

Activity 7 How the troops from all over the British Empire contributed to the war effort during World War One.

Some native people were brave men, so brave that some were awarded to bravery medals by the British government. This was the case for Khudadad Khan who won a Victoria Cross fighting for the British in World War One. None of them was born in Britain – or had even been there until the war started- but they were still prepared to risk their lives fighting for Britain. So why did men like Khudadad join up to fight? What contribution did the “soldiers of the empire” bring to the war effort? Indeed, did the Empire help Britain to win WWI?

'Soldiers of empire' during World War One

When World War One broke out in 1914 there was a great rush of young men volunteering in Britain to fight 'for King and Country'. But there was a huge wave of enthusiasm in the Empire too, as thousands of Indians, Canadians, New Zealanders, South Africans, Australians and West Indians decided to 'do their bit' as well. This was lucky for Britain, because when war broke out there were ten times as many soldiers in the German Army as there were in the British Army. The British government had no choice but to use the Empire soldiers.

- ★ Who was Khudadad Khan? Give at least three facts about him.
- ★ Can you think of reasons why men like Khudadad might have joined up to fight for the British?

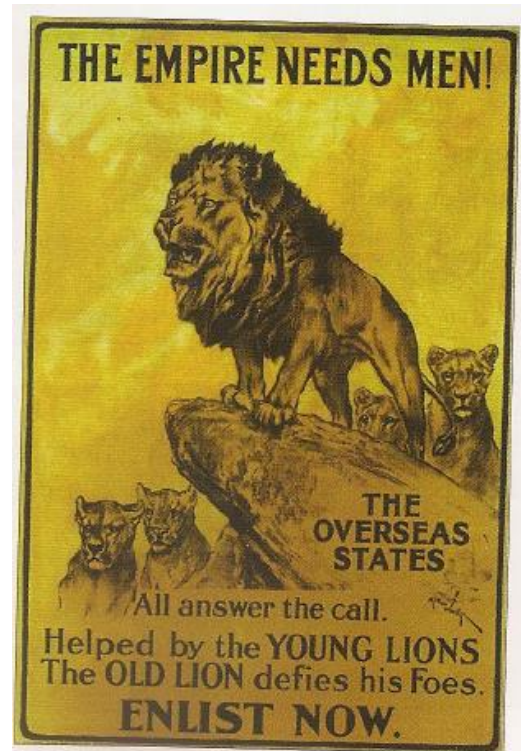


↑ SOURCE A: Khudadad Khan, pictured in the Daily Mirror in 1915. Born in what is now Pakistan, Khan won his VC in October 1914 after he was wounded, fought off a German attack with only his rifle, and managed to get back to the trenches after being left for dead.

Source B



Britain's empire also contributed troops. Around 1.5 million Indians and 15,000 West Indians fought in the British army. Canadian, Australian and New Zealand troops also fought.



Source C: A World War One recruitment poster, sent out to the colonies of the British Empire. Posters sent to India promised 'an easy life', 'good pay' and 'very little danger'! The posters clearly did the trick - by December 1914, one in every three soldiers fighting for Britain in France was From India.

- ★ Look at source C. Write a sentence or two explaining:
 - Who the poster was meant to appeal to;
 - How it tried to do this;
 - how successful you think it was in getting men to fight.

★ Using the following Internet links, try to create your personal World War One recruitment poster that could have been sent to the colonies of the British Empire (or only one of them). Try to imagine an effective drawing, a short motto to encourage native people to enlist.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/learning/resources/first-world-war-recruitment-posters>

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/11-amazing-first-world-war-recruitment-posters>

The number of Empire soldiers fighting in World War One was huge. For example, Canada sent nearly half a million men, Australia sent over 300,000 and New Zealand sent nearly 130,000 - about one-tenth of the entire population of the country. About 200,000 Irishmen served in the British forces too!

‘When Britain is at war, Canada is at war - there is no difference at all.’

📌 **SOURCE D:** *The Prime Minister of Canada in October 1914.*

SOURCE E: *An Australian recruitment poster. The Australians and New Zealanders (known as the ANZacs) fought in some of the toughest fighting of all in World War One - against the Turks in the Gallipoli Campaign, for example.* ➡



📌 **SOURCE F:** *The British West Indies Regiment in 1916. West Indian troops were usually used as ammunition carriers (a very dangerous job), rather than fighting soldiers. Some were unhappy with the 'lack of action' - and many were treated badly whilst in France. One Trinidadian sergeant wrote: 'We are treated neither as Christians nor British citizens, but as West Indian "niggers", without anyone to be interested in or look after us.'*

★ Look at source F and read the caption carefully.

- What sort of job did these men do in the war?

- How were they treated according to the sergeant quoted?

- Can you think of reasons why they were treated this way?

At the end of World War One, Britain's war dead numbered over 700,000 - and the Empire combined had lost over 200,000 men. For example, India lost 64,000 soldiers, Australia and New Zealand lost 67,000 and Canada lost 56,000. And Empire troops were involved in some of the bloodiest campaigns and battles of the entire war - Ypres, the Somme, Gallipoli and Passchendaele. Empire troops also on hundreds of medals during the war, including over 150 Victoria Crosses - the highest bravery award in the British Empire!