hospital in Kitchener, then run by the Canadian army. He died two years later and was buried in Kitchener's Mount Hope Cemetery.

Brar believes Singh's grave may be the only one in Canada belonging to a Sikh-Canadian who fought in World War I. The Victory Medal may also be the only existing medal for a Sikh soldier.

This story has become an obsession for Brar, who has created a website, sikhmuseum.com, to showcase his findings. He said Singh's family, who lived in a village in Punjab, India, knew nothing about his time at war. "They just received a notice when he died.

"There are still many blanks in his story," said Brar, who is trying to track down Singh's family in India. That, he said, will be the next chapter in Buckam Singh's story.