



UNWANTED SOLDIERS

For filmmaker Jari Osborne, November 11 was as unremarkable a day as the next. Watching her father, Alex Louie, during his annual Remembrance Day ritual, Osborne always thought of him as sentimental. However, in discovering her father's involvement in World War II, she uncovers a legacy of discrimination and politically sanctioned racism against British Columbia's Chinese-Canadian community.

Sworn to secrecy for decades, Osborne's father and his war buddies now vividly recall their top-secret missions behind enemy lines in Southeast Asia. Theirs is a tale of young Chinese-Canadian men proudly fighting for a country that had always mistreated them.

Told in the voice of a grateful daughter, this multi-layered documentary does more than reveal an important period in Canadian history. It pays moving tribute to a father's quiet heroism.



DIRECTOR: Jari Osborne
PRODUCER: Karen King

47 minutes, 21 seconds
Order number: C9199 084

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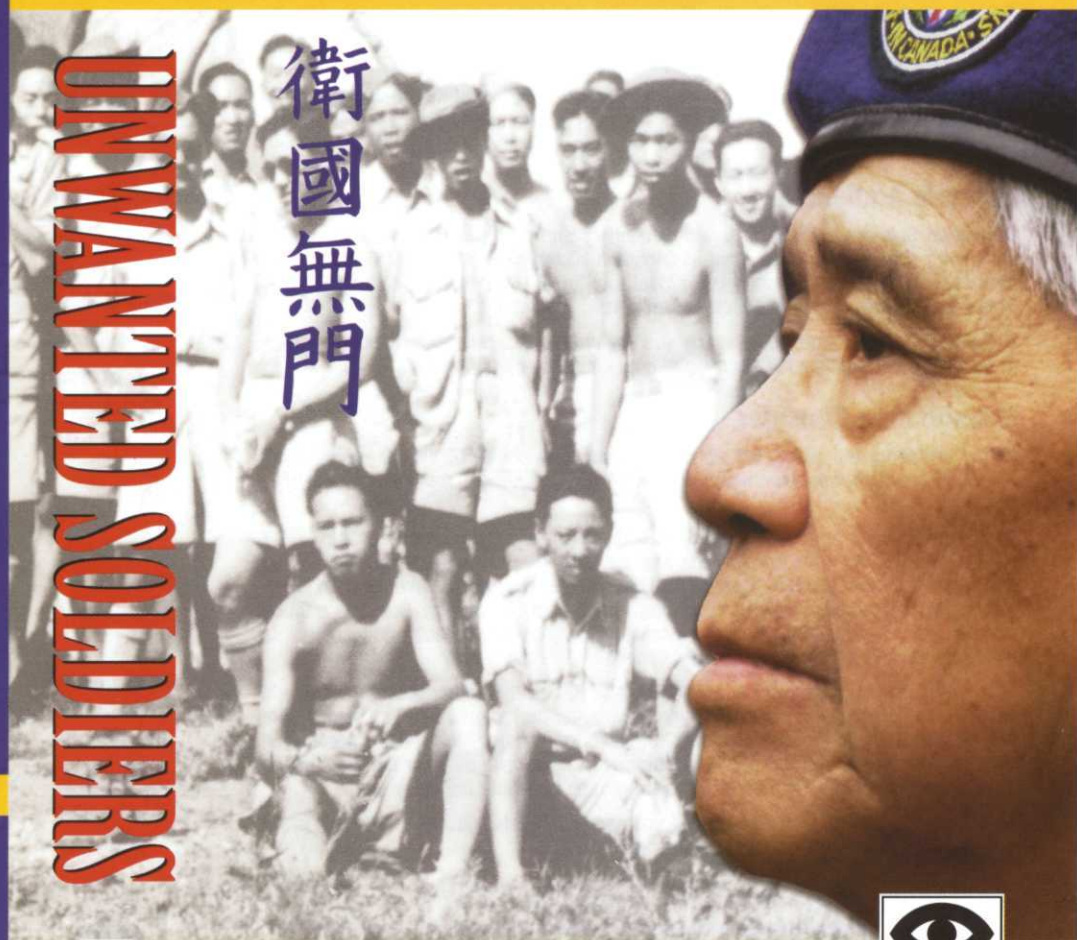


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Printed in Canada.



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VHS
C9199 084



A National Film Board of Canada Production

Introduction

Unwanted Soldiers reveals an unknown — and tragic — chapter in Canadian history.

There has always been racism in Canada, but rarely has it been as overt as the discrimination Chinese-Canadians faced until the mid-20th century — especially in British Columbia. If you were young, of Chinese origin and living in B.C. your activities and your future faced sharp limitations: no swimming in public pools, no sitting with the white people in theatres, no career as a pharmacist, lawyer or accountant, no right to vote in municipal, provincial or federal elections.

When the Second World War came, young Chinese-Canadian men were keen to fight for their country. But their country didn't want them. So while the military was, in the words of one recruiter, "scraping the bottom of the barrel" for soldiers, Chinese-Canadian men willing to fight were barred from serving.

Some community activists, like Roy Mah, realized that the war offered an opportunity for the Chinese-Canadian community to earn basic democratic rights. What government would dare refuse the vote to people who were willing to die for Canada?

Within two years of the end of the war, Chinese-Canadians had the provincial vote in B.C. and the federal vote. Ten years later, war vet Douglas Jung became Canada's first Chinese-Canadian MP.

Suitable Audiences

Unwanted Soldiers is ideal for use in secondary and post-secondary classrooms. In secondary schools, it can be used in Canadian History and Society, or Civics. At the post-secondary level, this video is an ideal tool for use in Canadian History, Political Science, Sociology and Race Relations and Ethnic Studies.

Unwanted Soldiers can be used by multicultural organizations and public sector groups to explore racism in Canada, and approaches to combatting it.

Questions to Consider

Before watching the video, list as many forms as you can of the ways you think Chinese-Canadians were discriminated against in B.C. and the rest of Canada until mid-century.

Comparing Canada to a burning ship, John Ko Bong says, "If you're on a ship and it catches fire, you fight the fire. Canada was our ship. There was a war on. You pick up the nozzle and fight the fire." Canada had badly mistreated people like John Ko Bong, but he was nevertheless willing to lay down his life for the country. Does his attitude surprise you? If a community faced the same level of oppression today, do you think its members would be as keen to fight for Canada? Why or why not?

There was dissent among Chinese-Canadians in B.C. over whether young men should volunteer in hopes of earning more rights, or whether they should insist on those rights first. At a raucous community meeting, John Ko Bong and Roy Mah spoke vigorously in favour of the former strategy. Which position would you have taken at the meeting? In the classroom, students can be divided into groups to debate the issue.

Alex Louie was a hero. Why then was he so hesitant to tell his daughter about his past? Why is that past so important to Jari Osborne?

Biographies

Alex Louie (filmmaker Jari Osborne's father): "We wanted to better our lot, and in order to better your lot you have to do something extraordinary. Something that you can be proud of." Despite being born and raised in Canada, like the other veterans profiled in **Unwanted Soldiers**, Alex Louie was denied the right to vote, and confined to life in Chinatown's ghetto. Born in Calgary, on June 21, 1925, Alex Louie served as a private in the Canadian military and volunteered for Special Operations Executive (S.O.E.) Force 136, which operated behind Japanese lines in Southeast Asia.

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**47 minutes
21 seconds**



Roy Mah: "When war was declared I thought that was an opportunity for us to go and serve the country, so that on our return we would have solid credentials to demand full citizenship rights." Respected as the community firebrand, Mah was editor of the *Chinatown News* and an activist. Born in Edmonton, on March 29, 1918, Roy Mah served as a sergeant and volunteered for undercover duty with S.O.E.

Lee Chin: "I was born in Vancouver. Born in Canada. I think I have a right to fight for my own country." Like so many British Columbian Chinese, Chin was told he was not welcome in the Canadian Armed Forces. Proud of the country he was born in, all Lee Chin wanted to do was join up. Born in Vancouver, on November 29, 1919, Lee Chin served as a sergeant and volunteered for S.O.E.

John Ko Bong: "He [the colonel] said, 'This is a very dangerous operation...Are you still willing to take the chance?' I said, 'I volunteered to fight anywhere, so if you feel that's the place for me to go, I'm ready, and that's my answer.'" A self-taught watchmaker by profession, Ko Bong could fix anything. He became the small-arms expert for his elite commando team. Born in Victoria, on November 18, 1912, John Ko Bong served as a sergeant and volunteered for S.O.E.

Douglas Jung: "We were prepared to lay our lives down for nothing. There was no guarantee that the Canadian government was going to give us the full rights of Canadian citizenship. We were taking a gamble." Born in Victoria, on February 25, 1923, Jung served as a sergeant and volunteered for S.O.E. A lawyer, he was the first Chinese-Canadian Member of Parliament and later became the Canadian representative to the U.N.

Chronology of Key Historic Events

1885: Canadian government levies a \$50 head tax on Chinese immigrants to Canada. At the time, the Chinese were the only immigrants subject to a head tax.

1903: Head tax raised to \$500.

1923: Federal government replaces head tax with the Chinese Immigration (Exclusion) Act. This effectively bans all Chinese immigration to Canada.

1939-45: WWII breaks out. In 1940, British Columbia pressures Ottawa to exclude Chinese-Canadians from the draft, fearing that they will in turn demand the right to vote. In January 1941, the Cabinet War Committee drafts "Secret Memorandum No. 1" which excludes Chinese-Canadians from the armed forces. The ban is applied across the country. Chinese-Canadian communities and organizations rally to raise funds for the war effort.

1944: In the spring of 1944, British Special Operations Executive requests that the Canadian government help locate Chinese-Canadian volunteers for dangerous duty behind enemy lines. Shortly afterward, "Secret Memorandum No. 1" is reversed. Chinese-Canadians across the country receive their call-up notices.

1945: British Columbia grants Chinese-Canadian war veterans the right to vote in the provincial election.

1947: Chinese Immigration (Exclusion) Act repealed, allowing limited immigration. B.C. joins the other provinces in granting Chinese-Canadians the provincial franchise, thereby gaining them the right to vote in federal elections.

1949: Chinese-Canadians win the right to vote at the municipal level in Vancouver.

1957: Douglas Jung, a WWII veteran, becomes the first Chinese-Canadian elected to federal parliament.

1967: Progressive changes in the Immigration Act lead to increased immigration from Asia (Hong Kong, China, Vietnam) and other parts of the world.

1984: Chinese Canadian National Council launches a head tax redress campaign.