

Embassy of India

The Hague

Press Release

November 2, 2017

Photo Exhibition showcasing India's contribution to World War I to be displayed in the City Hall of The Hague from November 13th to 17th, 2017

A photo exhibition showcasing the contribution of Indian soldiers in World War I will be on display at the City Hall of The Hague from November 13, 2017 to November 17, 2017. The exhibition is held in conjunction with Armistice Day (November 12) which is marked across the world with Remembrance functions. In The Hague, the Embassy of India will host a Commonwealth Remembrance Day service at the Westdium Cemetery on behalf of the Commonwealth countries to honour the sacrifices of Commonwealth forces in the First and Second World Wars.

It is a little-known fact that the forces of undivided India played a significant part in the First World War. By one estimate, every sixth soldier sent into the War by the British empire was from the Indian subcontinent. The photo exhibition remembers the Indian soldiers who were killed and wounded in one of the deadliest conflicts in human history and pays tribute to the courage and sacrifice of these soldiers. The photographs narrate the war experiences of the Indian soldiers and also includes photos of newspaper articles, postcards, comics and works of art by the Indian soldiers.

Over 74,000 Indian soldiers lost their lives in World War I in which approximately 1.1 million Indian soldiers participated. India provided Britain with a volunteer army equal in numbers to the combined forces contributed by the dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. The Indian troops fought valiantly on the Western Front as well as in German East Africa, Mesopotamia (now Iraq), Egypt, Palestine and Gallipoli (Turkey).

Indian soldiers faced a lot of hardships during the war. The supplies that were sent with them from India were inadequate in the face of the harsh European winter. The thin khaki drill uniforms left them exposed to the

wind, sleet, and snow. In addition to the searing cold, the techniques of European warfare – snaking trenches with barbed wire, bunkers, and machine gun nests were relatively new to the Indian troops. In Mesopotamia and the Middle East fronts, Indian troops had to contend with harsh climates and dramatic swings between the extreme summer and the bone-chilling winters of the desert. And yet, despite the myriad obstacles, Indian soldiers won accolades for their bravery.

During the war, Indian soldiers were recognized and seen as heroes. Their bravery and contribution in Flanders was exceptional. If Punjabi troops in the Lahore Division hadn't arrived in October and November of 1914 in the Flanders area of Belgium, the Germans would have taken the ports and the Canadian Expeditionary Force would not have landed on the European mainland.

After the war, 9200 Indian soldiers were decorated and 11 Indian soldiers who participated in the war were awarded Britain's highest award for valour, the Victoria Cross, for their conspicuous bravery on the battlefield.

India also contributed to the First World War in the form of 170 million animals, 3700 million tonnes in supplies and cash worth 130 million pounds.

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