Billy Bishop Museum's 2026 Honouring Our Local Veterans

Private Maurice John
The Royal Canadian Regiment

Family Life

Maurice John was born on February 11, 1921, to Lillian and William John of Chippewa Hill, Saugeen First Nation. He had two brothers, Arthur "Art" and Ernest "Ernie" and a younger sister, Doris. His father enlisted with the 160th Bruce Battalion during the First World War.

He attended school until age 14, when he left to work as a labourer on the family farm. On his Attestation Paper, Maurice noted that after the war, he wished to return to farming. He was a member of the Saugeen United Church and the Loyal Orange Lodge.

His brother, Arthur, also served in the Italian Campaign with the Perth Regiment. His brother, Ernie, while serving with the Grey and Simcoe Foresters, was killed after being struck by a car on Highway 21 near Elsinore during a weekend leave.

Military Service

Private Maurice John enlisted with the Grey and Simcoe Foresters on June 19, 1940. He trained at Camp Borden, Ontario and Debert, Nova Scotia. When the regiment was converted to the 26th Army Tank Regiment in April 1942, he continued on with the Foresters.

Decorations

- 1939-1945 Star
- Italy Star
- Defence Medal
- Canadian Volunteer Service Medal and Clasp
- War Medal 1939-1945

Military Service

On July 28, 1942, Maurice was transferred to the New Brunswick Rangers. On July 8, 1942, he arrived in Goose Bay, Labrador, where the regiment was tasked mainly with defending the airfield. On April 1, 1943, he qualified as a Driver I.C. (Internal Combustion) (Wheeled) Class III, meaning he was qualified to drive heavy trucks and armoured cars. He was injured during a training exercise on December 7, 1943, while riding in the back of a truck. When the vehicle momentarily left the road a loose box stuck his left thigh, resulting in severe bruising.

Maurice returned to Canada from Labrador (which didn't join Canada until 1949) in preparation to embark to the UK, where he arrived on September 19, 1943 and was absorbed into the 3rd and then 7th Canadian Infantry Reinforcement Unit. He was subsequently transferred to the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment in Italy, on March 3, 1944. From there he would join the regiment in the field as part of 1st Canadian Infantry Division.

On May 16, 1944, the Royal Canadian Regiment was given orders to lead an attack along the road adjacent to the Liri River advancing towards Pignataro. D Company led with A, B, C and TAC Headquarters following. They came under heavy machine gun and mortar fire. The whole battalion dug in with mortar and anti-tank guns coming forward to support. The final push by A company forced the withdrawal of all enemy units on the night of May 16/17. The town of Pignataro was captured two days later.

It was during this battle on May 16, 1944, that Private Maurice John was killed. He was initially buried on the road leading north to Pignataro, and later reinterred at Cassino Military Cemetery. He was 23 years old. On June 5, 1944, a memorial service for Maurice was held at the Saugeen United Church.