

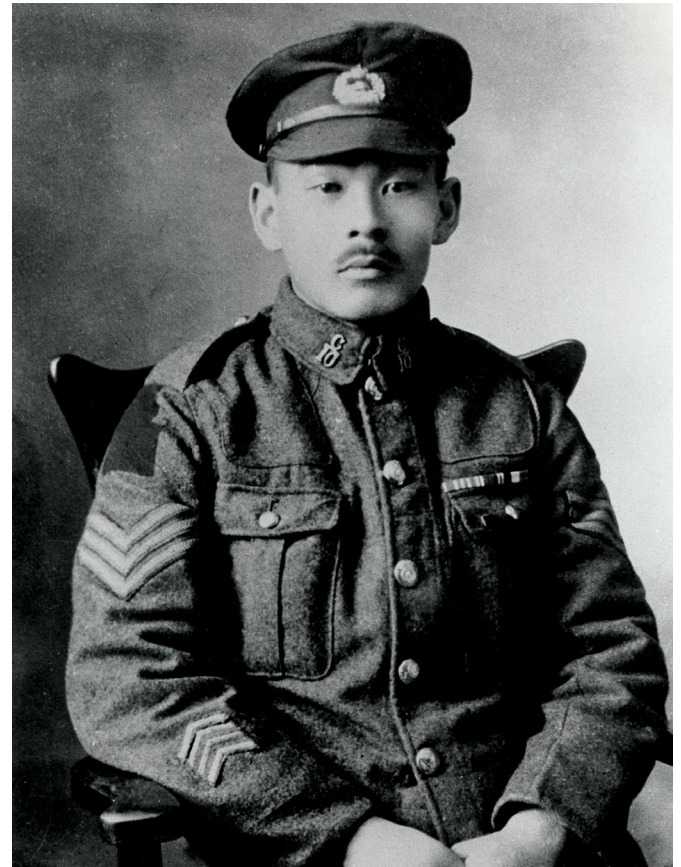


**SUPPLY
LINE**

Masumi Mitsui

Japanese Canadian First World War Veteran

Despite being a decorated Canadian veteran of the First World War, Masumi was detained, like many other Japanese Canadians, during the Second World War.



Studio portrait of First World War veteran Masumi Mitsui, in his uniform.
George Metcalf Archival Collection
Canadian War Museum 19830626-001_1

A Military Tradition

Masumi was born into a military family in Japan in 1886. He emigrated to Victoria, British Columbia, in 1908, working as a farmer and a head waiter.

In 1916, he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Sent overseas, he fought at Vimy Ridge in April 1917, and was wounded in combat later that month.

Given command of a group of Japanese Canadians in his battalion, he led them during the Battle of Hill 70 in August 1917. He was awarded the Military Medal for his actions in combat, and he was promoted to the rank of Sergeant.

Campaigning for the Right to Vote

After the war, Masumi returned to British Columbia. He started a poultry farm, and he and his wife Sugiko had four children.

He also helped lead the fight for Japanese Canadian voting rights. He became president

of Canadian Legion Branch No. 9, made up of British Columbian Japanese-Canadian war veterans. Through their lobbying efforts, they helped win the provincial vote for Japanese Canadian veterans in 1931.

Forced Relocation

Despite this victory, anti-Japanese sentiment deepened during the 1930s. When Canada went to war with Japan, Masumi wrote to the government, offering to serve in the military again, without success.

Masumi's life was to soon be impacted by events often called Japanese Canadian internment. Other terms are also used. They include uprooting, forced relocation, and incarceration.

In 1942, when Canada began detaining Japanese Canadians, he went with his daughter to register. He brought along his medals, and according to family legend, may also have worn his uniform.

According to his daughter, he approached the registration official, exclaiming, "What are you doing to me? I served my country. You've taken everything away from me. Told us we have to leave with only 150 pounds of luggage. What are the good of my medals?"

Masumi threw his medals on the official's desk, and they fell to the floor. The registration official picked them up and handed them back to Masumi, unable to answer. Masumi reportedly refused to wear his medals for decades after that.

Masumi and his family were forcibly relocated to Greenwood, British Columbia. Their land, barns, newly built house, furniture, and entire flock of poultry were seized and sold off. Later, the family would be compensated for only a portion of their property's value.

After the war, the Canadian government continued to restrict the civil liberties of Japanese Canadians. They were given the choice of moving to Japan (which most had never seen) or leaving British Columbia. Masumi and his family moved to Hamilton, Ontario.

Redress for Japanese Canadians

In 1985 – as part of a Japanese Canadian campaign to right injustices they had suffered during the Second World War – Masumi, then 98, was invited to take part in a Vancouver ceremony.

There, as the last surviving Japanese Canadian veteran of the First World War, and wearing his medals, he helped re-light the eternal flame of remembrance that is part of the Japanese Canadian War Memorial, erected in 1920. It had been extinguished in 1942.

Masumi died in 1987, one year before the Canadian government signed a compensation agreement with the Japanese-Canadian community and formally apologized for the community's treatment during the Second World War.

