



WORLD WAR I

POSSIBLE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What role did colonial forces play in World War I? Where and how were they involved?
- What were the impacts of the African Front on the nations of Africa?
- What were the impacts of the participation of troops from the colonies in World War I on the Colonial System?

BACKGROUND

While the bulk of World War I was fought in the trenches of Europe and the largest proportion of lives lost were those of the soldiers and civilians of Europe, World War I was truly a global war. It was fought not just in Europe, but in Africa, the Middle East, and East Asia by soldiers that hailed not just from Europe and America, but from East and West Africa, India, Australia and New Zealand, and more. The war was bracketed by engagements in Africa. The first shots by the British were fired in the Anglo-French invasion of Togo, a German Colony. The last

Germans to surrender did so two weeks after the European Armistice in what today is Zambia. Indian troops experienced tremendous losses at the first battle of Ypres in 1914. The losses experienced by the Australian and New Zealand troops (ANZAC) and Irish troops at Gallipoli were shocking to all three of those nations. Millions of troops from the colonies fought in the war and hundreds of thousands were killed and injured. The role of those troops is often overlooked though. If you look at the casualty table published by PBS, the losses experienced by the colonies are not listed - they are folded into the totals for the British Empire and Germany (http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath_pop.html).

The losses suffered by the colonial forces were not limited to soldiers. The engagement between the British and Germans in East Africa pitted a force of 150,000 on the British side against 25,000 troops on the German side. At least four times as many porters and bearers supported both sides, of whom at least 300,000 killed in the fighting. On top of this hundreds of villages were plundered and destroyed. The disruptions caused by the conscription and deployment of African troops to Europe was amplified by the violence and destruction caused by engagement on the African Front.

The colonies were a source of tremendous wealth for the Imperial Powers of Europe. Control over colonies was a matter both of the economic interest and a matter of nationalist pride. Many of the tensions that existed between the nations of Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were a result of struggles over colonial possessions. Colonies were not willing participants in this system. Europe used military force alongside a host of other administrative techniques to keep their colonies subjugated. World War I saw the use of troops of subjugated colonies to maintain the very system that kept them subjugated. The experience of colonial troops in the war led to increases in demands for independence across the colonial system. The War thus served to destabilize the colonial system in the long term.

RESOURCES

Personal Stories

- [First World War: Memories of the Last Survivors \(The Guardian\)](#)
- [Excerpt from letter from Ram Sing to his father Subadar Madhun Sing \(BBC\)](#)

Articles

- [WWI \(British Library\)](#)
- [How the Great War razed East Africa \(Africa Research Institute\)](#)
- [Recruitment in Africa \(BBC\)](#)
- [The Forgotten African Battlefields \(CNN\)](#)
- [First World War 1914-18 \(Australian War Memorial\)](#)
- [Western Front \(International Encyclopedia of the First World War\)](#)
- [Gavril Princip: Hero or villain? \(The Guardian\)](#)
- [India and the Western Front \(BBC\)](#)
- [The Indian Sepoy in the First World War \(British Library\)](#)
- [World War I \(South African History Online\)](#)
- [Charles Bean: The Man Who Told the Truth About World War I \(The Sydney Morning Herald\)](#)

Data

- [Timeline \(1914-1921\) \(Library of Congress\)](#)
- [Casualties of World War I \(Facing History & Ourselves\)](#)
- [A Global Guide to the First World War \(The Guardian\)](#)
- [First World War: Global View \(National Archives\)](#)

Videos

- [Crucial Battle for Togo \(BBC\)](#)

Podcasts

- [The Middle East and the West: WWI and Beyond \(NPR\)](#)
- [WWI Podcasts \(BBC\)](#)

Art & Images

- [Germania by Friedrich von Kaulbach \(Wikipedia Commons\)](#)
- [The Forgotten African Battlefields \(CNN\)](#)
- [The Firing Lin in Shrapnel Gully on Gallipoli \(Nat Lib\)](#)
- [Soldiers in Front of the Sphinx \(Getty Images\)](#)
- [Tunisians Joining Army \(Getty Images\)](#)
- [Experiences of Colonial Troops \(British Library\)](#)
- [Germans burn Belgian town of Louvain \(British Library\)](#)
- [Unnamed Diggers of Perth, Australia \(ABC News\)](#)

Poetry/Prose

- [WWI Poetry \(Fordham\)](#)
- [WWI Poetry \(The Week\)](#)
- [War Girls \(Jessie Pope\)](#)