

# World War 1: The involvement of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean





## **Contents**

Before the First World War.....	4
World War 1 .....	8
They were there: .....	11
The Chinese Labour Corps: “The forgotten of the forgotten” ...	28
Contributions by Women? .....	30
Donations and Resources .....	32
After the War: Broken promises.....	32
Personal tribute: Remembering my grandfather.....	34
Index .....	38

# **World War 1: Global Heroes**

## **Before the First World War**

Contrary to popular belief, individuals from various parts of the world were involved in both World Wars and in wars prior to them.<sup>i</sup> As Britain's colonial empire expanded, there was a need to protect economic interest in the territories. Due to insufficient troops to provide the required security, recruitment of local troops were necessary to provide the additional support required by the British forces. The Royal Navy had recruited sailors from different countries at the start of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. There were men from 62 different present day countries. There were men from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean at the Battle of Trafalgar. Other countries represented included China, Mexico, Indonesia and Turkey.<sup>ii</sup>

The largest locally recruited force was the Indian army which served throughout Asia and Africa. The West Indian regiment served in the West Indies and in Africa whereas the local African troops were enlisted with the Royal Worcestershire Regiment between 1751 and 1843. Some of these soldiers may have been the sons of men who had also served the regiment. Thirteen were listed as West Indians, one as African and two as Indians.

**James Horton**, born in Sierra Leone was one of the first



African doctors to serve in the British Army. He was also a scientist and a political activist. He joined the British Army Medical Service in 1859 after studying at Kings College, London and Edinburgh University. He initially served as an assistant staff surgeon. He was one of the first Africans to serve as an officer in the British Army and became a Surgeon Major in

1874. After retiring from the armed services in 1880 Horton returned to Sierra Leone and founded the Commercial Bank of Sierra Leone. He died at the age of 48.<sup>iii</sup>

**Captain John Perkins**, a native of Jamaica born to a Caribbean mother and a white father. He joined the British Navy in 1775, serving as a pilot. By 1782 he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant and given command of a Brig. In 1800 John Perkins achieved the rank of Captain on the Schooner Punch earning the nickname 'Captain Jack Punch'.

Perkins was the first 'mullato' commissioned officer in the Royal Navy. It is claimed that Perkins captured 315 ships at this time, an average of three per week. He rose from obscurity to be one of the most successful ship captains of the Georgian Navy. In 1782 Perkins captured a large vessel carrying many important French officers. This led to a promotion of master and Commander of the Endeavour Schooner by Admiral George Rodney. However this promotion was disallowed and he was demoted back to the rank of lieutenant. Perkins spent his entire



naval career in the Caribbean. Caribbean workers built some of the ships that made up the Battle of Trafalgar battle fleet.

Fifteen years after he had first joined the navy, Perkins in 1790 made an application to the Jamaican House of Assembly for their assistance in achieving his promotion. He presented his certificates to the assembly, and the assembly investigated his claim and resolved to make an application to the Admiralty for his promotion to post-captain.

Later in his career Perkins acted for the navy as a spy and undertook missions to Cuba and Saint-Domingue (Haiti). He resigned his commission on health grounds in March 1804 and died on 27 January 1812 in Jamaica.<sup>iv</sup>

**William Brown.** In the 18th and 19th Centuries, it was not



unheard of for women to disguise themselves as men and join the Royal Navy - and some even managed to serve in this way for many years.

One such woman is William Brown (real name unknown) who was born in Grenada and joined the crew of the HMS Queen Charlotte in 1804 as a landsman but later promoted to captain of the

Fore-top, in charge of other sailors assigned to that particular part of the ship. Even when Brown's birth sex was discovered in 1815, she continued to serve until 1816. This makes Brown the first known black, biologically female individual to serve in the Royal Navy.<sup>v</sup>

## The Sikh Regiments of the British India Army

The Victoria Cross was awarded to 182 members of the British Armed Forces, British Indian Army and civilians under their command, during the Indian Mutiny also known as the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Indian troops were not originally eligible for the Victoria Cross, because since 1837 they had been eligible for the Indian Order of Merit; the oldest British gallantry award for general issue.



When the Victoria Cross was created, Indian troops were still controlled by the Honourable East India Company, and did not come under Crown control until 1860.<sup>vi</sup>

In the aftermath of the **Indian Rebellion of 1857**, the British developed what became known as the **martial race theory** which divided potential recruits into categories of **martial race** and **non-martial race**, targeting those who demonstrated their caste characteristics of a warrior race. They viewed this **martial race** as being brave, strong and loyal but intellectually inferior and lacking qualities which would make them fit for military command. This policy ensured a military force united by caste that would be loyal to the command of British officers.<sup>vii</sup>

### Defending Saragarhi, 12 September 1897

Saragarhi is the incredible story of 21 men of the 36th Sikh Regiment who gave up their lives in devotion to their duty. In



keeping with the tradition of the Indian Army, they fought to the death rather than surrender.

**Maha Veer Chakra Subedar Ajit Singh<sup>1</sup>**

The Battle at Saragarhi is one of eight stories of collective bravery published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

The 1st Chinese Regiment was raised in 1898 and consisted of Chinese troops under the command of British officers and senior NCOs. Its main task was to protect the British territory of Wei Hai Wei (now Weihai) a base for the Royal Navy's China Station. The regiment was disbanded in 1903 after the territory was transferred from War Office control to the Colonial Office. It did however see active service during the 3rd China War named Boxer Rebellion in 1900.



*Chinese soldiers during the Boxer Uprising 1899-1900 [2640x2312]*

## **World War 1**

At the time of World War One all troops coming from the colonies joined the British forces as volunteers. Fine, well-educated men from good families went willingly into the army to fight for their King on behalf of the British Empire.

Men from India, West Indies, Africa and other British colonial and other territories such as China rallied to defend Britain. They were spurred by the belief that, if they showed their support for the empire, the empire would benefit and empower them and their countries with civil independence and governance of their individual homelands.

It is conservatively estimated that **four million soldiers of African and Asian origin participated in World War 1** as combatants and non-combatants, with many coming from British colonial territories. India provided the largest amount of soldiers from British colonial territories, with some 1.5 million men. However, this represented undivided colonial India including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Burma.<sup>viii</sup>

After Britain joined the First World War on 4 August 1914, African, Asian and West Indian recruits could be found in all branches of the armed forces. From 1914 black Britons volunteered at recruitment centres. The West Indian volunteers travelled at their own expense to take part in the fight against the Germans. The 'Mother Country' needed their support, and they gave it.

Soldiers from Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Gambia and other African colonies such as Kenya were also recruited. They helped to defend the borders of their countries which adjoined German territories and later played an important role in the campaigns to remove the Germans from Africa. Throughout the war, 60,000 black South African and 120,000 other Africans also served in Uniformed Labour Units.

In 1915 a proposal for a separate West Indian contingent to aid the war effort was approved. Consequently the British West Indies Regiment was formed as a separate black unit within the British

Army. The first recruits sailed from Jamaica to Britain and arrived in October 1915 to train at a camp near Seaford on the Sussex coast. The 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion arrived in early 1916 in Plymouth while other battalions sailed direct to Egypt, arriving at Alexandria in March 1916. By the end of the war in November 1918, a total of 15,204 black men, representing British Guiana and all the Caribbean colonies, had served in the British West Indies Regiment. 13,940 had been rejected.

Of the total accepted, 10,280 (66%) came from Jamaica. However, the black soldiers of the British West Indies Regiment received lower pay and allowances than their white compatriots and they were mostly led by white officers and used as non-combatant soldiers in Egypt, Mesopotamia and parts of Europe.

When the first contingent of 224,000 Indian soldiers arrived in Marseilles in October 1914, they were greeted by the grateful French with praises such as “Vivent les Hindous”. This first Indian Expeditionary Force consisted of Contingents of the **Lahore** and **Meerut** Infantry Divisions and were immediately, under the command of General Sir James Wilcocks, placed piecemeal into the theatre of the fiercest fighting in the region of **Ypres**, suffering heavy casualties, with one Battalion being reduced from its full contingency of 764 to 365 men being fit for service.<sup>ix</sup>

Devastating losses characterized Indian participation and sacrifice in this global conflict, as at Kut el Amara where some 10,000 perished after being taken prisoner after the surrender by General Charles Townshend in 1916 and at Gallipoli where Indian losses numbered 1624 of 3000 killed. At the *Battle of Tanga* on November 1914, 8,000 Indian and British troops attacked, but within two days 800 were killed, to only 150 of the

German soldiers. The 14<sup>th</sup> Sikh division fought in the battle of Krithia in June 1915, suffering many casualties. Out of 700 that fought 371 were killed and wounded and a report commemorating this bravery was sent to Britain.<sup>x</sup>

## They were there:

### Mir Dast (1874-1945)

In 1874 in what is now known as Pakistan, Mir Dast was born in the Maidan valley. He was a member of the Afridi ethnic group of Pashtuns who were identified by the British as, a '**martial race**' possessing excellent fighting qualities.



Mir Dast enlisted in the British Indian Army in 1894. He served in the North-West Frontier and Waziristan prior to World War I. By the time of the First World War, Dast was already an experienced and decorated soldier. In 1908 he was awarded the Indian

Order of Merit, which was considered to be the Indian equivalent to the Victoria Cross at that time. He was also promoted to *jemadar*, the most junior officer rank of the Indian Army in 1909.

With 57th Wilde's Rifles Unit, Dast went to France in January 1915. His moment of gallantry came during the Second Battle of Ypres in April 1915. On 26 April he led his platoon with great bravery during an attack, and afterwards collected various



parties of the regiment and kept them under his command, as there were no British officers left, until the regiment was ordered to retreat. He risked his life to carry eight wounded British and Indian officers to safety while exposed to very heavy fire. Mir Dast was injured and disorientated by gas used by the Germans during the attack and as a result was hospitalised in Brighton. While in recovery, he was promoted to the rank of 'subedar'.



Dast was awarded the Victoria Cross and was presented to many important men of the day; including the Secretary of State for India, Austen Chamberlain and Lord Kitchener; the Secretary of State for War who was also a former Commander in Chief of the Indian Army.

Mir Dast never completely recovered from his injuries and was released from active service in 1917. He returned to India to a hero's welcome and was given the title, 'Bahadur' which means hero/champion in Hindi. He died on 19 January 1945 at Shagi Landi Kyan Village, where he is buried at Warsak cemetery there.

On 29<sup>th</sup> May 2016, a blue plaque was unveiled on the Royal Pavilion Estate, near the Indian Gate at the southern entrance to the estate. The plaque commemorates Mir Dast, who was a patient there during WW1.



In addition, a commemorative monument can be seen at the Memorial Gates at Hyde Park Corner in London to commemorate the Victoria Crosses of soldiers of Indian heritage. <sup>xi</sup>

### Lance Naik Kulbir Thapa (1886 – 1956)

On 15 December 1886 in Palpa in Nepal, Kulbir Thapa was born. Following Nepalese tradition, he enlisted in the Rifles. On 25 September 1915, Thapa's battalion was about to enter into a diversionary attack, which was to be the opening move of the Battle of Loos. Following the initial use of gas, artillery bombardment and a mine under the German position, the allied infantry assault began. Many of Kulbir Thapa's company were killed trying to breach the German wire under cover of thick smoke.



Thapa made it through but was wounded and trapped on the German side of the line. He began to dig a firing position hoping to hold his ground until the next wave moved forward. Thapa noticed a badly wounded soldier of the 2nd Battalion and went to him. He stayed with the wounded soldier all day and night, comforting him with the little English he knew. He kept both of them safe by killing any Germans who approached them.

When he saw an opportunity, Thapa carried the wounded English man over the German trench and placed him in a shell crater to protect him. Thapa also carried two of his regiment comrades, one from **Leicester**, to safety. This brave act and

selflessness attracted praise from the Germans and they cheered and clapped to encourage Thapa as he returned to his own side.

For his self-sacrifice and bravery, Thapa made history by becoming the first Gurkha to win a Victoria Cross. This was even more remarkable as he had never been under fire before the incident. He survived the war after earning the title of sergeant.<sup>xii</sup>

### **Walter Tull (1888-1918)**



Walter Tull was born on 28th April 1888 in Folkestone.

Between 1909 and 1911, Walter was signed as a professional footballer and played for Tottenham then moved to Northampton, where he is now commemorated with a memorial at Sixfields Stadium.

***Walter Tull memorial at the Sixfields Stadium, Northampton***



In December 1914 Walter enlisted and rose through the ranks, fighting at the Battle of the Somme as a sergeant and then being promoted to second lieutenant, despite a military rule excluding “negroes” from becoming officers.

Tull was cited for “gallantry” after leading his company to safety in Italy. However, he never received a Military Cross despite various petitions. He was killed at the age of 30 in Pas-de-Calais. His body was never recovered.

He is remembered at the Arras memorial for those who have no known grave and Northampton erected a tribute to Walter in 1999. In addition, there is a beer named after him which is sold at the ground.

In 2014, Walter was featured on a special £5 coin to



commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. Another tribute to him is on the wall of the site where he lived.

He was the first British-born black army officer and the first black officer to lead white British troops into battle.<sup>xiii</sup>

## **Khudadad Khan (1888 -1971)**

Khudadad Khan was born in the village of Dabin in the Chakwal district of the Punjab Province on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 1888. He served with the 129th Baluchis; a regiment of 20,000 Indian soldiers. The regiment was sent from Marseilles to the front line to help the British Expeditionary Force as they had lost many soldiers.



On the 30<sup>th</sup> October, along with other allied troops, Khudadad as a machine gunner, faced the Germans as they attacked the village of Hollebeke, near Ypres in Belgium. They fought in unbearable conditions with limited ammunition. Many from Khudadad's regiment were killed. With two remaining Baluchi machine gun crews the regiment carried on fighting. One whole crew was destroyed with a direct hit. German soldiers overran the other crew and everyone was bayoneted or shot. Khudadad, although wounded, was the only survivor. He pretended to be dead until the Germans had withdrawn. He then crawled away and rejoined what was left of his regiment at night fall.

The actions of the 'Baluchis' had held up the Germans long enough for other Indian and British troops to get to the area and halt the attack.

Khudadad was sent to a hospital in Brighton for treatment. He was honoured with the Victoria Cross; Britain's highest award 'For Valour,' for his courage in Hollebeke. He was the first Indian Muslim soldier to be honoured with the awarded. He returned to India, and continued to serve in the Indian Army. He died at home in Pakistan in 1971; aged 84. Many of his descendants now live in England.<sup>xiv</sup>

### **George Arthur Roberts (1890 – 1970)**



George Arthur Roberts was born on the island of Trinidad.

When war broke out, Roberts was determined to get to Britain to join the war efforts. He volunteered for European services and worked his

way to British soil; where he was attached to the Middlesex Regiment of the British Army and served 14 months in France. He fought many battles and was injured in both the battle of the Loos and Somme.

Roberts began to work as a battalion bomber, and received the name Coconut Bomber because when the bombs came over, he would throw them back at the Germans. He could throw them up to 74 yards. He was mimicking his antics, back in Trinidad, of bringing down the coconuts from the palm trees as a youth. The bombs were the same size and weight as the coconuts and so it seemed like the easiest and best way to get rid of them in his opinion.

On his return to Trinidad; on special leave, he helped to recruit more troops for the British army. He gave some great speeches on behalf of the British Army, his adopted country which he saw as the motherland.



Following the First World War, George Arthur Roberts went on to become a firefighter throughout *the* blitz and the remainder of World War II. He was recognised for this service with a blue plaque on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015.

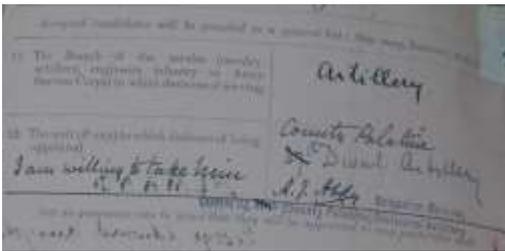
In 1944, Roberts was awarded the British Empire Medal for general duties and for his part as a founder and pioneer of the 'Discussion and Education' groups of the Fire Service' throughout the Second World War at New Cross Fire Station. In addition, he was a founding member of one of the first black-

led organisations to assist black Britons; 'League of Coloured Peoples'.<sup>xv</sup>

## George Edward Kingsley Bemand (1892 – 1916)

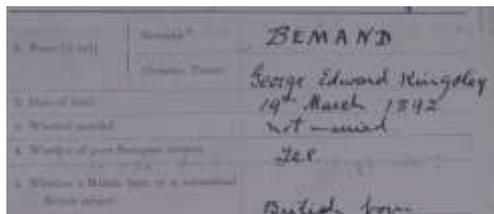


On 19 March 1892, George Bemand was born in Jamaica to a white English father and a black Jamaican mother. The family moved to England when he was 16 where George went to Dulwich College, South London and later joined University College, London, to study Engineering in 1913. At university, he joined the London Officers training Corps and obtained a temporary commission in the Royal Field Artillery on 23 May 1915. His form was countersigned by the commanding officer Brigadier-General A. J. Abdy as he really wanted him in his troop.



**Brig-Gen Abdy's confirmation that he wanted Bemand as one of his officers**

Bemand declared on his application form that he was of pure European descent. This act may have been carried out following advice from others as had he not written down that he was of pure European descent, he would not have been accepted.



G. E. K. Bemand's application form for an army commission

On completing his training at Grantham and Salisbury Plain, George went to France in November 1915 attached to the ammunition Column of the 148<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Royal field Artillery. He transferred to Trench Mortar Battery and was killed in action on 26 December 1916. He is buried at the British Cemetery at Le Touret, near Bethune. <sup>xvi</sup>

### **Lt. David Louis Clemetson (1893-1918)**

David Louis Clemetson was born in Port Maria, in St Mary Parish, Jamaica on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1893 into a wealthy family. He attended Clifton College in Bristol and was admitted to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1912 to study Law and row for the First Trinity Rowing Club's fourth boat.



*Clemetson pictured at Clifton College (front row seated, fourth from right)*

At the outbreak of war in 1914, Clemetson left his studies to enlist in the Sportsmen's Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers as an Acting Lance Sergeant and played in the battalion's ruby team. His commander Lieutenant Colonel HJH Inglis recommended him for a commission, and he was transferred to become a second lieutenant in the Pembroke Yeomanry on 27 October 1915. His unit was sent to Egypt in March 1916 with the 4th Dismounted Brigade (later the 231st Brigade). He returned to England after suffering shell shock, and was rescued after the ship taking him back to England, HMHS *Dover Castle*, was sunk by a German submarine off North Africa on 26 May 1917. While he recuperated at

Craiglockhart, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant in July 1917. He is thought to have been the only black person to hold the rank of lieutenant in the British Army during the First World War.



Clemetson was killed in action, near Péronne, on the Somme, in September 1918. His name is listed on the British West Indies Regiment memorial in Port Maria, Jamaica and he is buried in Vendhuile, France.

*Unicorn war cemetery in, Vendhuile, northern France, where Clemeteson is buried*

He was posthumously awarded the Victory Medal and the British War Medal and a poem, In Memoriam, written by a friend, was published in the Jamaica Gleaner after his death.<sup>xvii</sup>

## **Hardit Singh Malik (1894 – 1985)**

Born to a wealthy family in 1894 in Rawlpindi, Punjab Hardit Singh Malik was studying in Britain for his degree at Oxford University when the war broke out.<sup>xviii</sup> On finishing his degree, he joined the French Red Cross as an ambulance driver in 1915. However, Malik's ambition was always to join the Royal Flying Corps. This dream was realised on his return to Britain in early 1917 when he was accepted into the Royal Flying Corps as a cadet.

On arriving in the Corps, Malik received a lot of discrimination for wearing a turban. As an observant Sikh he stood his ground and was allowed to keep his turban as part of his uniform. A

specially designed flying helmet was later created for him to fit over his turban. This earned him the nickname; the "Flying Hobgoblin".

From April 1917, Malik trained at No.1 Armament School and was commissioned into No. 26 Squadron as a Flight Lieutenant on 22 June 1917. He later transferred to No. 28 Squadron and served on the Western Front, flying a Sopwith Camel. In late 1917, he flew combat missions over France and Italy securing several kills. Malik sustained bullet wounds to his right leg in a dogfight during this period and needed several months to recuperate in an English hospital.

Once Malik regained his fitness, he rejoined the RFC, which was now known as the Royal Air Force flying a Bristol F.2 Fighter with No. 141 Squadron RAF. He was based at Biggin Hill alongside pilots from all over the world; Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Rhodesia [Zimbabwe], and Argentina.



Malik was the first Indian to fly as a pilot with the Royal Flying Corps in World War 1.

Following the armistice, Malik was posted back to France with No. 11 Squadron RAF at Nivelles. He returned home to a hero's welcome and had an extremely successful political career .<sup>xix</sup>

## **Sergeant William Robinson Clarke (1895 – 1981)**

William Robinson Clarke was born in Kingston, Jamaica, on 4 October 1895. With the outbreak of war, 'Robbie' Clarke paid his own passage to Britain and joined the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) on 26 July 1915. At first, he served as an air mechanic, but on 18 October he was posted to France as a driver with an observation balloon company. Clarke wanted to fly and in December 1916 he was accepted for pilot training in England. On 26 April 1917, Clarke won his 'wings' and was promoted to Sergeant. He was the first black pilot to fly for Britain.

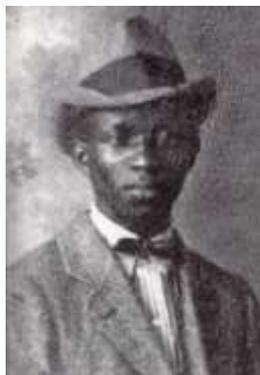


On 29 May 1917, Sergeant Clarke joined 4 Squadron RFC at Abeele in Belgium and began flying R.E.8 biplanes over the Western Front. While on a reconnaissance mission on the morning of 28 July, he and his observer, Second Lieutenant F.P. Blencowe, were attacked by enemy fighters. He was hit by bullets but recovered from his wounds.

After the war Clarke returned to Jamaica to work in the building trade. He was an active veteran and became Life President of the Jamaican branch of the Royal Air Forces Association. <sup>xx</sup>

## **Lionel Turpin (1896-1929)**

No one could have been more loyal to his king and country than the Guyanese merchant seaman Lionel Turpin. He was



just 19 years old when he enlisted in the British army and was sent out with the No. 32 British Expeditionary Force to the Western Front in Europe. He was in the battles of the Somme and his army service ended in 1919 with two medals, two gas-burnt lungs and a shell wound in his back. Lionel died in 1929 from the after-effects of war-time gassing.<sup>xxi</sup>

### **Arthur William David Roberts (1897-1982)**

Roberts was born on 28 April 1897 to a Caribbean father and Bristolian woman. At some point in his childhood, the family moved to Glasgow. Roberts completed school and then worked



as a marine engineer until he volunteered for the army in 1917. He started in the King's Own Scottish Borderers before joining the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers. He survived the Battle of Passchendaele and escaped<sup>xxii</sup> unharmed when a German shell killed men around him. Roberts chronicled his time fighting at the front in a diary. He married in 1956 and died in a nursing home in January

1982 in Scotland. His diaries were discovered in an attic in Mount Vernon in 2008 and have been used as the basis for the book 'As Good As Any Man: Scotland's Black Tommy.'<sup>xxiii</sup>

## Indra Lal Roy (1898-1918)

Indra Lal Roy was born on December 2, 1898 in Calcutta to



highly qualified and distinguished family. He was educated in Britain, attending St Paul's School in Kensington in 1911. He was only 15 when war broke out in August 1914. Indra was in the school cadet force from September 1914 until March 1917. Initially rejected by

the Royal Flying Corps on grounds of poor eyesight, Indra paid for a second opinion from a leading eye specialist and got the decision overturned. He joined the Royal Flying Corps in April 1917 and was given a commission as 2nd Lieutenant on 5 July 1917. Within a week of joining he was training at Vendrome. Following gunnery practice at Turnberry, he was assigned to 56 Squadron at the end of 1917. He was part of "A" Flight which was commanded by Captain Richard Maybery.

On 6 December 1917, his S.E.5a fighter crash-landed and he was injured. As a result Indra needed timeout to recuperate.

While recovering, he made many sketches of aircraft, some survived to this day. He was sent back to England for further remedial training and was pronounced medically unfit. Roy successfully ensured that the unfit verdict was reversed, allowing him to return to France on June 1918.



Back in France, Indra was assigned to 40 Squadron. He amassed ten air victories in 13 days, from 6 – 19 July; two of these victories were shared. Three of the victories were carried out in a single day, 8 July; in less than four hours.

Three days following his victories, Indra's luck run out and he was killed in action, on 22 July 1918; shot down in flames in the skies while fighting German Fokker D. V11 aircraft. He is believed to be the first and only Indian flying ace of the First



World War. He is buried at Estévelles communal cemetery in Pas de Calais, France.

For his actions during the period of 6 – 19 July 1918, Indra was posthumously awarded the

Distinguished Flying Cross in September 1918. He was the first Indian to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross

*To mark the centenary anniversary of his birth, the Indian postal service issued a commemorative stamp in his honour in December 1998.<sup>xxiv</sup>*

Indra Lal Roy's older brother, Paresh Lal Roy (1893–1979), also served in the war in the 1st Battalion; Honourable Artillery Company. He became known as the "father of Indian boxing." His maternal grandfather, Dr Surya Kumar Goodeve Chakraborty, was one of the first Indian doctors to be trained in Sergeant George Williams.

## Sergeant Major Juma (Unknown D.O.B.)

Juma was born in Nyasaland which is now known as Malawi.



He was recruited into the Kings African Rifles in 1901.

He was heavily engaged in battles across Somaliland which earned him many medals for bravery. He reached the rank of Regimental Sergeant Major; the most senior post held by an African, in his company, before the start of World War II.

After the war, Juma was recommended for the 'Victoria Cross', but was instead awarded the 'Distinguished Conduct Medal'. In total, Juma earned ten medals during his thirty years' service in the Kings African Rifles regiment.

Following his retirement Juma settled in a quiet village called Zombe near Lusaka in Zambia. He attended all the King's Birthday Parades and all official occasions.<sup>xxv</sup>

## Ralph Ernest Vignale 1884 1950's and Otto Rudolf Vignale 1891-1950's: "Brothers in arms"

Ralph Ernest Vignale and his brother Otto Rudolf Vignale were born in Trinidad but moved to the UK before the war. Ralph was an electrical engineer and Otto was a dental surgeon.



*Recruits for the British West Indies Regiment from Trinidad and Barbados being sworn in*

*by the Lord Mayor of London (from Illustrated War News, 26 Jan 1916)*

Ralph enlisted to the Queen's Regiment in July 1915. He became a corporal in the 4th battalion; reserve group, by 1916. He was never transferred to an active-service battalion. In May 1916, Otto called up and joined the Royal Artillery.

Ralph eventually went to France after being transferred to the 3rd Battalion of the British West Indies Regiment. He joined this regiment in France in late April 1917 but did not see action directly. He became severely ill in late September 1917 and was sent back in October to a hospital in the UK suffering from a serious kidney problem. The illness was so severe that he was discharged and given a 100% army disability pension until he had recovered. He was declared fully fit in 1920. Ralph studied to become a barrister, passed his final exams in 1922 and became a member of the Middle Temple. He later became mayor of his home town of Arima in Trinidad.

Otto Vignale went through artillery training and joined the 1st Northumbrian Heavy Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery, before moving on to 'A' Battery, Heavy Artillery, where he qualified as a signaller. Like his brother, he was not sent abroad while he was serving in his original unit and was transferred to the Royal Army Medical Corps. He survived a case of influenza and returned to civilian life after the war. He qualified as a dentist and lived into the 1950s. Although both brothers enlisted in the British army in active service units, neither fought at the front.<sup>xxvi</sup>

## The Chinese Labour Corps: “The forgotten of the forgotten”

Up to 95,000 Chinese farm labourers volunteered to leave their villages to work for Britain in the First World War as the Chinese Labour Corps.

At the time of the First World War, recruitment of the Chinese began in 1916 as ever escalating casualties meant labourers became disastrously scarce. Many died on their journey by ship across the Pacific, six days crossing Canada in sealed trains to avoid paying landing taxes, by ship to Liverpool, by train again to Folkestone, and finally to France and Belgium, where they lived in labour camps and worked digging trenches, unloading ships and trains, laying tracks and building roads, and repairing tanks.



*Workers seen in Weihai  
Photo: Weihai Archives*

Some of the volunteers who died on the voyage are buried in Liverpool, and 2,000 are buried in Commonwealth war graves. It is believed that some 20,000 died in total. When the war ended and other men went home, they worked on until 1920, clearing live armaments and exhuming bodies from battlefield burials and moving them to the new war cemeteries.

It is said that when Britain distributed 6 million commemorative medals to all who took part in the war, those received by the Chinese bore only their numbers, not their names, and were

bronze, not silver. Painfully symbolically, the Chinese were also painted out of a giant canvas exhibited in Paris at the end of the war. The canvas was believed to be the largest painting in the world showing a victorious France surrounded by her allies. The canvas was begun in 1914, but had to be changed in 1917 to include the arrival of the United States – the space was found by painting over the Chinese workers.

A campaign has been launched by the Chinese community in Britain to create a permanent memorial in London as a tribute to the Chinese Labour Corps and the vital work they did behind the front lines. (*Kennedy M., The guardian, cited 14 august 2014*)



*From a photograph album compiled by Captain George Cecil Brooke while serving with the 1st Chinese Regiment, the 2nd Border Regiment and the 4th Lancashire Fusiliers, 1900-1912. (GreatWarPhotos.com, P. Reed)*

The above image is from a vintage post card recovered by World War One historian Paul Reed and appears on his site GreatWarPhotos.com<sup>xxvii</sup>

The Men of the Chinese Labour Corps carried no rifles, yet they still helped the Allies win the First World War. More than 140,000 Chinese workers, along with tens of thousands of migrants from Egypt,



India and elsewhere dug trenches, built roads and hauled supplies all along the Western Front. Only recently, have their sacrifices come to light. <sup>xxviii</sup>

## Contributions by Women?

### Princess Sophia Duleep Singh (1876-1948)



Sophia Duleep Singh was born on 8 August 1876 at Belgravia, Suffolk to Maharaja Duleep Singh, the last Maharaja of the Sikh empire who abdicating his kingdom to the British at the age of 11

and presented Queen Victoria with the Koh-I-Noor diamond; an important symbol for the Sikh people. He was exiled from India by the British at the age of 15 and moved to England where Queen Victoria provided his upkeep. He converted to Christianity reverting back to Sikhism in his later life, when he supported the freedom movement in India, after realising that he had lost a large empire by deceit. Queen Victoria was Sophia's godmother. In 1896, Queen Victoria gave Sophia Faraday House to live in as a grace and favour along with an allowance of £200 to help with the upkeep of the house.



Sophia's mother, Maharani Bamba Muller had

Indian, European and African ancestry. She was the daughter of a German father and an Abyssinian mother who grew up in Cairo speaking Arabic.

During the Great War, Sophia wore a Red Cross uniform and worked as a nurse tending wounded Indian soldiers at many of the south coast hospitals. She became a fundraiser for the Indian troops and organised flag days for Punjabi troops of the Indian Army in 1916. The day was celebrated on the anniversary of the British Red Cross.<sup>xxix</sup>



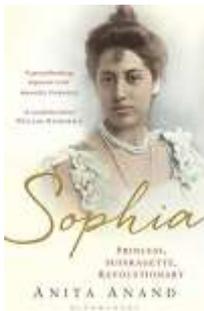
Prior to the declaration

of war, Sophia was heavily involved in the suffragette movement and appeared in court numerous times for refusing to pay fines.



([historysheroes.e2bn.org/hero/whowerethey/3521](http://historysheroes.e2bn.org/hero/whowerethey/3521))

On 22 August 1948, Sophia died in her sleep in Coalhatch House; now known as Hilden Hall. She was cremated according to Sikh rites per her wish on 26 August at Golders Green Crematorium. Her ashes were spread in India.



In 2015, Anita Anand wrote a biography “Sophia” about Princess Sophia to highlight the presence of women of colour in the First

World War and in the Women liberation movement. A short television documentary based on the book was aired on the BBC in late November 2015.

## **Donations and Resources**

The financing of the war effort was crucial to the ultimate success of the British and their allies. British colonial territories provided critical support of funds and raw material., African, Indian, and the West Indian colonies provided significant resources including oil and petroleum products, sugar, rum, citrus, cotton, rice, rubber, cocoa, clothing, logwood, and other mineral and agricultural resources. Donations of millions pounds were given to the British Government in support of the war effort and this essential financial support and input of manpower and resources was given at a sacrifice in the colonies.<sup>xxx</sup>

## **After the War: Broken promises**

At the end of the First World War, many African and West Indian soldiers who had fought for their 'Mother Country' decided to make Britain their home, but in some cities, including the seaports of Cardiff and Liverpool, they came under attack. Between January and August 1919, there were anti-black 'race riots' in seven towns and cities in Britain. Cardiff's African and Caribbean population had increased during the war from 700 in 1914 to 3,000 by April 1919. The tensions between the white and black communities exploded into violence in Butetown (aka 'Tiger Bay') in June 1919. 2,000 white people attacked shops and houses associated with black citizens. Many were injured.

From early in the war, the then government worried about potential political upheaval from any number of anti-colonial opponents, whether armed Sikh militants, Bengali, or, following the Ottoman entry into the war, an increasingly active pan-Islamic movement. The Viceroy, Frederic Chelmsford, Lord Chelmsford (1868-1933), was eager to pre-empt any potential challenges to the Raj and to respond to calls to reward Indian military service for the King-Emperor. Edwin Montagu (1879-1924), the new Liberal Secretary of State for India from 1917, was also critical of the bureaucratic mentality of the Raj's civil administration and shared a desire to instigate reform. The war gave him the mandate required to shake up India's government and to head off any political unrest.<sup>xxxix</sup>

The West Indies and African soldiers who served in the Black West Indian Regiment and in African Native contingents, despite remaining constant in valour and courage, providing essential military service, were treated badly throughout the war and were often consigned to perform menial tasks across the ranks, with little recognition for their invaluable contributions and the hard work and life threatening sacrifices that they made in the conflict. At the close of the conflict, a crisis arose when, after the Armistice in November, 1918, the eight Divisions of the British West India regiment were stationed in Taranto Italy to prepare for demobilization. They were joined by Three Divisions from Egypt and Forces who had served in Mesopotamia. Black soldiers were forced to perform all the hard labour, such as offloading ships and other back breaking work. They were also forced to perform the most manual, menial and demeaning tasks such as cleaning and building toilets for the White officers.

The determination and resolve of West Indian colonial society was clearly forged and even though many of the returning combatants were dispersed to Cuba and Venezuela, many ex-soldiers were active participants along with militant workers in the labour strikes and riots which ensued in Jamaica, Grenada and British Honduras and were instrumental in the struggles that led to political power and eventual independence in the region<sup>xxxii</sup>

The Chinese who contributed to World War 1 were refused the right to settle in Britain. There are no known descendants of theirs in Britain. Among the 40,000 (estimate), war memorials in the UK there is no tribute to the Chinese Labour Corps in Britain. They are “the forgotten of the forgotten”.

## **Personal tribute: Remembering my grandfather Mian Singh Sembi (1896-1987)**



**Harvinder Kaur and her husband with photograph of her grandfather; Mian Singh Sembi on the table and the with regalia.**

In November 2014, Harvinder Kaur Bhamra, 62, contacted Leicester's Race Equality Centre to see if they would be interested in various items stored away in her attic. She had heard that there was a Heritage Lottery funded project called "*Together We Won The War*" which was researching the contributions made by soldiers from the Empire and other parts of the world to the British war effort from 1914 to 1918. A key aspect of their exhibition focused on the overlooked stories of Indian soldiers and their heroic involvement in the conflict. Harvinder provided the project with her grandfather's military jacket; greatcoat, several medals and some documentation. Harvinder's grandfather's name was Mian Singh Sembi. His date of birth is unclear due to the lack of accurate recording at the time. However, it is believed that he was born in the Punjab in 1896 and subsequently worked as a carpenter, becoming a blacksmith and car mechanic. He enlisted in the British Indian Army in April 1917 and was discharged in June 1919 at the age of 23.

By the outbreak of the Second World War, Mian Singh was living in Kenya and once again, enlisted in the British Army in May 1939, serving for duration; six years; of the conflict in East Africa. During the course of his military service Mian Singh was awarded several medals including the Africa Star and the Burma Star.

In 1970 Mian Singh moved to the UK to live in Scotland but eventually moved to Leicester to be near his granddaughter Harvinder. He died in 1987.

The impact of the Mian Singh's story has been one of great excitement and pride for Harvinder Kaur Bhamra. Her family

were pleased to have found Main Singh's things and were very proud that he fought in the wars for them. He also felt that it is very important for youngsters to know about such forgotten heroes as many young people were not aware of this important aspect of history which is relevant to them.



## Index

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