

STUDENTS CONNECT WITH FIRST WORLD WAR BY RESEARCHING LOCAL SOLDIERS

GRADE 10S AT KING'S CHRISTIAN COLLEGIATE CREATED DETAILED PROJECTS ON SOLDIERS FROM HALTON REGION.

SAIRA PEESKER
speeker@metroland.com

They already knew about the First World War — but a group of Grade 10 students in Oakville say researching individual local veterans has given them a more visceral understanding of the brutal conflict. One hundred years after the end of the war — during which more than 15 million people died, including about 60,000 Canadian soldiers — the students say it's hard to truly know what life then was like — but their history homework has helped.

The 23 students in Michael Zietsma's Canadian history class at King's Christian College spent several weeks this fall creating scrapbooks or web pages, looking into the military history, families and local connections of First World War veterans from the area. They used government channels to dig up old documents, found their subjects' names on local cenotaphs, and in some cases, even visited their graves or former homes.

"The goal was to help them understand the human experience of war," said Zietsma. "(The soldiers) had lives... They had

hopes."

Some of the students say they now have more empathy for people who have experienced war and a deeper connection to local history.

"Everyone talks about the war on a large scale, but it's good to look at the people," said Milton resident Sam Coleman, 15. "These were just people. Some of their deaths were so unnecessary."

Burlington resident Addie Presswood, 15, used her grandmother Laura Forbes as a resource to study the life of close family friend George Nelson Ruttle. She said the project brought the two closer together, adding she thinks it's meaningful to her grandma that Ruttle's story has been passed on.

"I think she was really proud (of my project)," said Presswood. "It's almost like his memory had been drifting away."

We spoke with some of the students about their research.

Soldier: Cedric Harrop

Researched by: Sam Coleman

Harrop, like Coleman, was from Milton. He enlisted with his friend Fred Walsh and was killed at 21 in the Battle of Passchendaele. He is remembered in a stained glass window at a local church that depicts close friends David and Jonathan from the Bible, and on the Milton cenotaph. Coleman noted that while soldiers from several wars are listed on the statue, "The Great War" is centred, with the others some-



Nikki Wesley/Metroland

King's Christian Collegiate students Sam Coleman, 15, (back l-r) Mark Sanadi, 14, (front l-r) Kyleise Rolf von den Baumen, 15, Brenda Zamora, 15, and Addie Presswood, 15, created detailed Remembrance Day projects where each student researched a local First World War soldier.

what squished underneath.

"At the time, they thought it would be the only war."

Soldier: George Nelson Ruttle

Researched by: Addie Presswood

Ruttle was rare among the soldiers the students researched, in that he lived to return home from the war. Unfortunately, he got back to Toronto to discover that his wife had left him while he was away. Needing somewhere new to stay, he ended up living with Presswood's great-great-grandparents and remained a close family friend until his death. As part of her project, Presswood displayed a ring made out of a bullet with

the town name Etaples engraved on it, one of Ruttle's mementos from battle.

She also uncovered a book of poems he had written.

Soldier: Edward Osler Bath

Researched by: Kyleise Rolf von Den Baumen

Bath came from a wealthy Oakville family, whose home still stands at 126 Bath St. He went to war after attending Upper Canada College and St. Andrew's College, fighting in the second battle of Ypres. It was the first-ever battle wherein chlorine gas was used as a weapon. Bath was captured by the Germans and moved between several camps before escaping, and then being captured

again. He died in captivity of influenza and pneumonia.

Soldier: Donald Roy MacKay

Researched by: Brenda Zamora

MacKay came from an Oakville farming family, heading to the war in July 1915 with the Royal Canadian Mounted Rifles. He had just been married to Evelyn Marjorie MacKay earlier that month. After fighting in Belgium, he was killed in a raid on a German roadblock in December 1915.

"The project really made me think about how horrible the war was," said Zamora. "It made it more important to me, and made me feel more connected to Oakville."

Soldier: Raymond Boocock

Researched by: Mark Sanadi

Before the war, Boocock lived with his wife and four sons in a duplex at Randall and Navy streets in Oakville. His parents lived on the house's other side. As a member of the 20th Halton Rifles, he played clarinet in the band. Boocock was shipped out to Liverpool in April 1917 and fought in the Battle of Amiens, France. He died of a gunshot wound and was buried in France, but there are memorials to him in two Oakville cemeteries: St. Jude's and St. Mary's. Sanadi ended up contacting Boocock's grandson Doug. "I think he really appreciated (the project)," said Sanadi.

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