

Stories of Omission:

Conflict and the experience of Black soldiers



FRANCE



THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Stories of Omission:

Conflict and the experience of Black soldiers

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” There is still a long way to go in rectifying an omission that the modern progressive mind would not dignify by maintaining.

(Costello, 2015)

“

LOCATION UNKNOWN

➡ The Imperial War Museum's collections offer evidence of the participation of Black soldiers in the Great War. But often little is known about where or when a photograph was taken, like this one. Missing information invites us to look more closely for clues to fill in the gaps. For example, what regimental uniform are they wearing?

Colonial Office Collection.
© IWM Q52462



Introduction

Produced during his commission by the Imperial War Museum's Art Commissions Committee as an official UK war artist, Steve McQueen's *Queen and Country* was a visual stimulus at the start of the *Stories of Omission* project. Sheets of postage stamps commemorate each soldier who was killed during the Iraq War from 2003-2008: the everyday object was used to remember an unspeakable tragedy and the ultimate sacrifice a serviceman or woman can make. Not without controversy, the stamps were refused for general use by the Post Office. Many of the faces represented belong to Black soldiers, something that today we would not question, but the treatment of Black soldiers during the First World War cannot be said to be the same – frequently ignored, omitted from news reports, their role denied, a lack of acknowledgement and recognition is present throughout the conflict and in the years after the war ended.

We know that soldiers from Caribbean and African countries that were part of the British Empire participated willingly and from the earliest opportunity, indeed, the British West Indies Regiment was established in 1915 as a response to the high numbers of men enlisting from West Indian countries, but why is it that the contribution of Black soldiers is still not as well-recognised as their white counterparts?

Why, in the months and years after the war ended, were Black soldiers treated so differently to white soldiers?

Why have these men's stories not been remembered by the wider public?

Were the stories told and then forgotten or never told at all?

Or were the stories always about rebellion and dissent, for example, the Taranto mutiny, or the English race riots of 1919?

What happened to the stories of heroism and gallantry and why are they absent from general histories of the conflict?

”

Colonial governments and imperial officials, who, having exploited the manpower and material resources of colonial territories, subsequently denied or obscured the contribution of men from these areas.

(Howe, 2002: 14)

“

Stories of Omission set out to explore the representation of Black soldiers during and after the Great War. We wanted to find out about the types of information available to the general public but, perhaps more importantly, what stories were missed out, hidden, ignored or disregarded, with the intention of 'rectifying the omission'.

We interrogated available sources to explore the commemoration and non-commemoration of Black soldiers, including:

- local and national newspapers
- archive collections
- biographies and literature
- postcards and propaganda
- film, photography and visual arts

What follows is a mixture of images and fragments of stories which contribute to a bigger story that still needs to be explored, documented and shared. It is very much a starting point and we hope that our resource will act as a stimulus for further research and more projects.

Recruitment and Training

British West Indies Regiment (BWIR)

The story of the British West Indies Regiment was largely untold until the publication of Glenford Howe's book *'Race, War and Nationalism: A Social History of West Indians in the First World War'* in 2002. According to Howe, recruiting methods in the British Empire were relatively mild, with emphasis on moral suasion.

'A number of 'carrot and stick' measures were also adopted to induce men to come forward. They were repeatedly told by recruiters of the 'very distinct advantages' of enlisting. Among these were the prospects of gaining medals, glory, discipline, exercise and free land at the cessation of hostilities' (Howe, 2002: 43).



 This rallying patriotic recruitment message was printed in *The Gleaner*, Kingston.

'Poster for the British West Indies Regiment, showing a small portrait of King George V, 1915'.

Library of Congress: LC-USZC4-11199

JAMAICA

”

The King has been pleased to approve of the formation of a corps from contingents of the inhabitants of the West India Islands, to be entitled "The British West Indies Regiment"

The Times
27 October 1915

“

After much debate in the West Indies about Black men participating in the war, the formation of a contingent from the area was raised with the Colonial Office by the Governor of Jamaica.

'Among British officials, opinion was unequally and unfavourably divided on the question of using blacks as soldiers, especially on the western front' (Howe, 2002: 29).

Some men had already made their own way to Britain to enlist, stowing away in ships, although many were rejected because of the colour of their skin. After an intervention by King George V in April 1915, troops from the West Indies were to be accepted into a new battalion. The BWIR was formally established on 26 October 1915.

The 1st Battalion was formed of men from British Guiana, Trinidad, St Vincent, Grenada and Barbados. Ten further battalions were formed of recruits mostly from Jamaica. Over 15,000 men served in this regiment, mainly in Palestine and Jordan, where they fought against soldiers in the Turkish Army. Some battalions also served in France and Flanders.

Research on the BWIR can sometimes become confused by the similarly named West India Regiment (WIR). The British Army formed the WIR in 1795 to defend the British territories in the Caribbean during the Napoleonic Wars with France. The WIR also served in the First World War, being deployed in East Africa as well as the German colonies in Togoland (modern day Togo and part of Ghana) and Cameroon.

YOUNG MEN OF THE BAHAMAS

The British Empire is engaged in a Life and Death Struggle. Never in the History of England, never since the Misty Distant Past of 2,000 years ago, has our beloved Country been engaged in such a conflict as she is engaged in to-day.

To bring to nothing this mighty attack by an unscrupulous and well prepared foe, HIS MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY KING GEORGE has called on the men of his Empire, MEN OF EVERY CLASS, CREED AND COLOUR, to

COME FORWARD TO FIGHT

that the Empire may be saved and the foe may be well beaten.

This call is to YOU, young man; not your neighbour, not your brother, not your cousin, but just YOU.

SEVERAL HUNDREDS OF YOUR MATES HAVE COME UP, HAVE BEEN MEDICALLY EXAMINED AND HAVE BEEN PASSED AS "FIT."

What is the matter with YOU?

Put yourself right with your King; put yourself right with your fellowmen; put yourself right with yourself and your conscience.

ENLIST TO-DAY

📌 This poster was printed by Kingston's *Daily Gleaner*: 'it was newspapers which initiated recruitment campaigns while governments procrastinated' (Howe, 2002: 41).

The Gleaner, 1915.

Library of Congress: 2003675350

JAMAICA

THE EMPIRE NEEDS MEN!



Helped by the YOUNG LIONS
The OLD LION defies his Foes.
ENLIST NOW.

📌 Another version of this poster individually named Australia, Canada, India and New Zealand. Is this version inclusive of British colonies in the West Indies and Africa?

Parliamentary Recruitment Committee, 1915.

© IWM PST 5110

BRITISH EMPIRE

TRINIDAD

➡ Persuasion to enlist involved a patriotic call to arms, in recruitment rallies like the one shown here. There was no conscription in the West Indies for the First World War; all the men were volunteers.

'A recruiting meeting in Port of Spain, Trinidad, 1916.'

© IWM Q52436



GRENADA



➡ This photograph shows white officers and Black troops. Was this always the case?

'Contingent of British West Indian troops on parade. Grenada (Windward Islands).'

© IWM Q17129

BAHAMAS

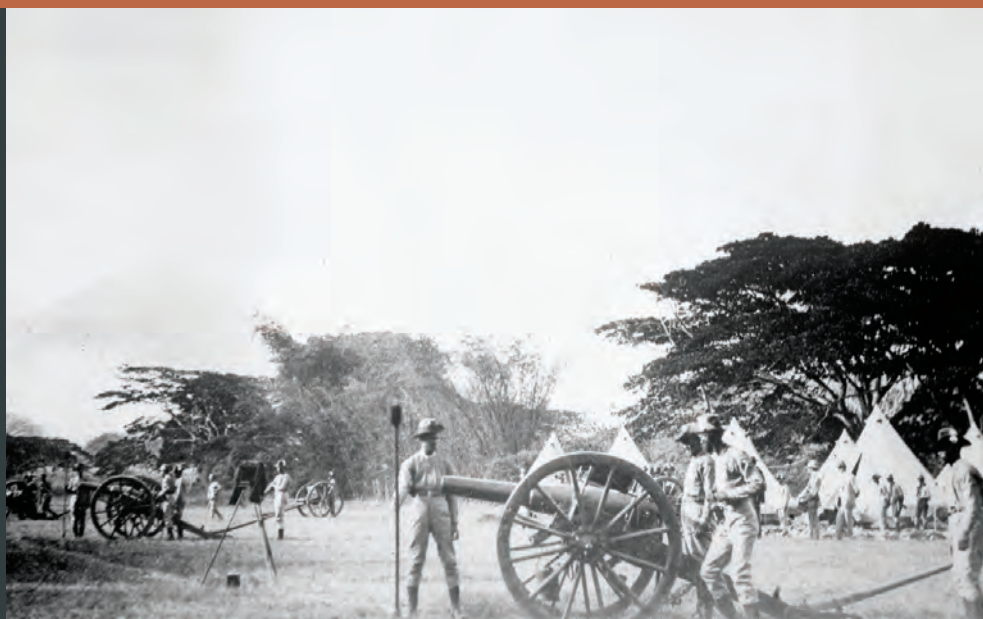
➡ This image shows some of the pomp and ceremony involved in preparation to leave for the front line.

'The Second Bahamas contingent depositing their colours at Government House, November 1915'.

© IWM Q52376



TRINIDAD



➡ Recruits are shown at practice, firing field guns, but would these men be expected to carry out such duties on the front line? Or was this photograph taken for the purpose of propaganda?

'Trinidad artillery volunteers undergoing gun drill, 1916'.

© IWM Q52423

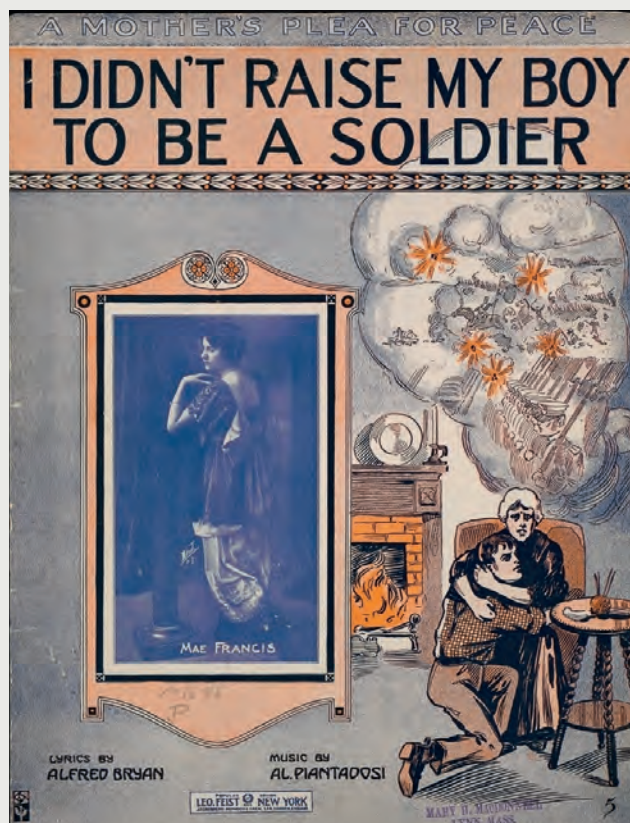
Recruitment and Training

Women

Posters, films, pamphlets and the print media were prominent in the recruitment drive, but what has been overlooked has been the role of women in crafting recruitment messages.

Women, as Dalea Bean has recently documented, were mobilised to encourage recruitment by writing letters to local newspapers that made it difficult for their men to stay at home while King, Country and Empire needed them. As the head of the Jamaican local forces, Brigadier General Blackden, wrote in *The Gleaner*, December 1916:

'I hope that you women who have sons, brothers, husbands who are of fighting age will not hold them back. But will encourage them to come forward' (Bean, 2018: 106).



There are various versions of this sheet music cover. One declares it as 'Ed Morton's Sensational Anti-War Song Hit'. Popular in America at a time when the USA was still a neutral in the Great War.

Sheet music, *I Didn't Raise My Boy To Be A Soldier*, 1915.

Library of Congress: 2002600251

AMERICA

Indeed, many women saw it as their duty, as one woman wrote to *The Gleaner*, May 1917:

'If they [men] never come back can we Christian women really grieve? Should we not rather rejoice that we have been allowed the privilege of giving so fully ... What are the women who are left behind to gain? We gain as women the knowledge that we have done our duty.'

Others though were wary of allowing their male relatives to go to war in Europe. In Trinidad some women adopted an American composed song and call for peace:

'I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier
I brought him up to be my pride and joy
Who dares to place a musket on his shoulder,
To shoot some other mother's darling boy?
Let nations arbitrate their future troubles
It's time to lay the sword and gun away
There'd be no war today, if mothers all would say
'I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier!''
(Bean, 2018: 111).

Such responses did not go unchallenged and women who adopted them were harshly chastised in the local press, as one woman wrote to the *Jamaica Times*, March 1916:

'You wives and mothers, your King requires your husbands and sons in order to save your country ... we do not want the women who when a young man says yes, I will go, says that he will make me weep, no those kind of women are no good. We prefer women who will give up her young man and encourage him and others to go and though she feels the loss she awaits his return, knowing that he is only gone to assist his King in his cause of right and justice' (Bean, 2018: 111).

For working-class women support for enlistment of male relatives sometimes turned on economic choices. An account of a conversation between a recruiting officer and a married woman was published in the *Port of Spain Gazette*. He asks her if her husband wants to enlist. Stating that she has four children to support she asks the recruiting officer if she will receive a separation allowance. When he replies that she will receive 28s 6d per week, she exclaims:

'Twenty-eight an' six a week! Nuff said. Rope him in' (Bean, 2018: 109).

Recruitment and Training

Propaganda

”

The Tommies, they brought up some German prisoners and these prisoners were spitting on their hands and wiping on their faces, to say we were painted black.

George Blackman
(Rogers, 2002)

“

At a time when Black people of the New World were still recovering from the scars of colonialism and slavery, Lord Kitchener, famous even now as the face behind the ‘Your Country Needs You’ campaign, is reported to have said ‘with the black race [I can] whip the world’ (Rogers, 2002). This was recalled by George Blackman, who served in the 4th Battalion, in his interview with Simon Rogers.

This confirmed the view that Britain needed her colonial subjects to help in what many viewed as a ‘white man’s war’. Yet, while supportive of Black participation in the conflict against Britain’s European foes, what did Kitchener really think?

‘Kitchener’s private views on black soldiers at the front alongside white soldiers were very different from the image suggested by George Blackman’s interview’ (Costello, 2015: 78).

It appears that even prior to their active service in battle for Britain overseas, there was a propaganda campaign for both the inclusion and omission of soldiers from the West Indies. In fact, the debate as to whether to include them or not was ended when King George V, presiding over the ensuing losses of British soldiers in a conflict which was now a year old, insisted that the BWIR be formed and its volunteers be allowed to join the battle. However, the battle had only just begun for the recruits, and this was before they even met the enemy.

‘The intervention of King George V in the face of enormous losses made the use of black colonial troops inevitable’ (Costello, 2015: 78).

The inclusion of Black soldiers in the war inspired a propaganda campaign by the Germans. This is illustrated by posters from the period depicting many fears and stereotypes of Black men. For example, in July 1916, German satirical magazine *Kladderadatsch* ran a cover in the Berlin edition entitled ‘The civilisation of Europe’ with a cartoon illustrating ‘Blacks learn how to shoot whites’, offering a sarcastic take on what they implied was a barbarian invasion of Europe by Black men.



Although this cartoon features a Black man fighting alongside other soldiers, he is depicted as a wild character. A skull around his neck hints at cannibalism. What else is conveying racism and propaganda here?

Kladderadatsch, 23 July 1916.
Heidelberg University Library: CC-BY-SA 3.0

GERMANY

JAMAICA

➡ 'Citizens in hundreds and thousands massed along the line of march ... in widely cheering crowds, our young soldiers with heads erect and cheering in reply' (*The Gleaner*, 10 Nov 1915). Was only positive news portrayed of that day?

'The departure of the first merchants contingent of West Indian troops, Kingston, Jamaica, 8 November 1915.'

© IWM Q52423



JAMAICA



➡ Troops from other islands were already on board, 'Jamaicans, Bahamians and British Hondurians commenced to fraternise. Then they lined the rails and cheered the crowd on the shore' (*The Gleaner*, 10 Nov 1915).

'Sailing of the first Jamaican contingent.'

Courtesy of National Library of Jamaica: D0003764

ENGLAND

➡ This front page newspaper article reports that 'A number of West Indians are now in England training to take their part in the war. Here is a crowd of the men, happy as sandboys at the prospect of fighting for their Empire.' How different is this viewpoint of the press from modern day reports?

Birmingham Mercury,
23 October 1915.

Courtesy of Library of Birmingham:
Newspaper Collection

A JOYFUL CROWD OF WEST INDIANS.



Embarkation and Travel

Crossing the Atlantic

”

Young, virile, bubbling over with life, proud soldiers of that Empire on which the sun never sets ... It was Our Day, Jamaica's Day ... as Jamaica was now in the war.

The Gleaner, 10 Nov 1915.
(Smith, 2004: 14)

“

The first draft of Caribbean recruits for the first contingent departed on *HMT Verdala* from Trinidad, Grenada and Barbados, on 18/19/20 September 1915. When they arrived at the training camp at Seaford, East Sussex, they were met with unfamiliar wintry conditions.

‘The West Indian soldiers were confined to their poor accommodation and unsuitable clothing for the duration of the winter and, as a result, their health and morale began to suffer ... pneumonia afflicted numerous men and an epidemic of mumps then swept through the camp’ (East Sussex WW1).

Hundreds of inadequately equipped recruits were transported on each hazardous journey. Their harsh reality is epitomised by the Halifax Incident when the *Verdala* was diverted north to avoid enemy submarine action, into a blizzard:

‘On 6 March 1916, the third Jamaica contingent, comprising 25 officers and 1,115 other ranks, departed for England ... since the *Verdala* was not adequately heated and the black soldiers had not been properly equipped with warm clothing, substantial casualties resulted. Approximately six hundred men suffered from exposure and frostbite and there were five immediate deaths’ (Howe & Marshall, 2001: 115).

Outbreaks of disease spread quickly on trans-atlantic troop ships, where soldiers were packed together in close quarters for up to two weeks or more. Despatches in January 1917 recorded one such event:

‘British West Indies Regiment: Barbados contingent. Forwards report by Dr John Hutson concerning the influenza epidemic on board HMT *Magdalena* and the return of invalids to the Caribbean’ (National Archives: CO 28/291/4).

BAHAMAS



📍 Are these grand processions organised for the benefit of the new recruits? Or is their purpose to persuade more ‘young men of the Bahamas ... to come forward to fight’ as part of the recruitment drive?

‘The second Bahamas contingent marching through Nassau, November 1915’.

© IWM Q52372

BELIZE

Records of the past can be false or misleading. From the caption, you may believe this photo was taken in Kingston. But, by comparing to old postcards, this is Battlefield Park in Belize. So, maybe this was prior to departure 'to' Kingston.

'An inspection of the second contingent of West Indian troops prior to departure, Kingston, Jamaica'. 7 Jan 1916.

© IWM Q52423



AFRICA



With limited knowledge from a short caption, is this a photograph of the 2nd Battalion of the WIR leaving Kingston for West Africa in late 1915, or from Freetown to Kenya in April 1916? What visual clues are there?

'The 2nd Battalion, West India Regiment, embarking for active service in East Africa'.

© IWM Q 52378

ENGLAND

These men are not dressed in the usual civilian clothing of the ship's crew but are wearing the British Navy uniform of an officer or midshipman, while Black men wearing ordinary ratings uniforms are stood nearby, just out of shot to their right.

'West Indians for Navy (war 1914-1918), men for the fleet, July 1917'.

TopFoto.co.uk: EU056773



Western Front

Contemporary records describing the life of Black soldiers on the Western Front appear to be scarce. One of the most important accounts is the diary of Father Achiel Van Wallegghem, a Catholic priest, appointed to Dikkebus, Ypres. Over 1,200 handwritten pages run from October 1914 to April 1918, offering an exhaustive account of the lives of the local population and the non-white troops and workers based in and around his parish. These descriptions represent a mixture of factual information and subjective opinion reflective of contemporary racist frames of reference as the following extract from 26 May 1917 demonstrates:

'Negroes (from West Indies and Jamaica) have arrived to work at the farm of Alouis Adraen and Drie Goën. They are dressed like English soldiers, are civilized, speak very softly, but they are not much liked because of their sticky fingers, and on the whole the civilians prefer to see the back of them, because when they enter a place for a cup of coffee they can stay anything from five minutes to a couple of hours. (P.S. I have found a letter written by the mother of one of those blacks. What sincere, Christian and motherly feelings! None of our members could write better.) These blacks are terribly frightened by the bombardments. They stare in fear and bewilderment when they hear a shell arriving, and if it drops not too far away, they all flee as if possessed' (Dendooven, 2011: 149-50).

Racial prejudice existed in both the attempts to enlist to fight for 'King, Country and Empire' and the experience of being a Black soldier. Norman Manley and his brother Roy were studying in Britain and enlisted in 1915. Both experienced racial prejudice. Roy had been previously refused admission to the Officer Training Corps because he was coloured (Killingray, 1986: 170). Norman wrote of his experience of racial hierarchy:

'I had grown up with horses and horse-drawn vehicles, and knew more about them than miners and town-bred Londoners, so naturally enough within a month I was a Lance Corporal or Bombardier as they were called in the Artillery, and by the time we left for France I was promoted Corporal. Here I came up against violent colour prejudice. The rank and file disliked taking orders from a coloured N.C.O. and their attitude was mild by comparison with that of my fellow NCOs. Corporals and Sergeants resented my sharing status with them. They were more spiteful and later conspired to get me in trouble. It was only the Officer class that I could expect to behave with ordinary decency' (Manley, 1973).

Roy was killed in a German bombardment on the Ypres front in 1917. He was 21. Norman recalled:

'We were good friends and I was to be lonely for the rest of the war – lonely and bitter' (Manley, 1973: 7-8).

BELGIUM

➡ This image became one of the most frequently used photographs when discussing the West Indian contribution to the war.

'West Indian troops stacking 8 inch shells at a dump on the Gordon Road, Ypres, October 1917.'

© IWM E(AUS) 2078



Africans

Britain called upon all of its Empire for frontline manpower, but not always for combatant roles:

‘The South African General J. C. Smuts had declined African and coloured officers the right to fight, determined to keep it a ‘white man’s war’, but 83,000 Africans and 2,000 coloured men served in a non-combatant capacity nevertheless. Black South Africans were as determined to prove their worth as much as their British West Indian comrades’ (Costello, 2015: 118-119).

Africans were recruited in their thousands to serve on the Western Front:

‘Nguni speakers with similar cultures and traditions, like the Zulu and Xhosa, were recruited to serve overseas as labourers supporting the British Army in France and Italy ... They were to be put to work labouring in the quarries, laying and repairing roads and railway lines, and cutting timber’ (Costello, 2015: 119-120).

Looking back on his childhood, the South African artist William Kentridge recently remarked:

‘In high school in Johannesburg ... we would gather in the quadrangle and the headmaster would read the names of old boys who died in the First World War. What was missing was all of the other names of African soldiers and porters who died’ (Whyte, 2018).

”

The dilemma of whether to allow black troops did not apply in the African theatres of war for, unlike on the Western Front, the enemy was also black, the Germans deploying their own colonial forces.

(Costello, 2015: 116)

“

It is estimated that ‘upwards of 200,000’ Africans died in the conflict, including soldiers, porters and carriers. Figures extracted from the archives of the Imperial War Museum indicate the non-combatant contribution of Africans:

‘From Nyasaland, 265,000 carriers / From Uganda, 190,000 carriers / From the Congo, 200,000 carriers / From Nigeria, 4,000 carriers each month / For every soldier, three carriers: for food, for ammunition, for boots / For every officer, nine carriers / For every machine gun, 12 carriers / For every cannon, 300 carriers’ (O’Toole, 2018: 51).

FRANCE

➡ This is one print from a series of photographs of a South African labour unit, where they are shown under inspection, digging sand, preparing food and waiting for a bath. What does this image tell us about their living conditions?

‘Troops of the South African Native Labour Corps around a brazier at their camp. Dannes, March 1917’.

© IWM Q4875



Canadians

Black men living in Canada, many of whom were from the West Indies, also encountered racial prejudice when trying to enlist:

‘Following the outbreak of the First World War, Canadians flocked to recruiting stations. From Nova Scotia to British Columbia, hundreds of Black volunteers, eager and willing to serve, were turned away from enlisting in what they were told was a “White man’s war”’ (Ruck, 2016).

This changed in December 1915, when Canada’s federal government declared that volunteers could not be rejected on the grounds of race:

‘Although official policy allowed blacks to be enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), a number of commanding officers fiercely opposed the enlistment of blacks in their battalions’ (Howe, 2002: 47).

Just sixteen Black volunteers were recruited into the Canadian Expeditionary Force between December 1915 and July 1916:

‘The Black soldiers were dispersed throughout the battalion’s four companies. On 15 July 1916, the battalion left for England aboard the RMS Empress of Britain. As was common practice at the time, the 106th Battalion was broken up to provide reinforcements for front-line battalions that had suffered heavy casualties in France’ (Ruck, 2016).

”

Wanted at once
300 MEN for No. 2
Construction Battalion for
Colored Men of Canada...
for all kinds of construction.
This battalion will go OVERSEAS
as soon as recruited
up to strength.

(WW1 Poster Collection,
Acadia University Library:
1900.237-WWI/42)

“

As it was common for white soldiers to oppose the idea of fighting alongside Black soldiers, a segregated battalion was proposed. The non-combatant No. 2 Construction Battalion was formed in July 1916, but their target of 1,000 volunteers was difficult to achieve:

‘This may be attributed to the rejection and humiliation Black men experienced when previously turned away at recruiting stations; the objection to serving in a segregated non-combatant labour battalion; and the exclusion of Black immigrants, especially in Western Canada’ (Ruck, 2016).

➡ At first glance, these soldiers appear to be in a combatant role. The attached record, however, tells us that these four members of the Canadian Corps are posing with ammunition before loading it into tramway cars to be taken up the line.

‘Loading Ammunition’.

George Metcalf
Archival Collection,
Canadian War Museum:
CWM 19930012-397



WESTERN FRONT

Frontline

The Middle East

In January 1916, BWIR's 1st Battalion and parts of the 2nd Battalion were sent to Alexandria, Egypt, to join the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. Some were later transferred to the Indian Expeditionary Force in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq). Others were sent to fight the Turkish Army in Palestine.

Like those on the Western Front, Black soldiers from the West Indies were initially assigned support services in Egypt, like digging trenches, building roads and working in ammunition dumps. But, the shortage of manpower in late 1916 resulted in the decision that they should take a more active role in combat.

The bravery of BWIR soldiers who fought in the Palestine Campaign was expressed in a telegram to the Governor of Jamaica from General Allenby:

'I have great pleasure in informing you of the gallant conduct of the machine-gun section of the 1st British West Indies Regiment during two successful raids on the Turkish trenches. All ranks behaved with great gallantry under heavy rifle and shell fire and contributed in no small measure to the success of the operations' (Smith, 2015).

Being placed in positions of great peril was not uncommon. In 1918, the 2nd Battalion were given orders to clear enemy posts near the British Line in Palestine.

”

Already the effects of that terrible malaria which claimed such a toll from the British forces in Palestine had begun to be felt in the Regiment, and officers and men fell by the road-side like flies.

(Besson, 2014)

“

This offensive action required the men to advance over open land under heavy fire. Although the mission was achieved, nine were killed and forty-three were wounded. Two were awarded gallantry medals.

'In every theatre the West Indians consistently displayed courage and discipline and as a result, many won decorations. Their invaluable service and the bravery with which they performed under dangerous conditions were highly commended by senior commanding officers' (Howe, 2002: 101).

PALESTINE

🕒 The white officer is named on this photograph, but not the BWIR Lance Corporal. Who is he and why is he being awarded a medal?

'Maj. Gen. Sir E. W. C. Chaytor, Commanding Australian & New Zealand Mounted Division, decorating a B. W. I. Corporal, 1917'.

Library of Congress:
2007675259



FRANCE



➡ How did these men feel, after being treated as general labourers, to then be armed and sent to the front to fight? Did they know of the extent of the casualties in the Battle of the Somme?

'Men of the British West Indies Regiment cleaning their rifles on the Amiens Road near Albert, September 1916'.

© IWM Q1201

EGYPT

➡ This photograph is from an album entitled 'JAMAICA 1. Views and personalities in Jamaica'. Why was it included in an album compiled in the 1930s by the Colonial Office and Empire Marketing Board?

'1st Battalion British West Indies Regiment in Egypt, May 1916'.

National Archives:
CO1069/369 (27)



PALESTINE



➡ Would the men pictured here, employed in manual tasks, soon be called upon to bear arms and fight Turkish soldiers?

'Men of the British West Indies Regiment creating dugouts for XX Corps HQ on the cliffs of the Mediterranean at Sheikh Shabasi, near Deir-el-Belah, (no date)'.

© IWM Q51352

Home Front

Frederick Johnson: A Birmingham Story

Archive albums containing fragments, photographs and ephemera, can reveal powerful stories. This dramatic picture of the Small Heath Home Defence Guard (1917) is pasted into a large miscellaneous volume with virtually no other information. At this time, individuals ineligible for active service were often encouraged to join local units designed to protect and support the city. The facial expressions in this photo leave us in no doubt as to the seriousness of 'home defence' in Birmingham. Each uniform would have been bought by the individual member; regulation arm bands signalled their 'volunteer' Home Guard status. All these men were very likely to have worked somewhere within the industrial Small Heath landscape. A further layer of cultural and historical significance to this photograph also emerges with the central presence of a Black volunteer positioned shoulder to shoulder within the ranks.

- Who was this man, standing proudly yet without a uniform?
- What was his story? What made him sign up for the Small Heath volunteers?

A later picture of the R.W.R Small Heath 5th Volunteer Battalion (1919) appears to show the same figure. This time however, he stands on the back row wearing full uniform. Again, he appears to be the only Black figure in the proud gathering of Small Heath men. Luckily for us, a list of names is attached, indicating his name as 'F. Johnson'.

After hours spent on a fruitless search for F. Johnson in the census, this was the limit of our knowledge for a number of years. But, knowing that the past can be elusive and it can take many attempts to find what was there all along, a further search revealed more of the story.

The Birmingham census (1911) also mentions a 'Frederick Johnson' living at 123 Whitehall Road in Small Heath. He is recorded as being a 'boarder, 48 years old, single, occupied as a (trams?) Painter, employed by Council, born Kingstown (sic), Resident of Jamaica, West Indies'. Notably, two other people live in the same property - Sarah Jones, 58, Widow, (born Warwickshire) and Frederick Jones, her son, 30, a Railway Porter.

By linking together these pieces of evidence, we gain an important if fleeting insight into Birmingham during the war. However, a huge number of questions persist and much more could be done with this story. What happened to Frederick and the other men after the war? Who was Sarah Jones - a woman that gave lodgings to a man from Jamaica at a time of ongoing racial tensions in Empire? Is this photograph itself framed by a racist visual practice that included Frederick only as a token presence? Or does the photo show a sense of genuine inclusion and solidarity within the Small Heath community when confronting the German foe?

Dr Andy Green

ENGLAND

➤ This dramatic image of the Small Heath Volunteers tells us many different stories, bringing together a vividly powerful visual commentary on histories of race, diaspora, class, empire and WWI.

'The Small Heath Home Defence Guard' (c.1917).

Library of Birmingham:
Birmingham Scrapbook
vol.10



Sharing Cultures

Music

Although there had been a Black presence in military bands prior to and during the First World War, still little is known about who these soldiers were and what type and style of music was played. It appears that there were a number of musical bands typically part of a regiment. The band music was quite traditional in its style, consisting of drums and brass instruments. But, the major musical influence appears to have come from the Black American soldiers who were merging ragtime jazz with European music styles. The band of the 369th Regiment, which became known as the 'Harlem Hellfighters', was led by influential Black musician James Reese Europe. This infantry band from New York arrived on the Western Front in early 1918:

'They were the first African American combat group to set foot on French soil, and their band immediately struck up the "Marseillaise" in a rhythmically spirited rendition that French soldiers initially failed to recognize as their own national anthem' (Watkins, 2002: 30).

Concerts were performed for British, American, French military and civilian audiences. They made quite an impact in war-torn France:

'Programs that featured ... "plantation" melodies and ... "Memphis Blues" invariably brought down the house. "Jazz spasms" and "ragtime-itis"... worked the crowds into a frenzy' (Watkins, 2002: 31).

On his return from the front in 1919, *The Literary Digest* published Europe's opinions on jazz:

'We have our own racial feeling and if we try to copy whites we will make bad copies... We won France by playing music which was ours and not a pale imitation of others, and if we are to develop in America we must develop along our own lines' (Lopes, 2002: 75).

Artists from America and the Caribbean were key contributors in the development of music styles and post-war political discourse that sought empowerment and justice against the mistreatment of Black soldiers. The impact their political views had on moving towards seeking independence in the Caribbean and social justice in Britain is an area ripe for further research. Some of these early pioneers of Afrocentric musical styles are known, such as Sam Manning, who served in the British West Indies Regiment in France and the Middle East. Manning originated from Trinidad, where calypso was a vehicle for expressing feelings and protest. He went on to achieve international acclaim after the war.

One popular wartime song that was sung as a calypso was 'Run Away, Kaiser William'. George Blackman recalled:

'We sang songs, 'Run Kaiser William, run for your life, boy' (Rogers, 2002).



AMERICA

➡ Just three months after this photograph was taken the bandleader, J.R. Europe (on left), was fatally stabbed by one of his drummers. How had the experience of being a frontline African American officer affect his leadership of the band?

'Lieutenant James Reese Europe returned with his regiment the 369th Infantry. 12 February 1919'.
US National Archives

Visual Representations

Fine Arts

The First World War was a visual war. It was captured in paintings and drawings, in still photography and cinematic images. The public at home wanted information about the conflict and the British government saw the potential of the visual as a propaganda tool to sway public opinion. To generate images, the government developed war art schemes and commissioned new and established artists to capture the experiences of all those involved in the conflict.

Artists travelled to theatres of war to record the subject matter that they witnessed. Many such images have today achieved iconic status as visual testament of the horrors of the conflict but also of British sacrifice and character. Many feature regularly in popular histories of the war and they have also been the focus of academic monographs (Imperial War Museum, 2008; Malvern, 2004; Hughes and Blom, 2014).

Yet, despite the extensive presence of Black soldiers in the war there is an absence in the representation of the conflict within the works produced by Britain's official war artists. The researcher looks in vain in the catalogues and monographs for black faces.

The one exception appears to be *A Canadian Gun-pit*, painted by Percy Wyndham Lewis in 1918. Lewis was a gunner with the Royal Garrison Artillery in France from May until October 1917 and took part in Passchendaele. He became an official war artist in December 1917. *A Canadian Gun-pit* depicts a camouflaged howitzer being laid in and was based on material he gathered on a visit to Vimy Ridge. The image is notable for its inclusion of a Black soldier in the foreground: our eye is immediately drawn towards him, as he loads shells under the watchful eye of the officers, with a scene of destruction in the background.

John Ellis has argued that the general exclusion of Black soldiers from official visual representations was in part due to 'their lowly enlisted status,' but mainly was a result of encoded 'racial hierarchies' which meant:

'It would have been impossible for artists to represent blacks serving alongside their white peers in scenes of significant national victories, because of the equality inherent in such images, both physically and with regards to contribution' (Ellis, 2009).

FRANCE

➡ This painting is reproduced and discussed at length in Sue Malvern's *Modern Art, Britain and the Great War* (2004), but no reference is made to the presence (or significance) of the labouring Black soldier in the foreground.

Percy Wyndham Lewis,
A Canadian Gun-pit, 1918.
The National Gallery of
Canada: Acc. #8356



Visual Representations

Portraiture

More intimate representations of Black soldiers can be found in the work of the Swiss artist Eugène Burnand. Known primarily as a landscape painter, he turned his focus to portraiture towards the end of his career. Between 1917 and 1920, Burnand sketched the 'Military Types' series of pastel portraits of men from the various allies. Many were recuperating from frontline action in Montpellier and Marseilles in France.

104 of these portraits were published in a book in 1922. The majority portray ground troops, many of whom were working as labourers. 22 were classified as belonging to the British Empire. African sitters include several Senegalese riflemen and a medical orderly from Madagascar. From the Caribbean, an artilleryman from Martinique and a soldier from Guadeloupe. Another portrait, of Cafes Johnson (pictured to right), is simply listed as 'Jamaican'.

In a time when portrait photography had become increasingly popular, these hand-drawn artistic representations provide a different and human perspective. Commentaries for each portrait were written by Burnand's nephew Robert. They were translated into English for a republication of the book in 2010. The translator issued this note:

'It will be obvious to anyone looking at the portraits that the artist was a man of great humanity, who captures the personalities he has depicted with great sensitivity and skill. The commentaries alongside, written by his nephew Robert, contain some outdated assumptions common at the time and some expressions describing physical attributes, characteristics and behaviour which are unacceptable today. The translations have recognised this by choosing words which maintain respect for the subjects' (eugene-burnand.com).

The portraits miraculously survived a fire that engulfed Eugène's studio in October 1920, of which he wrote:

'That my portraits escaped both the fire and the water is incredible. The firefighter seemed to take no notice of this pile of canvasses, they went right past them. The floor was running with black water but my collection with three exceptions, was intact. The future (as it might have been) is not desperate' (eugene-burnand.com).



What can the accompanying commentary reveal about attitudes of the time?

'The big soft sad eyes, nostalgic like a song of the Antilles, have seen the passing of the sumptuous, the fierce, the bloody procession of war. In the ports they have contemplated the arrival of merchant ships, loaded with men, who were going to die perhaps, who were certainly going to suffer. They have seen guns, munitions, provisions, accumulate on the quays. They have seen soldiers on the roads, lorries in the mud; the wounded on stretchers. And those eyes have been even sadder. The man with golden skin, like a coffee grain, that beautiful coffee that grows in full sunlight in the lush and fertile ground. His flowered isle stands in the middle of the sea, the pride of its palm trees and its blooming vegetation. It is not possible that he has had no regret during the long months when his easygoing nature every day found new work to do, before a horizon that nothing came to brighten; nothing but the bitter feeling about obscure banal duty'.

Jamaican. Cafes Johnson, by Eugène Burnand, First World War 'Military Types', 1922.

Courtesy of Doug Jenkinson: eugene-burnand.com

FRANCE

Visual Representations

Photography

Throughout the war many soldiers enjoyed a brief respite from the horror of modern warfare in a small French village located just behind the Somme front lines. It was here that thousands of soldiers encountered a couple of civilian amateur photographers, Louis and Antoinette Thuillier.

Almost a century later, in 2011, a photographic archive was discovered in the farmhouse where these young men posed for their photograph:

'After months of searching ... by the light of an attic window, we see three old chests. I lift the lid of one of them ... and there they are: thousands of glass photographic plates - candid images of First World War British soldiers behind the lines' (Coulthart, 2016).



↑ This damaged print of an unknown soldier shows the fragility of the past. Records that survive are rarely fully annotated, leaving researchers to look for clues in regimental insignia and uniform to form a fuller story.

Photo courtesy of the Kerry Stokes Collection.

FRANCE

”

As battalion after battalion visited their village of Vignacourt, the couple captured images of the men (individually and in groups) before they were once again thrown back into the trenches.

(Coulthart, 2016: 13)

“

Amongst the many photographs are Black volunteers who served with the Royal Engineers. The Thuilliers photographed the soldiers to supplement their farming income, but the fact that thousands of fragile photographic glass plates survived largely intact for a century suggests that they realised they were also custodians of a visual record for the future.

While some of the images have deteriorated overtime, most are of the highest quality and reveal substantial detail upon close inspection. The significance of this archive cannot be understated. They fill a gaping void in the record as, except for photographs taken by authorised military photographers, British servicemen were strictly banned from taking cameras into conflict zones on the Western Front.

Photographs bring us closer to individuals in the past. All of these images are windows into a world otherwise lost, but when we look at them, we are involved in meaning-making and meaning cannot be understood without taking into account the context and issues at the time the image was first produced. But what meaning do they have for us today? The meaning we take is inevitably subject to cultural definition. Do we see the past as represented in these images through the lens of both commemoration and our desire to place the experiences of Black soldiers at the centre of our narrative of the conflict? If yes, does this shape the emotional impact they have for us? Do we visually find ourselves placing these unnamed men in the frame of history?



Photographs courtesy of the Kerry Stokes Collection: The Louis and Antoinette Thuillier Collection.
Donated to the Australian War Memorial by Mr Kerry Stokes on behalf of Australian Capital Equity Pty Ltd.

FRANCE

Legacy

The Taranto Revolt

At the end of the war, most of the BWIR battalions were sent to Italy en route to the West Indies. The soldiers were still expected to work on various tasks, many of them menial such as building and cleaning latrines, while being paid less than their white counterparts. This understandably led to resentment and on 6 December the 9th Battalion refused to obey orders. They were joined a few days later by the 10th Battalion. Both battalions were disarmed and ordered on a route march. A battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment was dispatched to address any further unrest.

The only reference found on the BWIR in Taranto was in the *Aberdeen Press & Journal*, 5 March 1919:

‘The British force at Taranto is approximately 9000. This force comprises six battalions of the British West Indies Regiment, which are presently awaiting passage home. In addition, one British battalion is temporarily stationed at Taranto for the purpose of maintaining order’.

There had been one fatality when Acting Sergeant Richards negligently discharged his rifle and shot Private Pinnock. This challenge to the racial hierarchy of Empire led to a fear of losing control:

‘The British Italian command was unnerved and exacted harsh retribution. Forty-nine men from the BWIR were found guilty of mutiny and were sentenced to between three and five years’ imprisonment with hard labour...

”

From Marseille, it was seven days to reach Taranto. It is a seaport - all the boats were coming from London with ammunition. We have to unload the boat, the train come and we got to load the train to take the ammunition up the line.

George Blackman
(Rogers, 2002)

“

Private Sanches, apparently the ring leader, received a death sentence, commuted to twenty years’ imprisonment’ (Smith, 2004: 130).

The rebellion had been quashed, but the feelings and reasons for it remained:

‘The Taranto mutiny contributed to the politicisation of Black soldiers with the establishment of the Caribbean League ... it marked the emergence of the nationalist agitation that was to characterise politics in the British West Indies in the coming decades’ (Smith, 2011: 265-82).

ITALY



🕒 It is not surprising that there are no known images relating to the mutiny. This photograph, taken in Taranto in 1919, opens up questions about how these soldiers felt now that the war was finally over.

‘Taken on the journey home from Egypt by the Taranto Overland Route, 1919’.

© IWM Q50938

Legacy

George Blackman

George Blackman served in the 4th Battalion of the BWIR between 1914 and 1919 and had been at Taranto during the mutiny. In 2002, when George was 105 and partially blind and deaf, he was interviewed by Simon Rogers for an article in *The Guardian*: 'There were no parades for us'.

In 1914, in a flush of youth and patriotism, he told the recruiting officer he was 18 (he was actually 17) and enlisted:

'Lord Kitchener said with the black race, he could whip the world ... We wanted to go. Because the island government told us that the king said all Englishmen must go to join the war. The country called all of us'.



Blackman ended his interview by saying that 'England don't have anything to do with me now. England turned me over.'

Photograph of George Blackman by Elin Høyland.

BARBADOS

”

A secret colonial memo from 1919 ... showed that the British government realised that ... “Nothing we can do will alter the fact that the black man has begun to think and feel himself as good as the white.”

(Rogers, 2002)

“

George recalled the commonplace racism:

'They called us darkies ... But when the battle starts, it didn't make a difference. We were all the same. When you're there, you don't care about anything. Every man there is under the rifle.'

He returned to Barbados in 1919:

'When the war finish, there was nothing ... The only thing that we had is the clothes and the uniform that we got on. The pants, the jacket and the shirt and the boots ... I had nobody. I had to look for work. I had to eat and buy clothes ... I said, 'The English are no good.' I went to Jamaica and I meet up some soldiers and I asked them, 'Here boy, what the government give you?' They said, 'The government give us nothing.' I said, 'We just the same.'

The experience of Black soldiers at the end of the war was also reported at the time. In 1921, *The Times* reported on 'Destitute Ex-Soldiers, Strong Protests from Jamaica':

'Such men as being treated as paupers, it being an outrage against every sentiment of patriotism ... When these men were recruited, promises were made to provide a hospital for incurables, and to give land, a house, and cattle to each man after the war; these promises were not fulfilled and the men were left to shift for themselves' (*The Times*, 2 November 1921).

Legacy

Returning Home

Because of the Taranto mutiny, concerns about disillusioned Caribbean soldiers joining together to seek revenge meant that the first main shipload returning to Jamaica was met by a warship and a military guard on the wharf. However, a warm reception awaited the men from local residents:

‘The town was gaily decorated, the streets were packed and several prominent persons made speeches’ (Howe, 2002: 191).

In London, the Victory Parade of 19 July 1919 celebrated the end of the war on a vast scale. Thousands of troops marched in this celebratory parade, including allied forces, but not the BWIR:

‘The British West Indies Regiment were unable to be represented in the procession on account of the fact that their demobilisation is almost completed’ (*The Times*, 21 July 1919).

The joy of returning home was often short lived when the reality of their new life was known:

‘Disenchanted soldiers and angry workers unleashed a series of protest actions in ... Jamaica, Grenada and especially in British Honduras. The first large group of ex-servicemen arrived in British Honduras on 8 July 1919 and received a grand welcome, but by the night of 22 July they were involved in a major disturbance in the capital’ (Howe & Marshall, 2001: 123).

”

When the disgruntled BWIR soldiers began arriving back in the West Indies they quickly joined a wave of worker protest resulting from a severe economic crisis produced by the war

(Howe & Marshall, 2001: 122)

“

The BWIR and the West India Regiment were both disbanded in 1927. Caribbean soldiers were disillusioned not only by how they were treated during the war but also after they returned to their native islands, where they found themselves quickly forgotten. Pensions and medical treatment were not forthcoming as promised.

Some of the returning men went on to use their experience from the First World War to better their lives or to take on a second fight for betterment of the Caribbean, becoming actively involved in politics, such as Norman Manley, who went on to become the Premier of Jamaica.

FRANCE TO AMERICA

➡ What did the journey home feel like? This image gives an indication: ‘Waiting to sight land (only 10 days more)’ is written on the photograph. Another records 4,000 men being on board this troop ship.

‘803rd Pioneer Infantry Battalion on the U.S.S. *Philippine* (troop ship) from Brest harbor, France, July 18, 1919’.

Library of Congress:
Gladstone Collection
14024/43



TRINIDAD



Handwritten on the back is a note that highlights how the soldiers arrived by barge, whilst 'officers landed in launch'. What conditions did Black troops endure on the journey home in comparison to white officers?

'Barges arriving with B.W.I. soldiers, Port of Spain, Trinidad, May 1919.'

Michael Goldberg Collection, The Alma Jordan Library, The University of the West Indies.

ST VINCENT

Although there were no parades for BWIR soldiers in Britain, they were greeted by thousands in ceremonial welcomes across the West Indies. Why was their contribution not officially recognised by the 'Motherland'?

'Return of the St Vincent contingent of the British West Indies Regiment at the end of the First World War'.

© IWM Q15098



JAMAICA

'The war is over. The hardships of a soldier's life in warfare, have come to an end ... in every town and hamlet enthusiastic welcome is being accorded them' (*The Gleaner*, 8 July 1919). But what new hardships would be found in civilian life?

'Return of B.W.I.R.'

Courtesy of the National Library of Jamaica



Legacy

Remembrance

At the end of the war many soldiers complained about the lack of recognition their contribution was awarded in Britain and by the British military. However, photographs show that the reaction in the Caribbean was markedly different, with returning men being met by scores of locals.

While across the globe, in the UK and in Commonwealth countries, many monuments were erected in the years after the war, and even though 81 medals for bravery were awarded to BWIR soldiers, men of the Caribbean were still not remembered on war memorials in the UK until relatively recently. The **Memorial Gates at Constitution Hill, London**, inaugurated in 2002 by HM Queen, commemorate all the armed forces of the British Empire. It took another fifteen years before the first dedicated memorial to African Caribbean soldiers was installed in **Windrush Square in Brixton, London**. The African and Caribbean War Memorial was unveiled by Major Larry Davis on 22 June 2017, in a ceremony attended by the then Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon and the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan. But, why has it taken this long for these Black soldiers to be recognised?

Many **Caribbean islands** have war memorials or monuments to the fallen, with **Jamaica** having several located across the island. Those who paid the ultimate sacrifice are also honoured and remembered in Remembrance Sunday Armistice day parades across the Caribbean.

Nineteen BWIR soldiers are buried in marked graves at **Seaford Cemetery in Sussex**. Their names are recorded on the website of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. More recently we have identified a grave to a Black Bermudian soldier, belonging to the Bermuda Contingent of the Royal Garrison Artillery.

Portsmouth and Southampton both turned the spotlight on the **SS Mendi** incident of 21 February 1917. It was one of the worst shipping disasters of the war, with a loss of life reported at over 600:

'The Darro's prow sliced deep into the Mendi, probably killing or trapping some soldiers in the forward cargo holds, which had been converted to troop accommodation, and dooming the vessel. The ship sank within 20 minutes, claiming the lives of more than 620 of the 823 officers and men of the last – the 5th Battalion – of the South African Native Labour Corps (SANLC) to do service in France and on the Western Front' (Morris, 2016).

Many of the bodies of the men who drowned were never recovered. The SA Legion hold an annual ceremony at the **Hollybrook Cemetery in Southampton**, which was attended by HRH Princess Anne in February 2018. The tragedy was further commemorated in a ceremony on 28 August 2018 when Prime Minister Theresa May returned the bell of the shipwrecked **SS Mendi** to **South Africa**.

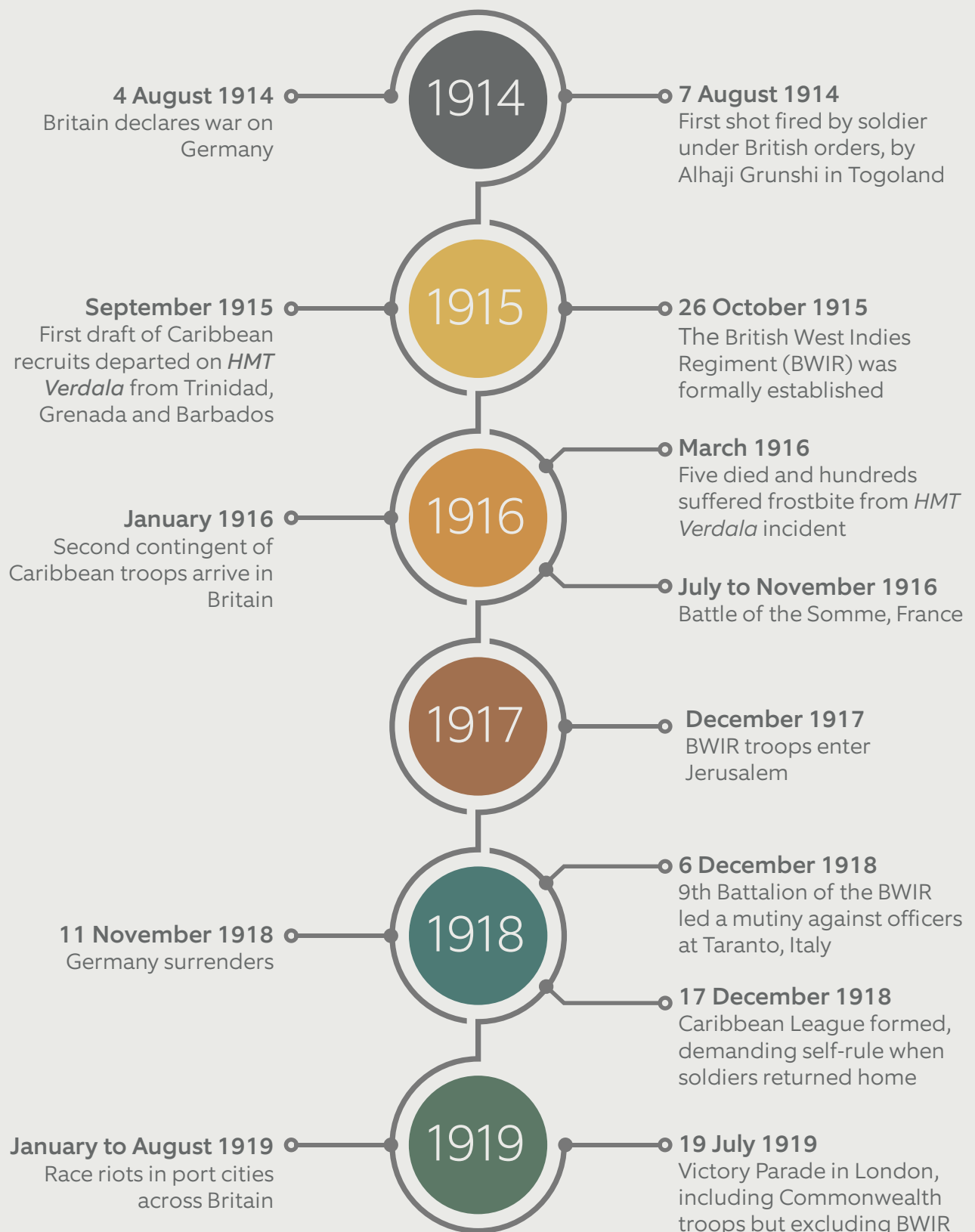
➡ This monument was installed on 28 June 1924 in War Memorial Park, Port of Spain, Trinidad. An inscription reads 'In honour of all who served. In memory of those who fell'. How is this memorial perceived today by young Trinidadian men?

'Trinidad War Memorial.'
Michael Goldberg Collection, The Alma Jordan Library, The University of the West Indies.



TRINIDAD

Timeline



Resources

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- Orme Wheelock Phelps, 'Rise of the Labour Movement in Jamaica', *Social and Economic Studies*, vol. 9, no. 4 (December, 1960), 417-468
- Richard Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, masculinity and the development of national consciousness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004)
- Richard Smith 'Heaven grant you strength to fight the battle for your race': nationalism, Pan-Africanism and the First World War in Jamaican Memory' in Santanu Das (ed.) *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 265-282
- Sean O'Toole, 'Heavy History,' *Tate Etc.* 43, (Summer 2018) 50-55
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- Murry Whyte, 'The carnage and the carve up,' *The Guardian: G2* (31 July, 2018)
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🔍 This image is used in an online article by Lindsay Ruck on the Canadian 'No. 2 Construction Battalion'. What can images do more than words alone?

'Two soldiers washing their uniforms, September 1916. Photo by Henry Edward Knobel'.

George Metcalf
Archival Collection,
Canadian War Museum:
CWM 19930012-397

Resources

WEBSITES

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- Away from the Western Front, 'The West Indian Experience': awayfromthewesternfront.org/campaigns/broader-themes/west-indies
- Gerard A Besson, 'Trinidadians who served in the First World War', The Caribbean History Archives, 2014: caribbeanhistoryarchives.blogspot.com
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- British and Caribbean Veterans Association, 'The West India Regiment': bcva.weebly.com/wir--bwir.html
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission: cwgc.org/find
- East Sussex WW1, 'West Indian Soldiers in Seaford': eastsussexww1.org.uk/west-indian-soldiers-seaford
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Resources

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- Rosalyn Narayan, 'Why did people oppose the creation of the West India Regiments': bl.uk/west-india-regiment/articles/why-did-people-oppose-the-creation-of-the-west-india-regiments
- National Archives of Grenada, Lest We Forget – The British West Indies Regiment: grenadanationalarchives.wordpress.com/2014/01/01/lest-we-forget-the-british-west-indies-regiment
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- 'For the Wounded', 1915: player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-for-the-wounded-1915-online
- 'From Trinidad to Serve the Empire', 1916: youtube.com/watch?v=GnZ6lrA1mH4
- 'Gurkha and British troops during the Third Battle of Gaza, Palestine Front', November 1917: iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060022568
- 'Mutiny', Sweet Patootee: sweetpatootee.co.uk/work/mutiny



ENGLAND

🕒 This image is a photograph taken of an event that was captured in film. Does the footage allow greater understanding or provide a different interpretation to still imagery?

'Lord Mayor of London inspecting Trinidad recruits. Photograph shows British businessman Charles Cheers Wakefield, 1st Viscount Wakefield' (1916).

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division: LC-B2-3677-8

Resources

PROJECTS

Community projects focusing on Black soldiers that have been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund's First World War Then & Now programme since 2014:

- Churches Together in England, Birmingham, *The Contribution of Black African and Caribbean servicemen and servicewomen to WW1*
- Central Africa Refugee Link, Birmingham, *Discovering Soldiers of African and West Indian Origin who Served in WW1*
- Black Voices, Birmingham, *We Will Remember Them*
- Walsall African Caribbean Community Association, Walsall, *A White Man's War? World War One and the Black West Indian People*
- Foothold UK, Coventry, *The role and experience of soldiers of colour in the First World War*
- The Race Equality Centre, Leicester, *Together we won the war*
- Mothers Against Violence, Manchester, *The 1st World War A Black Contribution (WWBC)*
- Writing on the Wall, Liverpool, *Great War to Race Riots - Black Servicemen's Struggle to Survive at Home and Abroad*
- The Street Life Foundation Limited, Liverpool, *The Colour of War, the Untold Heroes of WW1*
- National Museums Liverpool, *Black Families in the First World War - The Liverpool Story*
- Identity on Tyne, Tynemouth, *Beyond the Western Front: The First World War and Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities*
- African Heritage Forum, London, *Caribbean Soldiers on the Western Front*
- Narrative Eye, London, *The Empire needs men; Black Soldiers at the Battle of Somme*
- Community Builders, London, *Black on Both Sides: The Black British and Colonial Contribution to WW1*
- Tottenham Theatre Company, London, *Walter Tull Local Hero*
- Southwark Council, London, *Black Poppies Exhibition; Southwark and the black British First World War heritage*
- The West India Committee, London, *The Caribbean's Great War: The West India Committee's Unique Perspective*
- Preserving Our History And Heritage, London, *Identifying Memorials and Researching the contributions of twenty black WWI servicemen and women in Britain*
- 2nd Chance, London, *So what about the war?*
- Nubian Jak Community Trust Ltd, London, *From Sea to Land and Skies: The Evolution of Black Military Heroes 1914 -1948*
- StrongBack Productions, London, *The history behind Chigger Foot Boys - a play about the Caribbean and WW1*
- Phil Vasili, London, *Walter Tull Heritage and Legacy Project*
- African and Caribbean Memorial, London, *REMEMBERED: The African and Caribbean Commemorative Memorial Project*
- (CACOEU) Caribbean Communities in Europe, London, *Exploring the contribution made by the West Indian men and women to the WW1*
- Hikmat Devon CIC, Exeter, *Commemorating WW1 in Devon through BME eyes*
- Cultural Media Enterprise Limited, Southampton, *New Horizons, They came by sea, Black & minority seaman in the Merchant Navy*

Afterword

History is essentially about stories. ‘Stories,’ as the novelist Ben Okri writes ‘are the secret reservoir of values: change the stories individuals and nations live by and tell themselves and you change the individuals and the nations.’ (Okri, 1996). *Stories of Omission: Conflict and the experience of Black soldiers* can be characterised as a journey, an exploration of what we currently know, but more importantly what stories are still hidden, ignored or disregarded, in the dominant narratives of the First World War. On this journey we met fellow community researchers and activists and where possible have listed their research projects in our Resource List. They have all contributed to what we know about the conflict and its legacy, whether in the Caribbean and Africa in the decades leading to the end of Empire and decolonisation or in today’s Britain. *Stories of Omission*, and other similar projects, is also about the future. As racism and xenophobia return to the centre of Western politics, stories from the archive which challenge received notions of the past need to be heard. Like all good stories once heard, they will be told.

The project was co-designed and co-produced by Recognize Black Heritage & Culture and the Voices of War & Peace WW1 Engagement Centre. A group of volunteers worked with both organisations to carry out the research. The project was captured on film by Sam Lockyer of Iconic Productions.

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TRINIDAD

🕒 Now the Great War was over and Caribbean soldiers had returned home, what did they face next? Poverty, unemployment and unrest, followed by enlistment to fight in the Second World War? Each man had his own story and they mostly remain to be uncovered.

‘Welcoming home troops after war’, Trinidad.

Michael Goldberg Collection, The Alma Jordan Library, The University of the West Indies.





WEST INDIES



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