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## 'Arriving in the Nick of Time' The Indian Corps in France, 1914–15<sup>1</sup>

*Chandar S. Sundaram\**

*Today, military historians as well as those dealing with colonial South Asian history tend to overlook the fact that during the First World War, the Indian Army was Britain's strategic reserve. It vitally despatched over 150,000 troops to the Western Front to shore-up the British sector in the critical period of 1914-1915. To the Indian sepoy who crossed the kala pani to fight, die or be wounded in the trenches there, it was a jarring initiation into modern industrialised warfare. This article examines that episode and advances two arguments: first, that, contrary to accounts written as recently as the 1980s, Indian sepoy performed quite well in the trenches; second, that racial concerns and the advent of the Kitchener armies, rather than a poor combat record, led to their transfer from the Western Front at the end of 1915.*

[T]he Indian soldiers are due a great debt of gratitude by the people [of Britain], because at a time when our own countrymen were fighting against enormous odds and performing deeds of deathless glory, the Indian Corps was able to step in and fill the gap, and thus help roll...[back]...the billows thundering against that thin but still unshatterable granite wall...[T]hey arrived at the very nick of time and took their place in the sadly reduced battle line, thus relieving the strain which was becoming nigh intolerable for our own brave men.

—General Sir James Willcocks, 1917

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How many of us today know that the India Gate, that stately sandstone monument that graces one end of Rajpath in New Delhi, began life as a memorial to Indian soldiers who died in far-flung corners of foreign fields during World War I, and that a large portion of the jawans whose names are inscribed on India Gate were killed in Europe? In 1914–15, fully one-third of the British front-line in Flanders was held by brown men, the ‘doughty Sikhs, Gurkhas, and Pathans’ of the Indian Army.<sup>2</sup> Fully a century later, this has been forgotten in most of the scholarly and popular historical writings on the French and Belgian theatre of World War I, which, until recently, has conformed to the judgement of a writer cleverer than I, that it was ‘All *White* on the Western Front’.<sup>3</sup> The contribution, service and presence of colonial peoples of colour in this pivotal front have been all but ignored. Even when it has been dealt with, scholars of ‘the cultural turn’, with their rather cavalier and dismissive attitude towards careful, archival, empirical history, have hitherto dominated; which means that, for the empirical military historian, the ‘non-white’ factor on the western front has remained a *terra incognita*.<sup>4</sup> And, despite claims to the contrary, the subject has also been neglected by South Asianist historians, obsessed as they are with the doings of Mohandas Gandhi.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it—and military/war and society history generally—has been all but ignored by the Indian defence establishment. As recently as November 2008, this author was shocked to be proudly told by his second cousin, who at that time was the secretary of the National Defence College (NDC) in New Delhi, that military history was absent from the curriculum there.<sup>6</sup>

The present article seeks to begin to counteract this neglect, at least for the roughly 89,000 Indian combatant soldiers who deployed in France and Belgium in 1914–15, as part of the Indian Expeditionary Force A (IEFA), otherwise known as the Indian Corps in France.<sup>7</sup> This article will cover the following topics: What was the Army in India? Why did it find itself on the western front? How did the Indian Army perform? What were the experiences of Indian troops? It will add to the corpus of scholarly writings that seeks to counter the long-held view, established by Jeffrey Greenhut, that IEFA was a failure,<sup>8</sup> and also popularise knowledge of the IEFA, and military history generally, among the Indian defence and strategic studies establishment. Indeed, the present author agrees with P.K. Gautam that there is a crying need for a greater focus on military history in Indian academe.<sup>9</sup> Discerning readers will no doubt note that this article contains relatively little primary archival research. However,

it is hoped that they will see from the footnotes that there now exists a sufficient corpus of secondary material on the Indian Corps in France and Belgium to enable historically nuanced and sophisticated analyses to be made.

#### THE INDIAN ARMY IN 1914

In 1914, the Army in India was the name by which the land forces of Britain's Indian Empire—the British Raj—were known. It had existed, in one form or another, since the early seventeenth century.<sup>10</sup> It consisted of two parts: the Indian Army consisted of Indian units headed by British officers with the King's Commission; and the British Home Army, which sent units to India on a rotative basis. In 1914, the strength of the Army in India stood at 239,561 men, 76,953 of whom were members of the British Army doing duty in India. Indian personnel numbered 193,901 combatant troops plus 45,660 non-combatants. A Commander-in-Chief, India (C-in-C India), was in charge of the Army in India's operations and administration. The 'Indian Army' which consisted of the Indian component of the Army in India, and its British higher officers, will be the focus of this article.

In 1914, the Indian Army was an all-volunteer force consisting of 138 infantry battalions and 39 cavalry regiments. As a result of the Indian uprising of 1857, which had been spearheaded by Indian sepoys (soldiers), official policy dictated that, apart from 12 mountain batteries, the Indian Army have no artillery—considered an 'advanced' weapon, and therefore deemed dangerous in the hands of 'non-whites'.<sup>11</sup> The Indian Army's tasks in 1914 were classically colonial. Internal security troops were to aid the civil power in the event of another 1857-like popular uprising. Covering troops were tasked with monitoring and controlling the 'wild tribes' of the north-west frontier. From time to time, the Indian Army was, in the words of the British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury (1830–1903),<sup>12</sup> 'an English barrack in the Oriental Seas', which Britain could despatch to prosecute Britain's colonial wars east of Suez, '...without having to pay for them.'<sup>13</sup> This was because expenditure on the Army in India was totally borne by the Indian exchequer, through various taxes and 'Home Charges' imposed on Indians, which 'drained' wealth from India.<sup>14</sup> Finally, as a result of the Kitchener<sup>15</sup> reforms of 1903, the Indian Army formed a nine-division field force, which was a mobile reserve, ready to deploy against either the Afghans or, until 1907, the Russians. Only the field force was ready for deployment outside India.<sup>16</sup>

When we talk of Indian troops, also known as sepoys, of this period, we must remember that they did not represent all the regions of British India, which, at that time, included what are now the countries of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Burma, as well as India. They were recruited from the 'martial races' of India. The 'martial races theory' was a hodgepodge of European racial pseudo-science. Essentially, it held that in India, unlike in Europe, only certain 'martial races'—what we would term 'ethnicities' today—had the ability and inclination to become soldiers.<sup>17</sup> It also played up some martial and masculine self-images and identities of certain Indian communities.<sup>18</sup> The martial races doctrine only reached its epitome from the 1880s onwards. It essentially consisted of five elements. First, the British military in India began recruiting taller, well-built Indians in the belief that they would be more impressive on parade and in battle than their shorter compatriots. It must be noted that an exception to this was the Gurkhas. The second factor was climatic–civilisational determinism, which contended that men from the bracing and temperate north of India were more virile, enterprising, vigorous, and therefore more martial, than men from the tropical south. Third was the emphasis on the rural peasant or 'yeoman' farmer, who was thought to be dependable and trustworthy as well as apolitical as a result of his illiteracy.<sup>19</sup> Fourth was the geographical reorientation of recruitment, in the aftermath of the 1857 uprising, to Punjab, the United Provinces and Rajputana in the north-west and north, and Nepal in the north-east. Finally, there was the British tendency to recruit from communities that they had previously had the most trouble quelling militarily, such as the Sikhs and the Gurkhas.<sup>20</sup>

To command and control the multiethnic Indian Army, and to assist them in their roles of 'maa–baap' (mother and father in Hindi) of the 'child-like' sepoy, British officers of the Indian service, who were often linguistically challenged, needed close Indian collaborators. For this, they relied on a subordinate class of Indian officer, designated Viceroy Commissioned Officers (VCOs) sometime after 1858.<sup>21</sup> The three VCO ranks were: *Jemadar* (same in infantry and cavalry); *Subedar* (*Risaldar* in cavalry); and *Subedar-Major* (*Risaldar-Major* in cavalry). Jemadars and Subedars performed the routine duties of junior company officers, while the Subedar-/Risaldar-Major advised the infantry battalion's or cavalry regiment's commanding officer. A typical battalion or regiment had about 12 British officers and 20 VCOs. Rising always from the ranks, VCOs

shared the ethnicity of their unit and served with it throughout their careers. Without exception, they were subordinate to the junior-most British officer.<sup>22</sup>

Pre-war recruitment was done on a purely regimental, almost familial, basis. This ensured that recruits only joined units recruited from their own territorial area or ethnic group.<sup>23</sup> According to one source:

A regiment might send a recruiting party to a selected district; British officers might obtain men through their contacts with pensioners of the regiment; or men on leave might bring men back with them when they rejoined [the unit]. In each case, recruiting relied on local connections. Men on leave tended to bring in men of their own family or clan; and a recruiting party would normally be led by an Indian officer or NCO from the district, who would obtain suitable men more quickly than someone who was locally unknown. In practice, regimental recruiting parties tended to return often to those districts...they knew well. The men preferred it that way, as they wanted their families to retain the useful option of regimental employment.<sup>24</sup>

In the period before World War I, yearly recruitment into the Indian Army stood at between 14,000–16,000 men.<sup>25</sup> Recruitment was further complicated by the Indian Army's structure: regiments were either organised on a single class basis, in which all the men came from a single community, or on a class-company basis, where each company of a regiment came from a different martial race.<sup>26</sup> This was not conducive to the rapid expansion of the kind the Indian Army would soon be called upon to undertake. The combatant strength of an Indian infantry division stood at 12,154, and consisted of 8,606 Indians and 3,548 Britons. It also had 3,212 followers.<sup>27</sup>

#### DEPLOYMENT TO FRANCE

In 1912, as war clouds began to loom, the Army in India (Nicholson) Committee opened the door to India's military contribution in the event of a general European war. As part of a general principle that all parts of the empire had to be 'prepared to...support...forces operating at the decisive point',<sup>28</sup> the Committee declared that:

while the Army in India should not be specifically maintained for the purpose of meeting external obligations of an Imperial character, it should be so organised and equipped as to be capable of affording

ready overseas co-operation, when the situation in India allows of it, in such direction as His Majesty's Government may determine.<sup>29</sup>

General Douglas Haig, when the Army in India's Chief of Staff between 1910–12—and already convinced that war with Germany was very much in the offing—had already formulated a secret plan to despatch Indian forces to Europe under London's control. However, Charles Hardinge, the Viceroy, apparently vehemently opposed this. Morton-Jack contends that Hardinge objected on financial grounds,<sup>30</sup> which might have been the case, but the present writer thinks another reason the Viceroy objected to Haig's plan was that, if approved, it would remove front-line Indian Army units from New Delhi's control. This is plausible if we remember that the first Mesopotamian campaign, which ended in disaster and defeat at Kut in 1916, was under the Government of India's control.

In 1913, London asked New Delhi what forces it could send overseas in the event of war. Anglo-Indian authorities replied that the colony could despatch two infantry divisions and one cavalry brigade and that, in an emergency, an additional infantry division could be sent. However, when war was declared, India offered two infantry divisions and two cavalry brigades.<sup>31</sup> Initially, these forces were to be sent to Egypt, but Hardinge now contended that it would be a slur upon India's loyalty if Indian troops were not deployed in France, especially as France itself had deployed its own colonial troops to defend its soil.<sup>32</sup> That Hardinge prevailed was an indication of the critical manpower shortage the British Army faced in the opening months of the war. The composition of this 'Force A' was solidly martial race: Pathans, Sikhs, Jats, Punjabi Musalmans, Dogras, Garhwalis, Gurkhas, Rajputs and Mahrattas. The Indian Army was thus called upon to fulfil a heretofore unintended purpose: that of an Imperial strategic reserve, '...to meet contingencies as they arose.'<sup>33</sup>

#### BATTLE PERFORMANCE

Sepoys saw combat in the First and Second Battles of Ypres, Neuve Chapelle, Festubert, Givenchy and Loos. Two Indian infantry divisions, the Lahore and the Meerut, began arriving at the French port of Marseilles in late September and early October 1914, to cries of '*vivons les Hindous*'<sup>34</sup> from the local population. This first contingent was about 24,000-men strong.<sup>35</sup> Sepoy units accounted for 75 per cent of them, the rest being British units stationed in India. Commanding this Indian Corps was

General Sir James Willcocks, who, though not of the Indian service, had spent most of his career in India.

The Indians had arrived in 'the nick of time'. By late October, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was utterly spent, exhausted by continuous fighting along its entire sector. Seventy-five of its 84 battalions were now at a third of their established strength. It was barely hanging on, and the strategic town of Ypres lay tantalisingly open to the Germans. Sepoys were rushed into positions at Messines and Wytshaete on 22 October. It would have been better had the Indians been held back to form a fresh contingent, but according to a senior commander, '...the truth was it could not wait because it had to fill up gaps. We are now right up against the trenches, pushed in brigade by brigade...a few hundred men anywhere against us would turn the scale.'<sup>36</sup> The urgency of the situation is shown by the fact that the Indians were not given any time to acclimatise to western front conditions, unlike the 1st Canadian division, which was to train in England for six months.

Already, though, the war was forcing change. Witness the somewhat wistful comment of the naturally conservative British regimental historian of the 47th Sikhs, who wrote, '[o]nly a week before mobilization ...we had been rearmed with the short L.E. rifle, a fact which may be considered as the first of many breaches of orthodox military ideas that we were to encounter in the years of war before us.'<sup>37</sup> The 'orthodox military idea' to which he was referring was the Raj's military practice of keeping sepoy a generation behind pigmentally challenged troops in terms of rifles. This was done for 'security' reasons—the fear that Indians with advanced weapons that they knew how to use would inevitably rise up against the Raj—and also because it was assumed that sepoy would not have to face a first-class (that is, Western European) enemy. Thus, in 1914, they still had the obsolete Long Lee–Enfield or Lee–Metford rifles.<sup>38</sup> Now that they were to face the highly advanced German Army, and fight for Britain in Europe, all caution was thrown aside and sepoy were re-equipped with the Short Magazine Lee–Enfield (SMLE) .303. Perhaps it was thought that this was safe because the sepoy in France and Belgium were very far from a critical mass of any potential Indian 'mutineers' back home.

The Indian Corps area of responsibility (AoR) was a 13-mile sector of the British line, from La Cordonnerie farm, 3 miles east of Laventie, south-west through Neuve Chappelle to Richebourg-l'Avoué, and then almost due south to Givenchy and Cuichy, which were north and south

of the Aire-la Basée canal.<sup>39</sup> Béthune and Merville were the main towns in this sector, and there were numerous villages, such as Hinges, Festubert and Rouge Bancs.<sup>40</sup> The country was:

...flat and open, interspersed with small copses and villages, and was very low-lying and devoid of cover. The trenches occupied by...[the sepoy]...were either shallow ditches temporarily converted to fire trenches, or pits dug by individuals along hedgerows as they halted, and [were] in no way intended to be permanent.<sup>41</sup>

The ground, which was only 16 feet above sea level, was therefore impossible to drain. This resulted in the bottoms of the trenches being perpetually waterlogged, and the tops always crumbling in. Initially, there were no communication trenches, nor any barbed wire.<sup>42</sup>

Sepoys adapted quickly. Most were veterans of frontier fighting and regarded their rifles as extensions of themselves. The German shortage of artillery shells at 1st Ypres meant that sepoy riflemen could come into their own. According to a contemporary British observer, sepoy seemed not to mind 'dangerous' rifle fire, and a modern source contends that sepoy caused the majority of the 17, 250 small-arms casualties suffered by the German 4th Army in the period 30 October–3 November 1914.<sup>43</sup> At the end of November 1914, Haig assessed the Indians' hold over their 10-mile sector of the 'British' front as 'very strong' and was confident that they could hold it. Willcocks, who had commanded north-west frontier operations against the Zakka Khel in 1908,<sup>44</sup> had stressed that his sepoy were tactically flexible. He saw no reason why his sepoy could not employ their skills of 'savage warfare' to the western front, which he thought was an equally savage place. Willcocks encouraged the British officers of his sepoy units to spur their men to:

those constant enterprises and surprises in which the Indian troops do and must excel. Every ruse and device which the ingenuity of officers and men can bring into useful play should be employed to harass the enemy, disturb his rest, and inspire in him a wholesale respect for, and awe of, the Indian Corps.<sup>45</sup>

Pathan sepoy used their stalking ability, honed in their tribal regions, to steal German sniping rifles. Garhwali sepoy used their Himalayan skirmishing skills to great effect by innovating nocturnal raids on enemy trenches. One such raid, which went in at 3 am on 10 November 1914, proceeded as follows. About 100 men of the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 39th Garhwal Regiment traversed the 60-yard-wide stretch of no-

man's-land to the German trench undetected. A report states that they did this by creeping very low, but I suspect that their silence was due to the fact that they approached, not in their hobnailed boots, but in their stocking feet. Going barefoot over any sort of terrain is still rather common in the poorer rural parts of South Asia. The Garhwali sepoy then silently attacked the left flank of the German trench and captured 105 Germans, two machine guns and a trench mortar, which apparently was one of the first of that particular type to be captured by British forces. Its intelligence value was therefore significant. The silence of their attack, and the fact that they seem to have accomplished the raid with relatively little casualties,<sup>46</sup> leads to the conclusion that they cut not a few enemy throats with their knives.

Some sepoy showed great individual initiative and cunning. For example, in mid-November 1914, one Naik Jehandad, a Yusufzai Pathan of the 58th Rifles, became separated from his raiding party on a misty night. After blundering about for some time, he was challenged in German and found that he was within a few yards of an enemy saphead. Thinking quickly, he shouted out 'Musalman', and by gesticulating, made it clear that he was a deserter and wanted to give himself up. He was then taken along a series of communication trenches to the battalion headquarters. Here, he somehow made it known to the German officers that more of his compatriots wanted to desert and that he had come to arrange this. This evidently impressed the Germans and the following night, Jehandad was taken back to the same saphead whence he had come, with the understanding that he would return with his deserting companions. Instead he returned to his unit, where he was able to give valuable intelligence on the layout and locations of the German communication trenches and their battalion headquarters.<sup>47</sup> As a result of similar, and other, exploits, captured German letters and diaries showed that the Kaiser's forces had a healthy respect for the sepoy.

Improvisation in the Indian Corps was not only tactical, it was technological as well. A good example of this was the Batty bomb, a grenade so called after its inventor, Captain Basil Batty, who commanded the 21st Field Company, Bombay Sappers and Miners. It comprised a cylindrical container, segmented for fragmentation, filled with high explosive (originally guncotton but later, ammonal) and sealed with a wooden plug and wax with a fuse. The fuse was lit by a Nobel safety device inserted when it was to be used. Over 250,000 Batty bombs were

manufactured at an iron foundry located at Béthune. They were later superseded by the Mills bomb.<sup>48</sup>

Several issues have been often brought up by detractors of the corps' battlefield performance. One has been the incidence of self-inflicted wounds amongst sepoys, a sure sign of their 'cowardice'. While it is true that 57 per cent of the sepoys admitted to hospital from 22 October to 3 November 1914 had handwounds, one source contends that this does not tell us much because we are not told the causes of the handwounds. However, so widespread was the belief at the time that a comprehensive secret report was written about it by the commander of the Kitchener Indian Hospital in Brighton, Colonel Sir Bruce Seton, Indian Medical Service (IMS). The Kitchener Indian Hospital, Brighton, was one of seven hospitals for wounded sepoys established on the English south coast. Seton compiled the report after carefully examining 1,000 cases of sepoy wounds and injuries received in combat, looking all the while for specific evidence of self-inflicted wounds. Seton's assiduous analysis recorded the nature of the wound, its cause, its location on the body, as well as the cause of the wound—such as trench collapses or gas attacks—when known. He concluded that of the 1,000 wounds he had examined, only six or 0.06 per cent could be classified as self-inflicted. Seton therefore wrote that:

...there is no evidence of self-infliction of wounds which could be supported by statistical examination. That there is an extraordinarily well-marked preponderance of wounds of the hand in certain classes of fighting is certain. The figures given show that the normal percentage among the survivors of an action is 28 [per cent]; but, in the case of the most distinguished [Indian Army] regiment, the percentage rose to 46 [per cent] when fighting in the open, and when there could have been no question of self-infliction. That being so, it would appear to be fairer to the Indian Army to seek some other explanation, before suggesting, as is very commonly done, that there is strong suspicion attaching to any individual with a wound in his hand, especially in a left hand.<sup>49</sup>

A possible reason for wounds of the left hand amongst sepoys is provided by Frederic Coleman, an American living in the United Kingdom (UK) who volunteered himself and his car to chauffeur staff officers at the front. During 1st Messines, he noticed that quite a few sepoys of 57th Wilde's Rifles had wounds to their left hands and/or arms. When he mentioned this to a British officer of the unit, he was told that '...this was due to the peculiar way the Indians shield their head with

the left arm when firing'.<sup>50</sup> However, this does not fully explain the sheer number of the wounds. If firing their SMLEs in a particular way resulted in wounds to themselves, why didn't the sepoy modify their firing drill? In short, the evidence on sepoy self-harm seems inconclusive and needs further research. It would be useful in this connection to determine if the sepoy thus wounded were newly arrived, or had some experience of western front conditions, or whether their left-hand wounds had anything to do with the characteristics of their new SMLEs. Another possible explanation for the large number of handwounds that counters the self-harm myth comes to us from a World War I vintage postcard, which depicts turbaned sepoy, their left arms and hands swathed in bandages, being attended to by a British 'tommy'. The caption on this postcard reads: "Tommy" adjusts the bandage. The wounds in the left hand of our gallant Indian soldiers are largely due to the fearless manner in which they grab the bayonets of their opponents.<sup>51</sup>

Another critique of the sepoy performance contends that, being from South Asia, they were unused to the cold, damp and snowy winters of continental Europe. This is based on the erroneous Western belief, which is still being perpetuated, that South Asia is uniformly hot. Unfortunately, this belief began quite early and was instigated by people like Lord Curzon who, perhaps to magnify the great efforts the sepoy on the western front made, wrote of 'the sharp severity of a northern winter'<sup>52</sup> that they faced there. Curzon should have known better for he had been Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905 and, presumably, had experienced a north Indian winter. As anyone who has visited Delhi or other parts of northern India, or Pakistan or Nepal, in the months of November–February will tell you that it can get pretty cold there, with daylight temperatures hovering around 10–18° Celsius and dipping down to 0–5° Celsius at night. Added to this, village dwellings were constructed not from wood, but from mud and stone, which are not very good for heat retention. So, for the north Indian sepoy, who had often fought in sub-zero conditions in frontier campaign and in the Boxer rebellion in northern China in 1900, the cold of the western front was not that much of a shock. Indeed, one Lieutenant Alan Brooke, an artillery officer who rose to be Chief of Imperial General Staff under Churchill in World War II, wrote to his mother in October 1914 that the Punjabi Muslim sepoy driving the artillery columns were withstanding the cold as 'cheery as sandpipers'.<sup>53</sup>

Sepoy also used their common sense, wearing oversized boots, which enabled them to insulate their feet with an extra pair or pairs of socks.

Indeed, Willcocks had ordered every sepoy to wear two pairs of socks and keep a third as spare. That he was able to do this was because a London charitable organisation, called the Indian Soldiers' Fund, had sent the sepoy 78,000 pairs of wool socks and so much clothing that some sepoy sent some of it back to their kinfolk in India. Sepoy thus suffered from far less cases of frostbite than their pigmentally challenged British compatriots. This accounted for the assessment by a British War Office health inspector that, in late November 1914, the BEF sickness rate was five times that of the IEFA.<sup>54</sup>

An army marches on its stomach, and the IEFA in France was no exception. Here, the religious sensibilities of the sepoy came into play. The British knew that they had to heed and respect these if they wanted optimal performance from their sepoy. In May 1915, a sepoy wrote to his relatives back in the Punjab that the food arrangements for Indians on the western front were 'very good'. He elaborated that sepoy were provided with ghee (clarified butter), sugar, milk and meat, and other commodities as well, such as salt, pepper, oil and tobacco. Because sepoy abhorred beef and pork, authorities arranged for thousands of goats to be brought from Corsica and distributed to the sepoy for slaughter, according to their own strict religious codes. *Atta* (flour) and dhal (lentils) were specially imported from India. Sepoy also received over 3,000 food packages from India. Clearly, the authorities wanted to placate the sepoy, but why? The answer was that authorities were worried that wholesale complaints would lead to insubordination and mutiny at a time when every able body was needed for the fight. Such was the concern that, in late 1914, a senior Government of India bureaucrat, Sir Walter Lawrence, was appointed to monitor and care for the needs of the sepoy of IEFA.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the Indians' sterling service on the western front, some racism in the British attitude towards them reared its ugly head. One modern source states that the regimental history of a British Army unit, which was nowhere near the fighting Indians at 1st Ypres, nevertheless describes them as refusing to fight.<sup>56</sup> This scurrilous fabrication, unfortunately, snowballed. The Indian Corps also seemed to be ideal for the tendency, unfortunately common in most large organisations, including militaries, to find scapegoats. An Indian nobleman attached to the staff of IEFA wrote:

There is no doubt [that]...a great trouble under which we have laboured is that whenever we fail in the slightest degree anywhere people raise a hue and cry whereas if the British fail under the same

conditions, no one mentions it...The Indian troops had done very well all along but when we did the reverse at Givenchy and Festubert there was a hue and cry...Plainly, the thing is that if there is a success it is due to the British element, but if there is a reverse...it is all put down to the Indian troops.<sup>57</sup>

Although some scholars have sought to emphasise the issue of desertion among Indian troops, either as evidence of their deficiency or as proof of some 'subaltern resistance' by the sepoy towards their British overlords,<sup>58</sup> desertion was, in fact, rare among Indian troops. German efforts to suborn the loyalty of sepoy consisted mainly of the dropping of Hindi-language leaflets from the air. These leaflets encouraged sepoy to mutiny, and some specifically targeted Muslim sepoy, promising those who joined the Germans a chance to join a jihad against the Allies.<sup>59</sup>

The largest instances of desertion occurred in March 1915, when 22 sepoy defected, and in October 1915, which involved 14 sepoy. The sepoy involved were Afridis and Pashtuns from the tribal areas of the north-west frontier which the Raj never managed to completely control. Thus, they were deemed not the staunchest in terms of loyalty to the sarkar. Investigation of these instances by British seemed to suggest that the sepoy involved were not particularly motivated by nationalism or hatred of the British, but rather by war weariness, extreme stress and homesickness—'a short cut', in the words of one official, 'to India and home'.<sup>60</sup> Desertion, which one scholar has characterised as a 'high risk method of self-help',<sup>61</sup> definitely was a hazardous choice. Deserting sepoy could be mistaken by the Germans for raiding parties. This happened on a particularly dark night in November 1914. The Germans opened fire on the Indians, killing all; only daylight revealed that every sepoy they had killed was unarmed.<sup>62</sup>

#### SEPOY EXPERIENCES

What did sepoy, an overwhelming majority of whom were illiterate men from peasant backgrounds, think of their time in Europe? British censor reports of letters that sepoy dictated to scribes and sent to India provide some indication.<sup>63</sup> In this section, selections from these letters will be presented verbatim, to lend immediacy to their voices.

First of all, sepoy, like their European compatriots, were horrified by the industrial meatgrinder that was trench warfare. 'It is very hard', wrote a sepoy of the 39th Garhwalis:

to endure the bombs...It will be difficult for anyone to survive and come back safe and sound from the war...The bullets and cannon-balls come down like snow. The distance between us and the enemy is fifty paces. The mud is up to a man's middle. Since I have been here, the enemy has remained in his trenches and we in ours. Neither side has advanced at all. The Germans are very cunning.<sup>64</sup>

A wounded sepoy told his relative in India, 'Do not think that this is war. This is not war. It is the ending of the world.'<sup>65</sup> Another despaired: 'The battle is beginning and men are dying like maggots. No one can count them—not in thousands but in hundreds of thousands. No one can count them.'<sup>66</sup>

Some sepoys from southern India keenly felt the cold of France and Belgium. A Tamil sepoy wrote:

The war is a calamity on three worlds and has caused me to cross seas and live here. The cold is so great that it cannot be described. Snow falls day and night and covers the ground to a depth of two feet. We have not seen the sun for four months. Thus we are sacrificed. I have neither sleep by night or ease by day. In the world there could have never been such a war before, nor will there be again. It is sad that God who has so much power...should have brought such a day to pass. He has given...[the Germans] such a spirit that it cannot be described...And he has given them such skill that, when we encounter their deceitful bayonets, they set light to some substance which causes a suffocating vapour, and then they attack.<sup>67</sup>

There was also a tendency among Indian troops to lionise their German adversaries. This was clearly a ploy to emphasise the Indians' own difficulties:

The German is very strong. His ships sail the clouds and drop shells from the sky; his mines dig the earth, and his hidden craft strike below the sea. Bombs and blinding acid are thrown from his trenches, which are only 100 or 50 yards from ours. He has countless machine guns, which kill the whole firing line when in attack. When he attacks we kill his men. The dead lie in heaps...No man can return to the Punjab whole. Only the broken limbed can go back. The regiments that came first are finished—here and there a man remains. Reinforcements have twice and three times brought them up to strength, but straightaway, they were used up.<sup>68</sup>

A wounded sepoy wrote this from one of the Indian hospitals in

England. Commenting on the terrific and terrible attrition of the trench warfare:

The battle is being carried on very bitterly. In the Lahore Division, only 300 men are left. Some are dead, some wounded. The division is finished. Think of it—in taking fifty yards of a German trench 50,000 men are killed. When we attack, they direct a terrific fire on us—thousands of men die daily. It looks as if not a single man can remain alive on either side—then, when none is left, there will be peace. When the Germans attack they are killed in the same way. For us men it is a bad state of affairs here...[T]hose who return from the battlefield...are slightly wounded. No one is carried off. Even Sahibs are not lifted away. The battlefield resounds with cries.<sup>69</sup>

The same sepoy wrote this warning:

So far as [it] is in your power, do not come here. If you come, get yourself written down [as] ill of something in Marseilles, and say you are weak. You will do better to get the Doctor to write down the [the] sickness you have [is] in the head. Sick men do not come to the war...Do not be anxious about me.<sup>70</sup>

Some educated Indians of IEFA commented about European social conditions as well. Witness this letter by a sub-assistant surgeon:

When one considers this country and these people in comparison with our own country and our own people one cannot but be distressed. Our country is very poor and feeble and its lot is very depressed. Our people copy the faults of the British nation and leave the good qualities alone. We shall never advance ourselves merely by wearing trousers and smoking cigarettes and drinking wine. In fact, they have a real moral superiority. They are energetic. We are poor and hunger for ease. They limit their leisure, do their work justly and do it well. They do not follow their own inclinations, but obey their superior officers and masters. They avoid idle chatter. They delight in cleanliness...As for shopkeepers, everything has a fixed price.<sup>71</sup>

One of the most significant features that sepoys' letters dwelt upon was the status and position of women in France, which they contrasted with the situation in their Indian homeland. Sepoys were struck not only by the beauty of French women,<sup>72</sup> but by their independence and self-sufficiency. One Sikh cavalryman wrote to his grandfather in the Punjab:

I know well that a woman in our country is of no more value than a pair of shoes and this is the reason why the people of India are

so low in the scale. When I look at Europe, I bewail the lot India. In Europe, everyone—man and woman, boy and girl—is educated. The men are at the war and the women are doing the work... You ought to educate your girls as well as your boys.<sup>73</sup>

Another wrote the following to his wife: 'It is very wrong of you to work yourself into a state of illness through high anxiety for me. Just look at the people here. The women have their husbands killed, and yet they go on working just as hard as ever.'<sup>74</sup>

Indians who were evacuated to one of the seven hospitals in southern England that had been specially created for them<sup>75</sup> were generally impressed:

We are very well looked after. White soldiers are always beside our beds—day and night. We get very good food four times a day. We also get milk. Every man is washed once in hot water... Men in hospital are tended like flowers, and the king and queen sometimes come to visit them.<sup>76</sup>

At the Lady Hardinge Hospital at Brockenhurst in England:

There were about 1000 patients, all quite happy; and seeing the arrangements there, I think every one of them must be thanking God for having a bullet in their body. There were phonographs and pianos playing everywhere, fruits supplied in large amounts... and every possible comfort. The patients have become fat and plump.<sup>77</sup>

However, some sepoys chafed at the restriction British authorities placed upon them while convalescing.<sup>78</sup>

There was some official anxiety over the nursing arrangements for sepoys. It 'wouldn't do' to have European or English female nurses caring for sepoys, for fear that the latter might be tempted to have sexual relations with the former. Therefore, most of the staff of the Indian hospitals were men. Physicians were Britons who had served in India and knew Urdu or Hindi. Sub-assistant surgeons were Eurasian, and *dhobis* (laundrymen), sweepers and clerks were Indian. However, some white female nurses were present in supervisory roles.<sup>79</sup>

There were some sexual relations between sepoys and Frenchwomen. Sepoys almost certainly frequented prostitutes, though we do not know if, and at what rate, they came down with venereal diseases. An Indian cavalry unit which had been billeted in one area and then was transferred, began to receive imploring letters from Frenchwomen from that area with

whom sepoy had formed relationships.<sup>80</sup> There is also some indication that sepoy relished the idea of contact with European women and brandished this as a status symbol: for example, one Waziri sepoy boasted to his friend back home that he would come back from Europe with a 'lovely fine girl' for him to marry who would surpass any that could be found amongst his native Mahsud tribe.<sup>81</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The IEFA was transferred out of the western front in December 1915. Its force levels had been depleted and Indian recruitment, which was still adhoc,<sup>82</sup> could not keep up. Its sepoy were also becoming increasingly weary of the fighting, which seemed to have no end in sight. As Sir Walter Lawrence observed in June 1915:

The hundreds of sepoy's letters which I have read show that sepoy serving in Europe are genuinely anxious to get back home to look after their affairs. Their enemies in the village are trying to seize their land; they have trouble about their debts; they are anxious to look after marriages and other domestic details which form so important a part of the life of an Indian.<sup>83</sup>

Sepoy were also needed elsewhere, most particularly against the Turks in Mesopotamia. Finally, the arrival at the front of Kitchener's New Armies and Canadian troops meant that the reinforcement need was not as desperate as it had been when the Indians first arrived.

Sepoy had faced up well to the western front. Here, they faced a dual shock: that of modern, industrial war, dominated by barbed wire, deafening artillery, machine guns and static trench warfare, a world away from the campaigns on the north-west frontier which they had trained for and waged until then—here, it must be said that European troops faced this shock too; and that of being in a very unfamiliar land, many thousands of miles from their north Indian homes, where they did not know the language—French—and found the local dress and customs strange indeed. Their experience of culture shock can be likened to the experience of Western troops in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq in the mid-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and of Indian Army units with the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka in the late 1980s.<sup>84</sup> One important differentiating factor was that the Indians in France faced organised armies, as opposed to the popular insurgencies of the later wars mentioned. Yet, while it is perhaps an overstatement that the Indian

Corps 'saved' the BEF all by itself, it is nevertheless not overstating things to say that '...it was a vital link in the chain of reinforcements without which the BEF, and the Allies, would have suffered a disastrous defeat.'<sup>85</sup>

#### NOTES

1. The title quote is from General Sir James Willcocks, 'The Indian Army Corps in France', *Blackwood's Magazine*, MCCXXI, 1917, p. 8. An earlier version of this article was presented at the 2015 conference of the Western Front Association, Pacific Coast Branch, Victoria BC, 7 March 2015. I would like to thank John Azar for kindly offering me this opportunity. Thanks also to Roger Buckley, Ashok Nath and Raymond Callahan for their support and friendship. This article is dedicated to the memory of Professor DeWitt C. Ellinwood.
2. G. Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches: The Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914–1915*, Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1999, p. xvi. A more recent work is by George Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front: India's Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium in the First World War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
3. See <http://geographicalimagination.com/2014/07/25/all-white-on-the-western-front/>, accessed on 2 December 2014. This blog is the work of Dr David Gregory, who teaches at the University of British Columbia.
4. See, for example, Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014; and Santanu Das, 'Indians at Home, Mesopotamia, and France, 1914–1918', in Santanu Das (ed.), *Race, Empire, and First World War Writing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 70–89. Both are poor, being full of post-colonial theories, and are relatively devoid of cogent argument based on sustained research and contextual knowledge of the military history of the Raj. See the present author's review of Singh's book in the *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 78, No. 3, July 2014, pp. 1151–54.
5. The role of colonial India and its army in World War I has been largely overlooked by both South Asianist historians and military historians. To date, there is only one collected volume of essays that treats the topic as an integrated whole, and that was published as far back as the 1970s. See DeWitt Ellinwood and S.D. Pradhan (eds), *India and World War I*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1978. Thus, the assertion of the South Asianist economic historian, Claude Markovits, that colonial India '...figures prominently in recent general histories...' of World War I is not supported by the extant evidence. In the only general history he cites, Hew Strachan's *The First World War, Vol. 1: To Arms*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 'India' is mentioned on only 20 pages or about 0.02 per cent of its 1,000-

- plus pages. See Claude Markovits, 'Making Sense of the War (India)', in *1914–1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel *et al.*, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10465. Last modified: 2014-10-05. In a similar vein is Andrew Wiest, *The Illustrated History of World War I*, London: Amber, 2001, pp. 76, 40, which, while mentioning the Indian Corps' role at Aubers Ridge, makes absolutely no mention of its important role at 1st Ypres.
6. Present author's conversation with Brigadier Gautam Moorthy, Secretary, NDC, New Delhi, 5 November 2008.
  7. A further 60,000 Indians on the western front performed support and non-combatant functions. Total Indian Corps casualties on the western front came to 33,116 men. See S. Doherty and T. Donovan, *The Indian Corps on the Western Front: A Handbook and Battlefield Guide*, Brighton and New Delhi: Tom Donovan Editions and Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research, United Service Institution of India, 2014, p. 46.
  8. J. Greenhut, 'The Imperial Reserve: The Indian Infantry on the Western Front, 1914–1915', Unpublished PhD dissertation, Kansas State University, 1978; and J. Greenhut, 'The Imperial Reserve: The Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914–15', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1983, pp. 54–73.
  9. See P.K. Gautam, 'The Need for [a] Renaissance of Military History and Modern War Studies in India', Occasional Paper No. 21, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2011.
  10. Useful brief outlines are: Government of India, *The Army in India and its Evolution*, Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1924; and Daniel P. Marston and Chandar S. Sundaram (eds), *A Military History of India and South Asia from the East India Company to the Nuclear Era*, Westport and London: Praeger, 2007, chapters 1–9.
  11. S.D. Pradhan, 'The Indian Army and the First World War', in Ellinwood and Pradhan, *India and World War I*, n. 5, p. 55.
  12. Though Salisbury was Prime Minister in 1885–86 and 1886–92, he uttered these words while occupying the office of Secretary of State for India, 1874–78.
  13. K. Jeffery, "'An English Barrack in the Oriental Seas'? India in the Aftermath of the First World War', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 1981, p. 369. See also A. Harfield, *The Indian Army of the Empress, 1861–1903*, Tunbridge Wells: Spellmount, 1990.
  14. This was one of the chief complaints of some of the early Indian nationalists, such as Dadabhai Naoroji (1825–1917), and Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848–1909). See J.R. McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.

15. Herbert Horatio, Earl Kitchener of Kharthoum (1850–1916), C-in-C India, 1902–1909.
16. V. Longer, *Red Coats to Olive Green: A History of the Indian Army, 1600–1974*, Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1974, p. 135; I.G. Leask, ‘The Expansion of the Indian Army in the Great War’, Unpublished MPhil thesis, University of London, 1989, p. 36.
17. G.F. MacMunn and A.C. Lovett, *The Armies of India*, London: Adam and Charles Black, 1911, p. 129.
18. Ashok Nath, ‘Martial Race Theory in the South Asian Context’, *Durbar: Journal of the Indian Military Historical Society, Militarhistorisk Tidskrift* (military history journal of the Swedish National Defence College), 2007, pp. 31–41.
19. According to Anglo-Indian ideologues, once Indians became literate, they were susceptible to ‘infection’ by the ideas of British political liberalism, such as ‘democracy’, ‘freedom’ and ‘rights’. See Valentine Chirol, *Indian Unrest*, London: Macmillan, 1910; and G.F. MacMunn, *Turmoil & Tragedy in India 1914 and After*, London: Jarrolds, 1935.
20. C.S. Sundaram, “‘Treated with Scant Attention’: The Imperial Cadet Corps, Indian Nobles, and Anglo-Indian Policy, 1897–1917”, *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 77, No. 1, January 2013, p. 47; D.M. Peers, ‘The Martial Races and the Indian Army in the Victorian Era’, in Marston and Sundaram, *A Military History of India and South Asia from the East India Company to the Nuclear Era*, n. 10, pp. 34–52; and H. Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, *passim*.
21. For a fascinating investigation of the origin of the term VCO, see Rana Chhina and Tony McClenaghan, ‘The VCO: Origin and Development’, *Durbar: Journal of the Indian Military Historical Society*, Vol. 28, No. 3, Autumn 2011, pp. 134–42. However, this article does not conclusively answer when the VCO rank designation originated. Therefore, more research is needed.
22. Harfield, *The Indian Army of the Empress*, n. 13, p. 6; Sundaram, “‘Treated with Scant Attention’”, n. 20, p. 47; M.H. Jacobsen, ‘The Modernization of the Indian Army, 1925–1939’, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of California, Irvine, 1979, pp. 11–12.
23. Leask, ‘The Expansion of the Indian Army in the Great War’, n. 16, p. 78.
24. D. Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860–1940*, Houndmills: Macmillan, 1994, p. 21.
25. Leask, ‘The Expansion of the Indian Army in the Great War’, n. 16, p. 78.
26. Pradhan, ‘The Indian Army and the First World War’, n. 11, p. 52.
27. A.J. Barker, *The First Iraq War, 1914–1918: Britain’s Mesopotamian*

- Campaign*, New York: Enigma Books, 2009, pp. 388–89 (first published in 1967 under the titles: *The Bastard War* [US] and *The Neglected War* [UK]). I thank Professor Raymond Callahan for this reference.
28. F.J. Moberly, *The History of the Great War based on Official Documents: The Campaign in Mesopotamia, 1914–1918, Vol. I*, London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1923, pp. 57–58.
  29. Ibid.
  30. George Morton-Jack, 'The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914–1915: A Portrait of Collaboration', *War in History*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2006, p. 334.
  31. Government of India, *India's Contribution to the Great War*, Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1923, pp. 72–74.
  32. B.C. Busch, *Hardinge of Penhurst: A Study in the Old Diplomacy*, South Bend: Archon Books, 1980, p.226.
  33. F.W. Perry, *The Commonwealth Armies: Manpower and Organisation in Two World Wars*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988, p. 87.
  34. 'Long Live the Hindus' in French. See Mulk Raj Anand, *Across the Black Waters*, Delhi: Orient Paperbacks, 2008 (originally published in 1940), p. 13. In the ones and teens of the last century in the West, 'Hindus' seems to have been blanket term for all South Asians. For instance, the early South Asian immigrants to British Columbia, on the Canadian west coast, although overwhelmingly Sikh, were referred to as 'Hindoos' in local newspapers. See Ali Kazimi, *Undesirables: White Canada and the Komagata Maru*, Vancouver: Douglas and MacIntyre, 2012.
  35. J.W.B. Merewether and F.E. Smith, *The Indian Corps in France*, London: John Murray, 1917, p. xi.
  36. Morton-Jack, 'The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914–1915: A Portrait of Collaboration', n. 29, p. 339.
  37. Doherty and Donovan, *The Indian Corps on the Western Front: A Handbook and Battlefield Guide*, n. 7, p. 25.
  38. For a description and visual representation of these weapons, see The Diagram Group; D. Harding (ed.), *Weapons: An International Encyclopedia from 5000 BC to 2000 AD* (updated edition), New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990, p. 138.
  39. Merewether and Smith, *The Indian Corps in France*, n. 34, p. 37.
  40. Ibid., 'General Map of the Country from the Sea to La Basée Canal', n.p., but between pp. 42–43.
  41. Earl Stanhope, *The War Memoirs of Earl Stanhope*, edited by B. Bond, Brighton: Tom Donovan Editions, 2006, p. 16
  42. J. Willcocks, *The Romance of Soldiering and Sport*, London: Cassell, 1925, p. 280.

43. Morton-Jack, 'The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914–1915: A Portrait of Collaboration', n. 29, p. 339.
44. T.R. Moreman, *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare, 1849–1947*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998, p. 92.
45. Morton-Jack, 'The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914–1915: A Portrait of Collaboration', n. 29, p. 342.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 343.
47. Doherty and Donovan, *The Indian Corps on the Western Front: A Handbook and Battlefield Guide*, n. 7, p. 45.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 27–28. The shaded text box on p.28 of this book contains more details on Battye, who seems to have led an interesting life.
49. Colonel B. Seton, IMS, 'An Analysis of 1,000 Wounds and Injuries Received in Action, with Special Reference to the Theory of Self-infliction [Secret Report, not for publication]', L/Mil/17/5/2401, British Library: Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections (BLAPAC), para. 78,
50. Frederic Coleman, *From Mons to Ypres with French: A Personal Narrative*, London: Sampson Low, 1916, p. 236.
51. Available at <http://www.worldwar1postcards.com/real-photographic-ww1-postcards.php>, accessed on 9 March 2015. I wish to thank Ms Sherri Robinson, a volunteer archivist for the Township of Esquimalt BC, for this valuable source.
52. Merewether and Smith, *The Indian Corps in France*, n. 34, p. xi.
53. Morton-Jack, 'The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914–1915: A Portrait of Collaboration', n. 29, p. 351.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 356, 341.
56. Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches*, n. 2, p. xi.
57. Amar Singh Diary, 6 April 1915, quoted in DeWitt C. Ellinwood, *Between Two Worlds: A Rajput Officer in the Indian Army, 1905–21, Based on the Diary of Amar Singh of Jaipur*, Lanham: Hamilton Books, 2005, pp. 388–92.
58. See Greenhut's thesis and article, n. 8; and Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars*, n. 4, *passim*. In the historiography of colonial South Asia, the term 'subaltern' denotes a branch of social history that has adopted the theoretical stance of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). According to Gramsci, there was a constant struggle within society between downtrodden and marginalised 'subaltern classes' and the 'hegemon' of repressive state power. Subaltern historians of South Asia have thus focused on peasant and subordinate group resistance to colonial rule. See Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies, Vols I–VII*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982–1994. As David Omissi has pointed out, Guha and

- his group have focused almost wholly on peasant resistance to the Raj, but not on Indians that sided with it, like those who served in the Indian Army. See Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, n. 24, pp. xix, 113–52.
59. Morton-Jack, 'The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914–1915: A Portrait of Collaboration', n. 29, p. 354.
  60. A.T. Jarboe, 'Soldiers of Empire: Indian Troops in and beyond the Imperial Metropole during the First World War, 1914–1919', Unpublished PhD thesis, Northeastern University, 2013, p. 126.
  61. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
  62. *Ibid.*
  63. See the 'Introduction', in David Omissi (ed.), *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914–1918*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999, pp. 1–22, *passim.*, for a useful discussion of the problems in using these 'mediated testimonies'. Claude Markovits' contribution in this regard seems overly arcane and adds little to our understanding. See Claude Markovits, 'Indian Soldier's Experiences in France during World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front', in Heike Liebau, Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Dyala Hamza and Ravi Ahuja (eds), *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010.
  64. Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, n. 62, pp. 27–28.
  65. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
  66. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
  67. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
  68. *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.
  69. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
  70. *Ibid.*
  71. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
  72. Most probably, they would have commented on the fair skin of the French women, because fairness was, and still is, a desired feminine attribute in South Asia. One only has to glance at the matrimonial ads in Indian and, I suspect, Pakistani and Bangladeshi newspapers to notice this.
  73. Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, n. 62, pp. 257–58.
  74. *Ibid.*, p. 276.
  75. During the Indian Corps' deployment on the western front, over 14,000 sepoys were treated at these hospitals. For details of these, see David Omissi, 'Europe in Indian Eyes: Indian Soldiers Encounter England and France, 1914–1918', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 122, No. 496, 2007, pp. 376–77, and S. Hyson and A. Lester, "British India on Trial": Brighton

- Military Hospitals and the Politics of Empire in World War I, *Journal of Historical Geography*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2012, pp. 18–34.
76. Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, n. 62, p. 59.
77. Omissi, 'Europe in Indian Eyes', n. 74, p. 378.
78. Hyson and Lester, "British India on Trial", n. 74, p. 26.
79. Omissi, 'Europe in Indian Eyes', n. 74, p. 379.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 388.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 380.
82. See Chandar S. Sundaram, 'An English Barrack?: Indian Military Recruitment, Planning, and Deployment in the Great War, 1914–1918', in Alan Jeffreys (ed.), *The Indian Army in the First World War*, Solihull, UK: Helion [forthcoming, 2016].
83. 'Demi-Official Letter: Lawrence to Kitchener, 15 June 1915', in *Papers of Sir Walter Roper Lawrence*, Mss. Eur. F.143/65, BLAPAC.
84. See, for example, Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1977; and Anthony Swofford, *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles*, New York: Pocket Books, 2003. For the IPKF specifically, see Chandar S. Sundaram, 'Sri Lanka: Indian Peacekeeping Force, IPKF, 1987–90', in S. Nambiar, C.S. Sundaram and R.T.S. Chhina, *For the Honour of India: A History of Indian Peacekeeping*, New Delhi: Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research, United Service Institution of India, 2009, chapter 19.
85. Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front: India's Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium in the First World War*, n. 2, p. 148.