



Indian cavalry await the order to advance on the Somme, 14 July 1916 [Source: National Army Museum, Image number: 100569]

South Asian, Black, and Indigenous Peoples serving in the British Empire during the First World War

In his article [Race, empire and colonial troops](#), Dr Santanu Das writes “Even by conservative estimates well over four million non-white men were mobilised into the European and American armies during the First World War, in combatant and non-combatant roles.”

Region of the Empire	People who enlisted
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland	<p>4,000,000 (initially 700,000, but grew to this number following conscription)</p> <p>Also: 620,000 from Canada, 417,000 from Australia, 146,000 from South Africa (White only), 120,000 from New Zealand and 12,000 from Newfoundland.</p> <p>Total = (approximately) 5,315,000</p>

- Approximately **1,610,582** (23% of the total) South Asian, Black, and Indigenous Peoples served on the side of the British Empire as either soldiers or labourers during the First World War.

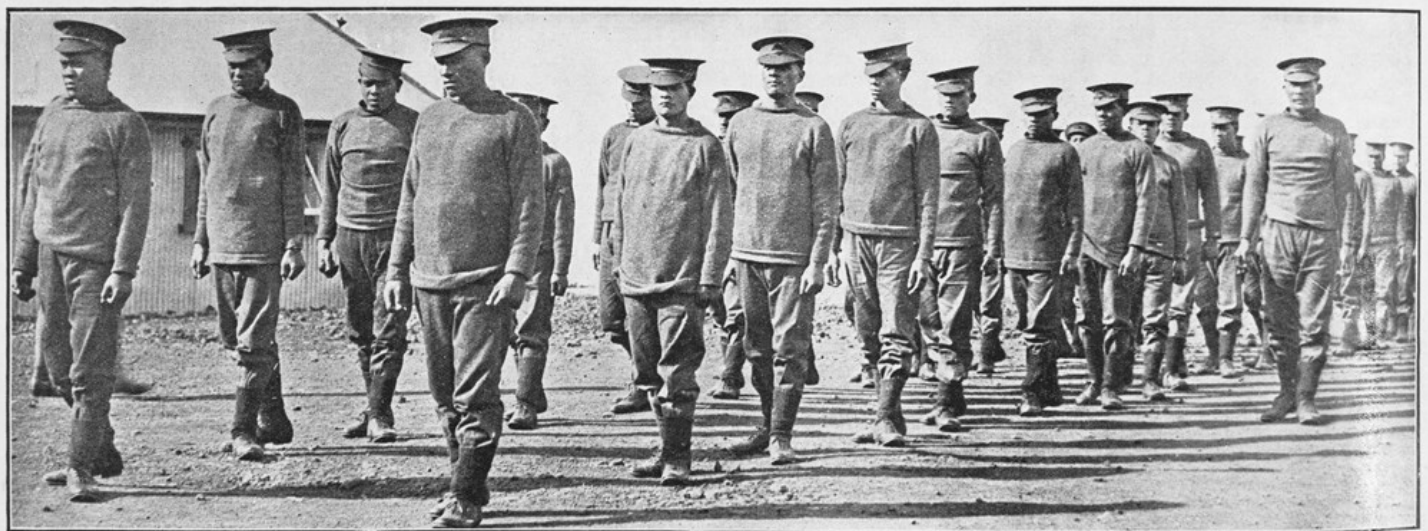
Region of the Empire	People who enlisted
India (including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan) ¹ Soldiers from the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) fought in all the major wartime theatres and made a decisive contribution to the struggle against Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire.	1,270,000 (all volunteers and greater than all other British Dominions, colonies and territories combined). (Source: British Council)
Nigeria, the Gold Coast (Ghana), Sierra Leone, Kenya, Uganda and Nyasaland (Malawi)	180,000 (Fearful of the political implications of pitting black soldiers against white soldiers, Britain refused to deploy a large African army for service in Europe. Instead, most Black people served in Africa, or as non-combatant labourers). (Source: The National Archives)
South Africa (Black South Africans)	85,000 (labourers – The White-dominated government of South Africa did not allow Black South Africans to be armed). (Source: The Army Museum)
Jamaica	10,280 (Source: The Imperial War Museum)
Other Caribbean Territories (Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, The Bahamas, British Honduras (Belize), Grenada, British Guiana (Guyana), the Leeward Islands, St Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines)	5,000 (Source: The Imperial War Museum)
Indigenous People enlisting with Canadian Military	4,000 (1/3 of First Nations people in Canada age 18 to 45 enlisted during the First World War. This number does not include non-status “Indians,” Metis or Inuit Peoples, Source: Crown-Indigenous Relations)
Māori and Pacific Islanders	2,700 (Source: National Army Museum)
Black Canadians	1,500 (including 800 people who served with the No. 2 Construction Battalion).
Indigenous People serving with the Australian Military	1000 (Source: Australian War Memorial)

¹ **60 percent of all combat troops raised in British India hailed from Punjab.** Source: Fogarty, Richard, Jarboe, Andrew Tait: Non-European Soldiers , in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2021-04-29. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.11543.

Cook Islands	500 (Source: The Auckland Museum). This was 5.8% of the islands' population at the time. Many served in Sinai and Palestine.
Chinese Canadians	300 (Source: Canadian War Museum)
Japanese Canadians	222 (Source: Canadian War Museum)
Niue	150 (Source: Niue 'left behind' over huge WW1 contribution)
Indigenous Fijians	100 (Only allowed to serve as labourers, despite the efforts of Ratu Sir Lala Vanayaliyali Sukuna, Source: The Imperial War Museum)
Indigenous People serving with the Newfoundland Military	21 (Source: Winegard, Timothy C.: <i>Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War</i> , Cambridge 2011)
Tuvalu	9 (Source: The Auckland Museum)

* Nearly 140,000 Chinese contract labourers were hired by the British and French governments, forming a substantial part of the immigrant labour force working in France during the war. Source: [Race, empire and colonial troops](#).

* More than 2 million Africans (both civilians and soldiers) were killed between 1914-1918. France recruited the most troops from their colonial empire (450,000) to fight on the front lines.



STURDY NIUE ISLAND RECRUITS, WHO ARRIVED LAST WEEK IN AUCKLAND: SOME OF THE MEN WHO ARE NOW IN TRAINING FOR THE FRONT IN THE NARROW NECK CAMP.

Ref: *Auckland Weekly News*, *Sturdy Niue Island recruits who arrived last week in Auckland*, 28 October 1915, Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, 7-A14556.