

# To The Memory Of Brave Men: The Imperial War Graves Commission And India's Missing Soldiers Of The First World War

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TO THE MEMORY OF BRAVE MEN: THE IMPERIAL WAR GRAVES  
COMMISSION AND INDIA'S MISSING SOLDIERS OF THE FIRST WORLD  
WAR

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the commemoration of Indian soldiers who died during the First World War by the Imperial War Graves Commission, Britain's official government body overseeing all imperial commemoration efforts. For the soldiers of the Indian Army their war experience was split between the Western Front in Europe and Mesopotamia in modern-day Iraq. They were also far more ethnically, religiously, and linguistically diverse than their British and Dominion counterparts. In order to examine how geography, religion, and the imperial relationship affected Britain's commemoration of India's war dead, this study uses the Commission's own records to recreate how the IWGC created its policies regarding Indian soldiers. The result shows that while the Commission made nearly every effort to respect India's war dead, the complexity of their backgrounds hampered these efforts and forced compromises to be made. The geography of the war also forced a clear definition between the memories of Indian soldiers who died in Europe and those who fell in Mesopotamia.

To my mother, who taught me to love history, and my father, who worked so hard to support my dreams.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

“We pray God that some opportunity be given us that we may be able to use our sharp and glittering swords for the destruction of the Germans, and place our names on the tongues of the entire world.” - Mahomed Usuf Khan, Meerut Cavalry Brigade, France, 1916.<sup>1</sup>

On 23 October 1914, the soldiers of the 3rd Lahore Division, I Indian Corps, British Expeditionary Force, reinforced a British defensive line near the towns of La Bassee and Neuve Chapelle, France. By the end of the Battle of La Bassee ten days later over 1,500 Indian soldiers had been killed or wounded along with 15,000 other casualties from British and Commonwealth units.<sup>2</sup> Traveling thousands of miles to Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, the Indian and British soldiers of the Indian Army found themselves involved in the deadliest war in European history to that point; 60,000 of these men did not survive the war.<sup>3</sup> For the men who died far from home without family or community to care for their remains, the Imperial War Graves Commission, the British government body responsible for graves registration and the building of monuments to the Empire’s war dead, became responsible for their burial and memorialization. The cemeteries and memorials built by the Commission following the war act as the enduring legacy of these soldier’s service and sacrifice.

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<sup>1</sup> David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers Letters, 1914-18* (MacMillan, London, 1999), 182.

<sup>2</sup> J. E. Edmonds, *Military Operations France and Belgium, 1914: Antwerp, La Bassée, Armentières, Messines and Ypres October–November 1914* (London: Macmillan, 1925), 205-224

<sup>3</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 4.

Death has always been a central part of almost all works written about the First World War. The scale of this loss is not only significant on its own, but has also had far reaching social and political consequences. The memory of this death and the soldiers who were lost during the war has also been the subject of a growing historiographic discourse. Scholars recognize Paul Fussell's 1975 work *The Great War and Modern Memory* as the foundational work on the memory of World War I. While his analysis focuses on the influence of literature on the formation of memory, it also introduces several dynamics which continue to influence examinations of memory and the memorialization of the Great War. The most influential argument made by Fussell is that instead of World War I leading to a demythologized world, "the movement was towards myth, towards a revival of the cultic, the mythical, the sacrificial, the prophetic, the sacramental, and the universally significant."<sup>4</sup> In his 1990 work *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* George L. Mosse expands upon Fussell's argument for myth and examines what he calls the "Myth of War Experience." This myth was constructed both privately by the veterans themselves as well as publicly by government agencies such as national burial commissions. This myth was based on the glory of war and transformed the war experience into something that was meaningful and sacred.<sup>5</sup> In this way the memory of the past is reshaped into a form which fits into the context of the present. Though both of these works see myth as central to Great War memory, both also fail to examine the effect of this on colonial soldiers and confine their analysis to Britain.

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<sup>4</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 142.

<sup>5</sup> George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 6-7.



Mosse's argument is not universally accepted, however, and Adrian Gregory offers an alternative in *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919-1946*. In this work Gregory argues that the memory of the war was constantly changing and shaped by the events of the inter-war period.<sup>6</sup> Looking to contrast war commemoration in Britain from the other nations which fought the war, Gregory argues that the most important shaper of memory is language. Ritual, tropes, and rhetoric shaped a public discourse which defined the memory of the war. This public discourse overshadowed the personal memories of those who lived through the war which were shared privately.<sup>7</sup> Language is also central to *Memory, Masculinity and National Identity in British Visual Culture, 1914-1930: A Study of Unconquerable Manhood* by Gabriel Koureas. Koureas argues that collective memory and masculinity both have contested meanings and that examining war memorials allows for an understanding of the power relations which existed within male society in inter-war Britain. He also challenges assertions that war memory was an almost universal construction. Where Gregory argues for the dominant role of language in the construction of collective memory, Koureas states that this very language is an aesthetic of the upper and middle classes. This is the language of memorials, speeches, and commemoration. These very things not only bring about closure, but work to impose a new and more ordered perception of war over the reality of chaos and loss.<sup>8</sup> Indian, South African, or other colonial soldiers are absent from these works and their memory and language is ignored.

While the works above all examine the memory of World War I, and many the memory of the dead, few actually engage with the role cemeteries and memorials played in this memory.

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<sup>6</sup> Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day, 1919-1946* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-7.

<sup>8</sup> Gabriel Koureas, *Memory, Masculinity and National Identity in British Visual Culture, 1914-1930: A Study of Unconquerable Manhood* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 2-3.

One of the works which does focus on these sites is Bart Ziino's 2007 book *A Distant Grief: Australians, War Graves and the Great War*. In examining the role of the Imperial War Graves Commission in constructing these sites of grieving, Ziino states that it "produced a testament of care in the cemeteries [it] created, if not the testament to Empire its founders also envisaged."<sup>9</sup> Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* also examines the process of grief following the war. In his examination of war graves and memorials Winter is more concerned with the aesthetic qualities and these sites rather than their influence on memory. Cemeteries are described as the "repository of remarkable commemorative art" and the colonies are only mentioned in reference to the previous architectural work of Sir Edwin Lutyens in New Delhi.<sup>10</sup> Both the Imperial War Graves Commission and the Indian Army are mentioned once and only in passing. Ignoring any actual analysis of their place in the grieving process, Winter simply uses colonial issues as footnotes to a larger argument.

There are few works that directly examine the Commission and those that do are often meant for general audiences. Works such as David Crane's *Empires of the Dead: How One Man's Vision Led to the Creation of WWI's War Graves* and *British and Commonwealth War Cemeteries* by Julie Summers were published as general histories of the Commission and offer little in the way of theory. Works which do offer more extensive analysis such as Philip Longworth's *The Unending Vigil: The History of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission* are wide ranging histories which cover the entire history of the Commission through both world wars. Memory theory and analysis is largely absent from these works. They also lack almost any

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<sup>9</sup> Bart Ziino, *A Distant Grief: Australians, War Graves and the Great War* (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2007), 190.

<sup>10</sup> Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 78-116.

examination of the treatment of colonial soldiers and the effect of their burial and commemoration on their memory. While simple explanations of colonial monuments or burials are mentioned, they are rarely longer than a page in length and lack any real analysis.

When historians examine the colonial memory of World War I directly it is most often in articles on very specific subjects. Bill Nasson has examined the South African National War Memorial and the ways in which it excludes black African support soldiers, is largely Christianized, and ultimately became overshadowed by the legacy of Apartheid.<sup>11</sup> Peter Stanley also examines colonial memory in *Die in Battle, Do not Despair: The Indians on Gallipoli, 1915*. Largely remembered as part of the ANZAC legacy, Stanley explains the limited memory of Indian participation at Gallipoli through memorials and burial practices. Although over 60,000 members of the Indian Army died in nearly every theater of the war, their graves are largely absent from the official and unofficial cemeteries found at nearly every battlefield. Stanley explains this by noting that the graves of Muslim soldiers would have been left undisturbed and that those of Hindus and Sikhs would have been exhumed, cremated, and their ashes spread in appropriate areas. Memorials to Indians who served at Gallipoli are also largely non-existent except for one erected in Patiala. Because “[m]emorials and cemeteries now dictate much of how visitors understand the campaign,” the memory of Indian soldiers at Gallipoli has suffered.<sup>12</sup>

Although Great War memory is the subject of a growing historiographic debate, the role of Indian soldiers in this memory has been largely ignored. Even fewer historians have examined British commemoration of India’s dead and missing soldiers of the First World War. This is

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<sup>11</sup> Bill Nasson, “Delville Wood and South African Great War Commemoration,” *The English Historical Review* 119, no. 480 (Feb. 2004): 57-86.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Stanley, *Die in Battle, Do not Despair: The Indians on Gallipoli, 1915* (Birmingham: Helion and Company, 2015), 283-302.

surprising as the theory and models used in many of the works above lend themselves well to an analysis of Indian soldiers and their commemoration. The government memorialization examined by Mosse, the inter-war formation of memory argued for by Gregory, the importance of language noted by Koureas, and the influence of religious burial rites on the inclusion of soldiers in cemeteries are all highly relevant to any analysis of the IWGC's memorialization of Indian soldiers. The goal of this thesis is to combine these methods in order to fill a historiographic gap that leaves the commemoration of India's war dead, specifically its missing soldiers, by the British government unexamined.

When the First World War began in July of 1914, the countries involved did not yet realize the massive scale it would take on. As it progressed, however, it became clear that the Great War would take place on a scale unseen before in Europe. As the war escalated, it began to push the manpower reserves of the belligerents to the breaking point. In order to help fill the ranks of their armies, the great nations of Europe looked to their colonial empires. For the British this meant drawing soldiers from across the world including from India, where the Indian Army could draw upon hundreds of thousands of young men ready for service in Europe.<sup>13</sup> Originally under the control of the British East India Company, the British army in India transferred to the control of the British government after the Rebellion of 1857. Made up of a mix of British and Indian soldiers, by 1879 the army numbered almost 200,000 men.<sup>14</sup> Intended to ensure civil order within India itself and to protect the frontier from Russian and Ottoman attack, the British government used the Indian Army in limited numbers outside of India prior to World War I.

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<sup>13</sup> Dewitt C. Ellinwood and S. D. Pradhan, eds. *India and World War I* (Columbia, Mon.: South Asia Books, 1978), 12.

<sup>14</sup> Pradeep P. Barua, *Gentlemen of the Raj: The Indian Army Officer Corps, 1817-1949* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 2-3

During the nineteenth century, the British government deemed its soldiers unnecessary, or perhaps unwanted, in both the Boer War and the Crimean War.<sup>15</sup> The sheer scale and lethality of the First World War changed this overnight. The stagnant nature of trench warfare and the extensive use of new technologies such as modern artillery and machine guns resulted in soldiers being killed and wounded at an astonishing rate. On the first day of the Battle of the Somme alone the British army suffered almost 60,000 wounded and 20,000 killed.<sup>16</sup> An all-volunteer force recruiting nearly 20,000 men every year, mostly from North Western India, the Indian Army provided Britain with manpower it desperately needed. With a strength of 155,000 when war broke out in Europe in 1914, over 1.27 million men served in the Indian Army by the end of the war.<sup>17</sup>

The 60,000 soldiers of the Indian Army who died during the war made up only part of the nearly one million soldiers from across the British Empire who gave their lives during the war. In total, over nine million soldiers from all sides died during the four-year conflict.<sup>18</sup> Millions more civilians shared their fate.<sup>19</sup> Death on this scale not only changed the demographics of Europe, but the very way that it viewed death and commemorated those who died. Bart Ziino, when discussing the Australian war experience, describes the war as “a crucial moment in western cultures of death and mourning” that “did not simply *create* new ways of mourning or induce rejection of older forms. Rather, it induced more focused attempts to conduct familiar

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<sup>15</sup> Ellinwood and Pradhan, *India and World War 1*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> G. J. Meyer, *A World Undone: The Story of the Great War 1914 to 1918* (New York: Delta, 2006), 447.

<sup>17</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 1-4.

<sup>18</sup> Meyer, *A World Undone*, 7.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 705.

forms of mourning despite unfamiliar forms of death.”<sup>20</sup> Due to the scale of death produced by the war, the British government made the decision not to repatriate the bodies of fallen soldiers. Instead, the British government buried or memorialized these soldiers near where they fell, never to return home to their families. For the British Empire’s war dead, the ground they fought and died for became their eternal resting place allowing for a new form of memorialization not seen before in war.

Although British dead did not return home, they remained forever at rest in the cemeteries and memorials built by the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) following the war. In the years after the war, the IWGC constructed over 1,850 cemeteries and memorials that contain the remains or names of over one million soldiers who died during the conflict. The memorial at the Menin Gate in Belgium alone memorializes over 55,000 soldiers from across Britain’s Empire.<sup>21</sup> For the Indian soldiers who died during the war, the memorials at Menin Gate in Belgium, Neuve Chapelle in France, and Basra in modern day Iraq, stand as the primary memorials to their service during the war. The IWGC’s cemeteries and memorials act not only as testaments to the lives of individual soldiers and as places of mourning for their families, but stand as places of grief and bereavement for entire nations.<sup>22</sup> The crosses that mark their graves and the memorials that list their names stand as the most visible reminders of not only the death caused by the war, but of the war itself. In this way, these memorials have played a central role in forming both individual and collective memory of the war.

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<sup>20</sup> Ziino, *A Distant Grief*, 2.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

The actions of the IWGC following the war, and over the years since, have constructed and shaped a large part of the British public's, and even the world's, collective memory of World War I and the soldiers of the British Empire who served and died. The creation of memory is not a one-time event, but rather a process that is never truly complete. While individuals who lived through the war created their own personal memories of that period, these same memories could not help but be influenced by society. Lynn Abrams explains this dynamic by stating that "individual memories are recalled using the language and frameworks deemed acceptable or understandable in society or within the group with which the individual identifies."<sup>23</sup> The memories of individuals are "reformed" to better fit into a larger "grand narrative." This process of transformation is known as "social memory" and sees memories as "particularly relevant when they are articulated; *shared* memories, indeed the sharing process itself, that is to say the production of spoken or written narratives about the past, will take form within the framework of the meaning given them by the group inside which they are told."<sup>24</sup> The concept that individuals and organizations share the memories most important to them is central to this dynamic. This process of sharing then creates a collective memory that is an amalgamation of the most important memories of society. Because we have now entered a period when those who lived through the Great War have all passed away, it is only historical memory that remains. Historical memory is a "learned historical experience" for those generations who live after an event or period has occurred.<sup>25</sup> The cemeteries and memorials built by the IWGC now act as physical representations of the men who served and died during the Great War.

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<sup>23</sup> Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 96.

<sup>24</sup> James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992), 88.

<sup>25</sup> Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 100-101.

Geography also played a crucial element in shaping the memory of India's war dead. Many Indians viewed the war as a distant event with little impact on their daily lives.<sup>26</sup> While the families whose loved ones served abroad most certainly felt a stronger connection to the war than the general public, geography still influenced this connection. Rather than being recruited from areas across India, the vast majority of Indians who served in the army came from the North Western areas of the country including Punjab, North-West Frontier, and Uttar Pradesh. The British conception of martial races that believed those Indians living in the North West were capable soldiers, and those from the south and east as being effete, was directly responsible for this geographic division in recruitment.<sup>27</sup> This geographic division meant that while most Indians already felt distanced from the war, those who lived in the North West experienced a stronger connection to the war through their family members who served.

But where Indian soldiers died also produced a critical influence on how the British government memorialized and remembered them. The IWGC reluctantly made a postwar decision to make a critical distinction between memorials to Indian soldiers erected within Europe and those located in other theaters of the war. Central to this distinction is the difference between meticulous graves registration and record-keeping efforts in Europe and the haphazard character they took on in Mesopotamia. Since these memorials contained the inscriptions of all missing soldier's names as a central element of their design, poorly kept records in Mesopotamia made it nearly impossible to accurately list the names of all missing Indians. Working against fast-approaching deadlines and with little time to correct the lists of the dead, the IWGC decided to simply list most Indian dead as part of a statistic. Panels on memorials commemorating Indian

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<sup>26</sup> Ellinwood and Pradhan, *India and World War I*, 1-18.

<sup>27</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 2.



units therefore only give a number for how many Indian enlisted died or went missing during the war, while all others are listed by name. Because of this, nearly every single Indian soldier who died in Europe has his name engraved in stone alongside his British counterparts. For those who died elsewhere, except for Indian officers and NCOs, they are listed as part of a simple number, reduced to a statistic, their individual experiences and sacrifices erased from the memory of the war.<sup>28</sup>

What cannot be forgotten is that this memorialization process happened within the context of the British Empire. India did not enter the First World War for self-defense or self-interest, but did so in response to the wartime needs of its metropole.<sup>29</sup> Britain's need for manpower increased as the war progressed, and it sent units from across the Empire to every theater of the war in response. The largest combined effort the Empire had seen, World War I proved to many the strength and unity of the British Empire.<sup>30</sup> Many historians, including Ziino, have pointed out how the IWGC, and its director Sir Fabian Ware, sought to build memorials not only to the Empire's war dead, but also to the Empire itself.<sup>31</sup> This effort to memorialize the Empire then turned the personal tragedy of a soldier's death into a national one. Mosse adds to this argument by stating that the war precipitated "'a new stage in the history of nationalism' in which the state 'nationalised the dead' through the creation of mass and uniform cemeteries."<sup>32</sup> This nationalization makes it important to examine how the British government chose to

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<sup>28</sup> Lt. Col. Lord Arthur Browne, Letter to Under Secretary of State India Office, 14 March 1924. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 627, Item WG 219/19 Pt. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Ellinwood and Pradhan, *India and World War 1*, 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> Ziino, *A Distant Grief*, 107.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

memorialize the Empire's war dead. Soldiers from places in the Empire such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand could be commemorated in much the same way as British soldiers, that is as white Christians. India's war dead posed a unique challenge though. Non-white and belonging to multiple religions, predominantly Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism, these 60,000 dead provide an opportunity to examine how the IWGC viewed India's war contributions, its place within the Empire, and the recognition its war dead deserved compared to those of Britain and its Dominions. The accommodations it made in order to respect Indian soldiers' religion, language, burial rites, and accomplishments will be at the heart of this analysis.

In order to examine how geography, religion, and the imperial relationship affected Britain's commemoration of India's war dead, I chose to examine how the IWGC created its policies regarding Indian soldiers. In order to accomplish this, I visited the now Commonwealth War Graves Commission archive located at its headquarters in Maidenhead, United Kingdom. Relevant folders were selected from the archives index and were provided by an archivist upon request. These folders cover a wide range of topics including "Indian Graves in Gallipoli and Asia Minor," "Memorials to the Missing: Mesopotamia Part 1 & 2," "Indian Graves: France and Belgium," and even "Correspondence: Lord Hugh Cecil and Lt. Col. Sir F. Kenyon." These folders cover chronologies ranging from less than a year to over ten years in some instances. The documents in these folders are organized in reverse chronological order as new documents were added on top of existing ones. Relevant documents from each folder, numbering over 1,000 pages, were then digitally photographed and indexed by folder with a short description of each document. These documents are mostly made up of personal correspondence, memoranda, official reports, and news clippings. The most common documents by far are the personal correspondence between high level members of the Commission. These documents allowed for

the Commission's internal discussions on policy creation and memorial planning over time to be reconstructed. The result is a detailed look at how the IWGC approached the intricacies of Indian religions and burial rites, the complex efforts to create respectful yet practical policies concerning India's war dead, and the eventual effect these decisions had on the memory of these fallen soldiers. While conducting my research the archivists at the Commission archives were incredibly helpful and enthusiastic about supporting my research efforts.

## CONFLICT, EMPIRE, AND THE TURN IN BRITISH WAR MEMORIALIZATION

“Tell my mother not to go wandering madly because her son, my brother, is dead. To be born and to die is God’s order. Someday we must die, sooner or later, and if I die here, who will remember me? It is a fine thing to die far from home. A saint said this, and, as he was a good man, it must be true.” - A wounded Sikh to his father, January 1915.<sup>33</sup>

Death has always been a defining factor of war as well as its enduring legacy. From the earliest conflicts, society has sought to make sense of death in war, to give it meaning beyond the spoils of victory. For centuries, this process remained a private one where families or small communities mourned the loss of their loved ones. While the deaths of individual soldiers were private tragedies, the credit for victories belonged to the upper classes that lead the army and benefited most from its success. The process of memorializing these conflicts often excluded the common soldier, their names remembered only by their fellow soldiers, their family and friends, and written down in any documents that may have recorded their sacrifice. Only recently did the idea of building monuments to the common soldiers who die during war, or even simply listing their names, become a common practice. Often buried in mass graves following battles, common soldiers received no lasting monument, no individual graves, and no place in the memory of war.

This emphasis on the upper-classes alone gradually began to change and the rise of nationalism in Europe created a profound change in the way society viewed the accomplishments of their fellow citizens. Seeing themselves as part of a national community, these citizens felt a

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<sup>33</sup> David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 30.

shared responsibility for the success and security of the nation as a whole. This new, shared identity also transformed the triumphs and tragedies of individuals into those of the entire nation. For this reason, war memorials became as much about re-enforcing patriotism and the imagined community of nation, or in Britain's case Empire, as they are about commemorating war dead.<sup>34</sup> Tombs of Unknown Soldiers and Cenotaphs are often the most visible representations of this dynamic. Rather than memorializing the death of individuals, they represent the willingness of the ideal citizen to sacrifice his life for the nation.<sup>35</sup> The massive wars of the Twentieth Century reinforced this ideal and brought about a new willingness of citizens to die for their country, an act often seen as the "ultimate sacrifice."<sup>36</sup>

Understanding how Britain changed the way it memorialized its war dead over time is essential to understanding how the First World War influenced views of war, death, and Empire. British wars prior to World War I were not truly imperial efforts and produced little impact on imperial unity and identity. These wars also did not produce the magnitude of death necessary to prompt a mass memorialization effort led by the British government. The First World War, however, represented a massive war effort by every corner of Britain's empire resulting in the deaths of nearly one million soldiers. This presented the Imperial War Graves Commission and the British Government with an opportunity to build a monument to the Empire itself. It would also be its last chance. Although the Commission built cemeteries and monuments to the Empire's dead of the Second World War, the decolonization of the British Empire that soon

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<sup>34</sup> Andrew Lambert, "'The Glory of England': Nelson, Trafalgar and the Meaning of Victory," *The Great Circle* 28, no. 1 (2006): 3-12.

<sup>35</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 9-36.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-154.

followed ended these efforts for future wars. The experiences of the Second World War furthered the formation of unique national identities for Britain's Dominions. For India, the growing influence of independence movements at home eventually lead to Partition and Independence a few years after the end of the Second World War.

Until these World Wars, however, British war memorialization remained a private effort independent of the government and focused primarily on the nation's military leaders. Statues that depicted great men who led their armies to victory remained the most prominent form of war memorial throughout British history. Whether standing or mounted on horseback, these artifacts act as symbols of the victories these men won. The most famous of these monuments in Britain, the statue of Vice Admiral Horatio Nelson, posthumous victor of the Battle of Trafalgar, sits perched high above the square that bears that battle's name. At the base of his column, guarded by four iconic British lions, are four bronze reliefs showing the great victories of Nelson's life. The battles of Cape St. Vincent, the Nile, Copenhagen, and Trafalgar cost the British navy over 4,000 dead and wounded with 458 of these sailors dying at Trafalgar alone. Absent from the column are the names of the other ranks, the common enlisted men, the monument reserved only for the great man and his victories at sea.<sup>37</sup> Countless other statues of kings, generals, and admirals dot the landscape of Britain's cities, men who won their victories through the sacrifices of the common soldiers and sailors who served under them.

Even if these leaders held great respect for their men, they did not plan and build the monuments to the wars they fought. Nelson's death at Trafalgar kept him from providing any comment on the form of his memorial. Instead, this monument was planned and built in the

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<sup>37</sup> "Adm H Nelson - Nelsons Column," *Imperial War Museums*, Accessed 25 July 2017, <http://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/11551>.

standard British form. Sponsored by a large group of peers and politicians, designed by participants in a contest, and funded through public subscription, this statue serves as a collective expression of British naval power. Nelson's Column therefore represents how memorials increasingly began to show those they honored as symbols of their nation's exceptionalism. Nearly any man who advanced his nation's prestige and power became worthy of being memorialized.

In Britain during the nineteenth century, the building of monuments represented the growing fortunes of a nation spearheading the industrial revolution at home and rapidly expanding the world's largest empire abroad. In the dearth of European wars that occurred during the period known as the *Pax Britannica*, Britain looked for new heroes to memorialize. It found them in the numerous scientists and inventors that helped to start the industrial revolution and put Britain at the forefront of scientific and economic achievement. Britain commemorated men such as Isambard Kingdom Brunel, James Watt, Robert Stephenson, and Richard Arkwright across the nation with statues, plaques, engravings, and other honorifics. While it did grant knighthoods and other honors to these men, the British government made little, if any, effort to build the physical memorials to their accomplishments. Instead, private efforts sponsored by professional associations and local governments, and funded almost exclusively through public subscriptions, created these memorials. The technological and economic advancements the men these monuments commemorate created just as much, if not more, of an influence on Britain's fortunes than any military victory. Individually, they stood as icons of personal achievement,

taken as whole they showed the scientific and economic triumph of the British nation and Empire.<sup>38</sup>

While Britain emphasized peaceful, scientific pursuits, during this period, it still waged some wars; however, and Britain sent her armies abroad in both the Crimean War in 1853 and the Second Boer War in 1899. In one of these wars, Britain joined an allied effort to halt Russian expansion into Crimea and the Balkans, while in the other it fought a war against imperial rivals in South Africa. The first major war for Britain in almost forty years, and costing nearly 20,000 lives, it is not surprising that a monument to the victory over Russia in Crimea was erected in the middle of London.<sup>39</sup> Located in St. James and designed by John Bell, construction of the memorial ended in 1861. The Crimean War Memorial features three members of the Guard Regiments with a female personification of honor behind them. The statues themselves, cast from the bronze of Russian cannons captured during the siege of Sevastopol, serve as a monument to the accomplishments of the British soldiers who captured them. But this memorial also shows a shift away from the great men that dominated earlier memorials to a more inclusive commemoration of death. On one side of the Crimean War Memorial is a plaque that reads “To the memory of 2152 Officers, Non-Com. Officers and Privates of the BRIGADE OF GUARDS who fell during the war with Russia in 1854-1856. Erected by their comrades.”<sup>40</sup> Meant to commemorate a single elite unit, this monument represents a new focus on the individual dead of war in place of the Admirals and Generals who acted as heroic representations of Britannia

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<sup>38</sup> Christine MacLeod, *Heroes of Invention: Technology, Liberalism and British Identity, 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1-26.

<sup>39</sup> Anonymous, “Crimean War. Chapter 1. Loss of Life in Different Ways,” *Advocate of Peace: New Series* 1, no.7 (July 1869): 106-107.

<sup>40</sup> “Guard’s Crimean War Memorial,” *The Imperial War Museums*, Accessed July 25, 2017. <http://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/11608>.



herself. Although the names of individual soldiers are still absent, the Crimean War Memorial acts as a small representation of the cost in lives of Britain's victory in Crimea.

Almost forty years later, the Second Boer War matched the Crimean War for the amount of death it produced in the British, and this time Imperial, army. Soldiers from Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and British Ceylon, served in South Africa with more than 20,000 dying during the conflict.<sup>41</sup> Despite this, no one built a grand monument to the victory or even to the dead of the war in London. Instead, the British people commemorated the Second Boer War locally across Britain with numerous small, privately commissioned, memorials. Located in churches, parks, and other public locations, these small memorials focus almost exclusively on the men from these communities who died serving the Empire in South Africa. They follow an almost standard form. Whether statues of soldiers in their iconic pith helmets, bronze plaques, or engravings in stone, nearly all of these monuments prominently feature a list of names for all those from the local community who died during the war - the fathers and sons of the community who never walked the streets or attended church services again. The monuments to the Second Boer War may not have been national or even imperial in character, but they contain a personal significance to those who paid the subscriptions to fund their building.<sup>42</sup>

Another form of memorialization for the Second Boer War did not begin with veterans associations or local governments, but with the efforts of the prestigious public schools whose young alumni made up a significant portion of the army's officer corps.<sup>43</sup> Overseen by

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<sup>41</sup> Marvin Rintala, "Made in Birmingham: Lloyd George, Chamberlain, and the Boer War," *Biography* 11, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 124-139.

<sup>42</sup> E. W. McFarland, "Commemoration and the South African War in Scotland, 1900-1910," *The Scottish Historical Review* 89, Part 2 (October 2010): 194-223.

<sup>43</sup> A British public school is similar to an elite private school in the United States.

prominent alumni and funded through subscriptions advertised in yearbooks and alumni magazines, these memorials often had more to do with school pride than honoring the dead. Taking the form of plaques or shrines in the schools' chapels or sanctuaries, these memorials reflected the school's own values of service and a chivalric ideal of sacrifice in war. Less about assuaging grief, these ceremonies were used to reinforce a martial spirit many in the upper classes felt had been lost.<sup>44</sup> This almost romantic, chivalric, and even medieval view of war and military service was later reflected in the monuments and literature of the First World War.<sup>45</sup>

The Crimean and Second Boer wars were major conflicts for the British nation, but still failed to reach a scale that demanded the government to directly take part in memorialization efforts. The approximately 40,000 men who died during these wars represented less than .2% of the British population in 1858.<sup>46</sup> While these losses are far from insignificant, they still did not bring about a change in how Britain commemorated its war dead. These losses did, however, bring about a new awareness of the lethality of modern war and the military and medical community in Britain began to look towards the next European war and try to predict how advancing military technologies and tactics would affect casualty rates. The British Medical Journal highlighted the effect of technology on casualty rates with an article based on Balkan War casualty rates that predicted 1.5 million casualties in the first month of a modern war

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<sup>44</sup> Peter Donaldson, "The Commemoration of the South African War (1899-1902) in British Public Schools," *History and Memory* 25, no. 2 (July, 2006): 32-65.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 122-167.

<sup>46</sup> Charles M. Willich and E.T. Scargill, "Tables Relating to The State of The Population of Great Britain at The Census of 1851, With a Comparative View, at the Different Ages, of The Population of France; Also a Comparative Return of Births and Deaths, 1838-1854," *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 21, no. 3 (September 1858) : 298.

between just two Great Powers.<sup>47</sup> Although they ultimately proved to be overestimates, these studies proved that at least Britain's medical community looked towards the next European conflict with trepidation.

Up until this point, the Indian Army almost exclusively operated within India itself. From its earliest incarnations as an arm of the British East India Company the Indian Army existed to ensure social order and support British rule. The Indian Mutiny of 1857 proved to the British that a native army in India could also be the greatest threat to its rule. When the British began use of new greased cartridges for the army's rifles, many Indian soldiers refused to use them on religious grounds, suspecting that the British used animal fats in the production of the grease. Overly harsh punishment of those who refused to use the new cartridges sparked an uprising in the Bengal Army near Meerut that soon spread to units throughout India.<sup>48</sup> The British government and its loyal Indian allies put down the rebellion only after months of brutal fighting. The battle to retake Delhi alone resulted in 2,000 British dead, as well as an equal number of loyal Indian soldiers, and nearly 20,000 rebels.<sup>49</sup> When it ended, the rebellion shattered British optimism in India and painted Indian soldiers as a dangerous threat to British rule. The British government then unified the Indian Armies and placed them under direct control of the crown to reduce the chances of an uprising happening again.

In the years following the Mutiny, the idea of mobilizing the Indian army, equipping it with modern weapons and training, and deploying it in support of a European war seemed nearly

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<sup>47</sup> Unknown, "Casualties in Modern War," *The British Medical Journal* 2803, Vol. 2 (Sept. 19, 1914): 514-515.

<sup>48</sup> Denis Judd, *The Lion and the Tiger: The Rise and Fall of the British Raj, 1600-1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 70-90.

<sup>49</sup> Sanjay Yadav, "The Indian Mutiny of 1857: Why Britain Succeeded and the Rebels Failed," *Journal of Asian History* 28, no. 2 (1994): 141.

unthinkable. It became even more unlikely that it would serve with distinction and its dead be memorialized alongside British, Dominion, and colonial counterparts in cemeteries and monuments following that war. Decades of loyal service following the Mutiny and the rapidly expanding scope of the war on the Western Front left the British military with little choice. For the first time in its history, the Indian Army mobilized for a large scale war and deployed outside the subcontinent en masse. It went on to serve throughout the war in multiple theaters and its soldiers received numerous awards including multiple Victoria Crosses - Britain's highest award for valor.<sup>50</sup>

The general peace that Europe enjoyed for almost 60 years was shattered on June 28, 1914. During an official visit to Sarajevo meant to improve ties between the Austro-Hungarian government and its restless Balkan holdings, Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie made their way along streets crowded with onlookers in an open-topped automobile. Among the crowd hid several assassins connected to the "Black Hand," a secret military organization intent on uniting all Serbian peoples under a single, independent government. When one of the agents threw a bomb at the motorcade, the Archduke himself batted it away with the resulting explosion injuring several passengers in the following car. The Archduke then ignored advice to retire to a safe location and insisted on visiting the injured at the local hospital. When his car then stopped after taking a wrong turn, twenty-year-old Gavrilo Princip stepped from the crowd, leveled a pistol at the Archduke and fired two shots. By 11 am, both Franz Ferdinand and his wife died from their wounds.<sup>51</sup> Almost one month later, Austria-Hungary declared war on

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<sup>50</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 3.

<sup>51</sup> Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (New York: Harper Collins, 2014), 367-376.

Serbia and Europe's complicated system of alliances, long standing political posturing, and overly rigid plans for military mobilization led to the First World War.

The German army's use of Belgium as a gateway into Northern France became the final provocation that pushed a reluctant British Empire to join the war on August 4, 1914.<sup>52</sup> By August 7 the first units of the British Expeditionary Force left for France and within ten days the entire force of 160,000 men had been mobilized.<sup>53</sup> They arrived exactly where the French needed them. Germany intended its thrust through Belgium to begin a great flanking maneuver meant to bypass the majority of French defenses and quickly capture Paris. Combined with the men of the BEF, the French forces defending Paris outnumbered the advancing Germans enough to challenge their advance. The French and British halted the German offensive just miles from the French capital in the Battle of the Marne.<sup>54</sup> As 1914 ended, so did maneuver warfare; the BEF dug into trench lines stretching from Ypres south to near Albert where the British and French lines met. Taken as a whole, the complex system of trenches occupied by the British stretched for nearly 6,000 miles if laid end to end. The BEF occupied these lines for the remainder of the war.<sup>55</sup>

As the war in France rapidly escalated, it soon became apparent that the original 160,000 soldiers of the BEF would not be enough to fight a war in Europe, Africa, Mesopotamia, and the Mediterranean. In order to address this deficiency, the British government drew upon the full strength of its Empire. Nearly every region of the Empire began providing financial, logistical,

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<sup>52</sup> Clark, *The Sleepwalkers*, 541-554.

<sup>53</sup> Bryce Poe II, "British Military Reforms, 1902-1914," *Military Affairs* 31, no. 3 (Autumn, 1967): 131-138.

<sup>54</sup> Anika Mombauer, "The Battle of the Marne: Myths and Realities of Germany's "Fateful Battle," *The Historian* 68, no. 2 (Winter 2006): 747-769.

<sup>55</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 39-40.

and military support to the war effort. The British Dominions and India helped to bear a large portion of this burden as well as adding their extensive manpower reserves and military forces to the fight. By the end of the war, over five and a half million British soldiers had served in uniform.<sup>56</sup> Soldiers from across the Empire joined them with over 620,000 Canadians<sup>57</sup> and 331,000 Australians<sup>58</sup> making up the largest contingents from the Dominions. The actions of the Canadians and Australians not only helped to win the war, but also worked to define their national identities. The Canadian success at Vimy Ridge and the ultimately unsuccessful efforts of Australian and New Zealand soldiers to capture the Gallipoli peninsula are now central to the grand narrative of the British Empire during the war.

The significant contributions of India and its armed forces are often less prominent in this narrative of the British Empire during the First World War. Whereas Dominions such as Canada and Australia maintained independent and sovereign governments within the British Empire, India remained a colonial possession ruled by the Raj, Britain's colonial government. Over 1.3 million Indian Soldiers served in nearly every theater of the war, making up by far the largest Imperial force deployed during the conflict.<sup>59</sup> These soldiers also experienced triumph and tragedy alongside their Dominion and colonial counterparts. Today Gallipoli, in present day Turkey, is remembered primarily as an Australian and New Zealand soldiers (ANZACs) experience. Fifteen thousand Indian soldiers fought alongside the British, French, and ANZACs

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<sup>56</sup> G. J. Meyer, *A World Undone: The Story of the Great War, 1914-1918* (New York: Delta, 2007), 219.

<sup>57</sup> Timothy C. Winegard, *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press), 6.

<sup>58</sup> Alistair Thomson, *ANZAC Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 25.

<sup>59</sup> Ellinwood, Dewitt C. and S.D. Pradhan, eds. *India and World War I* (Columbia, Mon.: South Asia Books, 1978), 143.

who fought to capture the peninsula.<sup>60</sup> During the great offensives on the Western Front, often remembered as British and French experiences, Indian divisions took part in the battles of Neuve Chapelle, Festubert, and Loos as well as defending over seven miles of the frontline.<sup>61</sup> The Indian Army also took a dominant role in the Mesopotamian campaign and experienced the tragic siege at Kut-Al-Amara, where over 13,000 soldiers of the Indian Army surrendered after a five month siege by Ottoman forces, and the triumphal capture of Baghdad in 1917.<sup>62</sup> Because of this, the Mesopotamian Campaign became the defining Indian experience of the war. As significant as the Indian efforts in Mesopotamia were, they are still often overshadowed in the collective memory of the war by the exploits of T.E. Lawrence in the deserts of Arabia. In every theater of the war India and its army made significant contributions to the Empire's war effort, yet the memory of these contributions remains secondary to those of Britain and the Dominions. Examining these contributions and the ways chosen by the British government to honor them can provide meaningful insight into The Raj and its memory.

If not for its imperial relationship with Britain, India would likely never have entered the war. Much like Canada and Australia, India was geographically and even politically isolated from the events in Europe that led to war.<sup>63</sup> The Indian Army also took part in few major deployments outside of the subcontinent until the First World War. Even during the Second Boer War where soldiers from across the Empire served, the British government avoided using non-white soldiers at all costs and only allowed Indians already living in Natal to volunteer for

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<sup>60</sup> Peter Stanley, *Die in Battle, Do not Despair: The Indians on Gallipoli, 1915* (Birmingham: Helion and Company, 2015), 283-302.

<sup>61</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 3

<sup>62</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, *The Basra Memorial*, WG 219/19 Pt. 2, 1930.

<sup>63</sup> Ellinwood and Pradhan, *India and World War 1*, 2-3.

service and fight during the war.<sup>64</sup> Just twelve years later, the scale and ferocity of the First World War, apparent even from its earliest stages, forced the British government to ignore past prejudices and draw upon the full strength of its Empire. As the “jewel” in the crown of that Empire and by far its largest possession, India represented a war asset that could not be ignored. Although India’s economy eventually contributed nearly 173,000 animals, 3.7 million tons of supplies and hundreds of millions of Pound sterling in war contributions and financing, its most significant contribution remained the 1.3 million soldiers it sent to fight in Europe, Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East.<sup>65</sup>

As significant as these contributions were, not all segments of Indian society initially served in the Army. The average Indian soldier who fought during the First World War was a product of the British recruitment policies based on the idea of “martial races.” Across the Empire, the British categorized native peoples into those they saw as fit for military service and those that were not. In India, the British almost exclusively defined those Indians living in the northwest regions of the country including Punjab, North West Frontier, and Uttar Pradesh, as belonging to martial races. With nearly 447,000 men recruited from within its borders, Punjab alone contributed over one third of all recruits during the war. The soldiers recruited from these regions were often poorly educated and existed within the world of their families and villages: their lives defined by their caste and religion. They also spoke a wide variety of languages including Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi. As the war progressed the recruitment policies of the Indian

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<sup>64</sup> Hulme T. Siwundhla, “White Ideologies and Non-European Participation in the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902,” *Journal of Black Studies* 15, no. 2 (December 1984) : 223-234.

<sup>65</sup> Ellinwood and Pradhan, *India and World War 1*, 143-153.



Army expanded beyond their traditional territories in order to provide the increasing numbers of soldiers needed for the war.<sup>66</sup>

Although created by the British and organized in a standard British form, the Indian Army was a unique organization with its own units and ranks. The Indian soldiers who served under British rule were commonly known as “sepoys” and the ranks of the Indian Army generally paralleled those of the British, but used their own names. For instance, Sepoy was used as a rank equivalent to a British Private, an Indian Naik equaled a British Corporal, and a Havildar a British Sergeant. For officers an Indian Jemadar was equivalent to a British Lieutenant, a Subedar a British Captain, and a Subedar Major a British Major. These equivalencies were in organization only and nearly all Indian officers were junior in rank to British officers. Indian cavalry units also used their own unique rank system. An example of this is an Indian Cavalry Daffadar equaling a British sergeant.

In terms of religion, the Indian soldier could not have been more different from his British and Dominion counterparts. While these soldiers were almost exclusively Christian, the Indian soldier belonged to a number of religions not found in large numbers in most of the Empire. At the beginning of the war, Christians represented less than one percent of the Indian Army, with 10 percent being Gurkhas, 19 percent Sikh, 30 percent Hindu, and Muslims making up the largest religion in the Army at 40 percent. These demographics resulted from the focus of recruitment efforts in the country’s North West regions where the Indian Sikh heartland and large Muslim populations are located. Muslims soldiers also dominated cavalry and artillery units, Hindus represented the largest religion in the infantry, and Sikhs served predominantly in

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<sup>66</sup> Ellinwood and Pradhan, *India and World War 1*, 145-178.

the infantry and cavalry. As the war progressed Hindus made up an increasingly large proportion of the army.<sup>67</sup> The expansion of recruitment efforts beyond their traditional bounds during the war meant that large sections of India's population now shared in the military experience.

For these soldiers, the war began when the Meerut and Lahore divisions deployed to France shortly after the war began. The first of these units left India on August 25, just 21 days after the British government declared war.<sup>68</sup> Traveling from Karachi and Bombay, these divisions arrived at Marseilles in late September and early October of 1914. Mere weeks later they found themselves defending the front lines near the town of La Bessee.<sup>69</sup> Many stayed in France until the end of the war, defending their lines from German raids and taking part in the offensives at Neuve Chapelle, Festubert, and Loos. For the British officers who commanded these units, the war was undoubtedly a shock that few were prepared for. For the Indian soldiers they commanded, France offered a new experience far removed from anything they knew. Over 4,000 miles from home the soldiers of the Indian Army found themselves surrounded by unfamiliar terrain, cultures, and weather. Their war in France proved a far cry from defending the mountain passes and valleys of India's North-West frontier. Coming from remote villages and taking their first trips outside the country in crowded troop ships, the experience of seeing Europe left a lasting impression on many sepoys.

For many Indian soldiers their first look at the capital of their Empire came after being wounded in combat. Subedar-Major Sardar Bahadur Gagan of the 6th Jats described his impressions of England to a friend during his stay at Brighton Hospital in January of 1915. "One

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<sup>67</sup> Ellinwood and Pradhan, *India and World War 1*, 186.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>69</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 2-3.

should regard it as fairyland. The heart cannot be satiated with seeing the sights, for there is no other place like this in the world. It is as if one were in the next world. It cannot be described. A motor car comes to take us out. The King and Queen talked with us for a long time. I have never been so happy in my life as I am here.”<sup>70</sup> Although much of this happiness undoubtedly came from being in England instead of at the front, the wonder of seeing Britain acted as a powerful experience that must have brought British rule into a very real perspective.

Before they were sent to England for medical treatment the soldiers of the Indian Army made their way from the ports of southern France to the front lines near La Bassee. The cities and countryside of France made just as powerful an impression as those of England. A soldier listed simply as L. R. described France in a letter home to a friend. “As for beauty, I believe France is the home of beauty. Here everything is beautiful. The hills are covered with beautiful pastures from top to bottom all over the country. The soil is rich for fruits. The woods, even, are good. Every village, even a small one, is built beautifully into beautiful roads everywhere. Everywhere there is cleanliness.”<sup>71</sup> Sentiments such as these were repeated by soldiers in countless letters home. Some could not help but compare the perceived beauty of England and France to conditions back in India. Writing from a hospital in Marseilles, Shah Nawaz made a blunt comparison. “You may be sure that India will not rise to the pitch of perfection for Europe for another two thousand years.”<sup>72</sup>

The longer they stayed in France though the more their views could change. While still often awed by the cities and villages behind the lines, the realities of the war became

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<sup>70</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 27.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

overwhelming once their units spent time at the front. Endless shelling and raids combined with worsening weather conditions and mounting casualties made the war unbearable for many Indian soldiers during the first winter of the war. A Muslim soldier from Southern India wrote home that “[t]he war is a calamity on three worlds and has caused me to cross the 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.”<sup>73</sup> Not only did the winter bring the misery of cold, it also brought about a stagnation in the trenches with no movement forward that became the soldier’s reality for the remainder of their time in France. No more than fifty paces from the German lines, bullets and artillery fire seemed to come down as thick as the snow. When the snow melted, the mud rose to the soldiers’ waists. The soldiers of the Indian Army endured these conditions as they defended their trenches for the winter from an attack that never came.<sup>74</sup> It must have seemed to many Indian soldiers that conditions could not get any worse. Brought halfway around the world to fight for their Emperor, the soldiers in France instead found themselves suffering through a harsh winter and mounting casualties without any real gains to show for it.

Despite this, many soldiers maintained their faith not only in the war effort, but also in the Emperor they fought and died for. Few Indians serving in the Army ever visited Britain prior to the war, and even fewer ever saw their Emperor in person. Despite this, he maintained a high level of respect among the soldiers of the Indian Army. A Garhwali Subedar serving during the war expressed his belief that “[i]t is a noble fate for us to be allowed to sacrifice our bodies for our king. If our ancestors help us and god shows us favour, if we die on the battlefield in the

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<sup>73</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 35.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

service of our king, this is equal to entering heaven”<sup>75</sup> The admiration for his Emperor and his willingness to die for him represented a sentiment repeated throughout the war. Although relations with the Raj at home could be strained at best and independence movements seemed to gain momentum every year, the emperor himself, George V, remained a revered figure the service of whom gave the sacrifices of war meaning.<sup>76</sup>

These sacrifices proved to be severe. By the end of 1914 almost half of the 160,000 soldiers of the BEF had become casualties with over 50,000 of these taking place in the Flanders region during the First Battle of Ypres.<sup>77</sup> These losses not only proved the value of reinforcements from Britain’s Empire, it also showed that Britain alone was not prepared for the scale of the war ahead. The early victory envisaged by all sides of the war vanished into the winter of 1914. With it disappeared any hope that the war would do anything but escalate as all of the belligerents used the winter months to strengthen their armies and prepare for the inevitable offensives that would begin with the coming of spring in 1915.

The BEF was not the only part of British society making sacrifices and mobilizing though and the public began to support the war effort from its very beginning. In the early months of the war many volunteer efforts began to fill the gaps where the army’s preparations were insufficient. One of these efforts came in the unlikely form of Sir Arthur Stanley, president of the Royal Automobile Club. Seeing a deficiency in the availability of ambulances to serve near the frontline, Stanley brokered a truce between the often uncooperative Red Cross and St. John

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<sup>75</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 39. The Garhwali people are a unique Ethno-Linguistic group from northern India. A Subedar is a rank in the Indian Army equivalent to a British Captain, but junior to all commissioned British Officers.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>77</sup> Meyer, *A World Undone*, 234.

Ambulance.<sup>78</sup> This resulted in a Red Cross led effort that used volunteers and donated vehicles to form Mobile Ambulance Units that helped to collect wounded near the front and transport them to aid stations.<sup>79</sup> Fabian Ware, the man who would have more influence on the commemoration of the Empire's war dead than any other, commanded one of these units. During this early period of the war, Ware oversaw a volunteer force searching the French countryside for wounded soldiers. They also found the quickly dug, often poorly marked, and scattered graves of British soldiers. While not originally their official concern, under Ware's leadership the MAUs began registering these graves and doing what they could to improve their conditions. Throughout the war, Ware and his associates in the MAUs continued their efforts to address the often haphazard techniques used to bury the dead and register their graves. In early 1915, these efforts resulted in the creation of the Graves Registration Commission, giving Ware the rank of Major and complete authority over British graves registration efforts in Europe. By August of that year the Commission registered 18,173 graves and photographed 6,000 for their records.<sup>80</sup>

For most of the war, the Graves Registration Commission continued the endless work of cataloguing the seemingly countless graves of the Empire's war dead in Europe. In the final days of 1915, however, the French Government passed "The Law of 29 December" that allowed for the permanent burial and memorialization of British soldiers on French land, financing provided by the French government, with their design, construction, and upkeep under the control of a yet to be determined organization within the British government. The war caused so much death and

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<sup>78</sup> The British Red Cross and the St. John Ambulance both vied for the title of Britain's premier aid service.

<sup>79</sup> David Crane, *Empires of the Dead: How One Man's Vision Led to the Creation of WWI's War Graves* (London: William Collins, 2013), 38.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-55.

destruction by this point that the French government realized allowing the British to oversee their own burial efforts was the only way to ensure these efforts were even possible.

In 1915 the British government established one of the most significant burial policies of the entire war. When the powerful family of deceased Lieutenant W. E. Gladstone arranged for his exhumation and reburial in England, Ware and his associates realized that only the upper classes would be able to afford such action. Their sons and fathers could return to Britain for their final rest, while those of the poor and middle classes remained in foreign lands, never to return home. The government deemed this unacceptable and official British policy banned the repatriation of soldiers and made their bodies property of the state.<sup>81</sup> The dead of war no longer belonged to their families, they instead became nationalized as a symbolic part of the nation's grief and a symbol of its war effort.<sup>82</sup> This nationalization of the dead also meant that the burial and memorialization of any soldier of the Empire who fell during the war became the sole responsibility of the British government. The first full year of the Great War caused what the Crimean and Boer wars could not. Faced with previously unthinkable numbers of war dead, the British government took full responsibility for the care of its fallen soldiers. With the implementation of these policies the framework for the Imperial War Graves Commission had almost been completed.

During March and April of 1917 the British government held the first of two Imperial War Conferences in London to discuss the war and its progress. Attending this conference were members of the Imperial War Cabinet including Prime Minister Lloyd George, Leader of the House of Lords Lord George Curzon, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of

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<sup>81</sup> Crane, *Empires of the Dead*, 68-74.

<sup>82</sup> Ziino, *A Distant Grief*, 4-5.

Commons Bonar Law, and representatives from all of the Dominions and India.<sup>83</sup> On the 24th of March the Conference passed a motion for the creation of a new government organization to oversee the burial and memorialization of the Empire's war dead "for the purpose of ensuring that the graves of the heroes who gave their lives for the Empire at the most critical time in its history shall be cared for in a manner worthy of the deeds they performed and the sacrifices they made."<sup>84</sup> A direct successor of the Graves Registration Commission, the newly created Imperial War Graves Commission was organized with His Royal Highness Edward, Prince of Wales, as President and numerous other government officials as members. These officials included the Secretary of State for War, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and the Secretary of State for India. Written during the conference, a draft charter laid out the legal and structural details of the Commission. The early pages of this draft contained a statement declaring the Commission's commitment to a vision of the British Empire as a loyal and enduring union. Those who wrote the charter hoped that "by honouring and perpetuating the memory of their common sacrifice, tend to strengthen the bonds of union between all classes and races in Our Dominions and to promote a feeling of common citizenship and of loyalty and devotion to Us and to the Empire of which they are subjects."<sup>85</sup> While the Commission considered the memorialization of the Empire's fallen soldiers as its primary purpose, building a monument to the Empire and its unity was clearly another critical goal.

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<sup>83</sup> Robert Livingston Schuyler, "The British War Cabinet," *Political Science Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (September, 1918): 378-395.

<sup>84</sup> Mr. Massey, "Notice of Motion," Imperial War Conference, 24 March, 1917.

<sup>85</sup> "Imperial War Graves Commission Draft Charter," *Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives*, Catalogue no. 46, Item WQ 8 pt. 2.



Although the final version of the IWGC's charter varied only slightly from the draft, the India office quickly expressed concern over the draft's language. On 13 April, just days after the presentation of the draft, the India office sent a letter, with the consent of Lord Chamberlain, to Major General Ware, now the Commission's director, expressing a desire that the word "graves" in the charter should include the cremation grounds central to Hindu burial rights. Signed by India's representatives to the conference Sir James Meston, Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, and Ganga Singh, Maharaja of Bikanir, this letter marked the beginning of a long relationship between the Indian Government and the Commission over religious and cultural considerations for the Indian soldiers who fell during the war.<sup>86</sup> It should be noted, however, that this relationship was between the British and their own colonial government in India, not an independent Indian government. Just ten days after the mailing of this letter, the War Conference circulated a document citing revisions to the charter and including an addition to section V explicitly stating that that use of the word "cemetery" included all Hindu and non-Christian cremation grounds "in so far as may be consistent with Hindu or such other religious customs as may be applicable."<sup>87</sup> Before even being officially constituted the Commission swiftly acted on the advice of the Indian government to help insure the religious rights of India's war dead.

Although it is doubtful that this request met any real opposition from the War Cabinet, Meston and Singh undoubtedly found an ally for their request in Lord George Curzon. Former Viceroy and Governor-General of India, Curzon took a keen interest in modernization efforts in

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<sup>86</sup> James Meston and Ganga Singh, Letter to Major General Fabian Ware, 13 April, 1917. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 46, Item WQ 8 Pt. 2.

<sup>87</sup> "Notes for Mr. Long, 23 April, 1917. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue no. 46, Item WQ 8 pt. 2.

the Indian Army during his six year tenure, especially the issue of Indianization of the Indian Army's officer corps. In order advance this effort, Curzon created the Imperial Cadet Corps, a program for young Indian men from noble families to receive officer commissions of British rank. Although this program ultimately failed to bring about large scale change in the Army, many recognized Curzon as the pioneer in this effort.<sup>88</sup> Curzon's influence, along with the presence of Meston and Singh on the War Cabinet, shows that those who wrote the Commission's charter were far from uninterested bureaucrats or naive concerning the complexities of Indian affairs. They instead represented a cross section of the political elite from across the Empire and included men who served in the highest levels of the Indian government. Even Fabian Ware, the founder, director, and most influential person in the Commission's history, came from a colonial background. Mentored by Alfred Milner, former High Commissioner for Southern Africa, Ware spent several years as a Director of Education for the Transvaal and Orange River Colony.<sup>89</sup> Like almost every aspect of political, cultural, and military affairs during this period, the imperial experience influenced the Commission in a very real way. This influence continued to show throughout the war and following years as the Commission set policy in regards to Indian soldiers and made decisions regarding how their remains should be treated, memorials designed, and memory defined.

The imperial influence must also be keep in mind when examining the Commission's policies. The IWGC's commitment to equal treatment of all the Empire's war dead, and the policies that followed these principles, were undoubtedly progressive for the time. The British

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<sup>88</sup> Pradeep P. Barua, *Gentlemen of the Raj: The Indian Army Officer Corps, 1817-1949* (London: Paeger, 2003), 9-15.

<sup>89</sup> Crane, *Empires of the Dead*, 20.

Empire, though, was anything but equal, with predominantly white populations such as Canada and Australia gaining Dominion status, while non-white populations, including India, remained possessions of the British crown. As progressive as the IWGC was in its policies and inclusion of Indians in its administration, it still existed as part of a system that favored white Christians at the expense of all others. Even when the British government did make efforts to improve the lives of its non-white subjects, it mostly did so out of a paternalistic viewpoint where the British nation gifted civilization upon its subjects, often seen as unable, or unwilling, to better themselves. Some of the Commission's most important policies, though originating out of seemingly practical considerations, still end up treating white soldiers of the Indian Army, and upper class Indians from preferred castes, with the highest respect, while making compromises where the Indian rank and file, often poor and from lower castes, are concerned.

## EUROPE AND MESOPOTAMIA: A DIVISION OF WAR AND MEMORIALIZATION

“Don’t be grieved at my death because I shall die arms in hand, wearing the warrior’s clothes. This is the most happy death that anyone can die.” - Jemadar Indar Singh, 15 September 1916. France<sup>90</sup>

Although the winter of 1914 came to an end, the snow ceased falling, and the brutal cold would give way to warmer weather, this proved to be no reprieve for the Indian Army in France. While the winter may have been almost unbearable, it at least marked a pause in major combat operations. As the weather improved, however, both sides began preparing for their first full year of the war and the inevitable offensives it promised to bring. Throughout 1915 the Indian Army took part in three major offensives including the Battle of Neuve Chapelle in March, the Battle of Festubert in May, and the Battle of Loos from late September to mid-October.<sup>91</sup> At the same time, in warmer climes, Indian Expeditionary Force D endured the first full year of the Mesopotamian Campaign, the British effort to secure oil supplies in modern day Iraq and to secure the Tigris and Euphrates rivers by capturing Baghdad. Fought primarily by the Indian Army and lasting the full length of the war, the Mesopotamian Campaign truly defined India’s experience during the First World War.

Examining the war in Mesopotamia also helps to reveal a contradiction in the IWGC’s efforts to commemorate Indian soldiers’ service. The clear distinction between Indian

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<sup>90</sup> David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers’ Letters, 1914-18* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999) , 234-235

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

experiences in Europe and in Mesopotamia and the policies adopted by the Commission following the war worked to exacerbate this division. This division started in the war, caused by the fundamental differences between the campaigns on the Western Front and in Mesopotamia, and created a long lasting effect on the memory of Indian involvement in the war. In Europe, the British and French governments closely controlled the war effort, including the operations of the Indian army. French and British hospitals treated Indian casualties once they cleared aide stations, and Graves Registration Units meticulously recorded their dead for future burial or cremation. Those units that fought in Mesopotamia operated under the control of an expeditionary effort thousands of miles from their respective governments. Inadequate aide stations treated casualties before sending them down river on barges to Basra, where they reached an actual hospital. The Indian Army in Mesopotamia was constantly on the move and forced to hastily record casualties and burials with no serious Graves Registration Units devoted to the effort. As much as the IWGC pushed for equal treatment of all of the Empire's war dead, the realities of the war in Mesopotamia created a marked divergence between commemoration there and in Europe that still affects the memory of Indian involvement in the war to this day.

The beginning of this divergence in the commemoration of the Indian war experience began in 1915, well before the Commission began planning its commemoration efforts. In Europe, the Indian Army contributed to many of Britain's initial efforts that year to adapt to the rapidly-changing nature of the war. During the first planned British offensive of the war at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, the Garhwal Brigade of the Meerut Division took part in spearheading the attack. Beginning at 8:05 am, it took only fifteen minutes for German trenches to be captured and by 10 am the British controlled the city of Neuve Chapelle for the first time since its capture

by the Germans at the Battle of La Bassee five months earlier.<sup>92</sup> A Sikh sepoy serving with the 59th Rifles remembered that “[t]he attack came off on the 10th at seven o’clock in the morning. We fix bayonets and look towards the enemy. The enemy trenches are two yards off [sic]. They have been well built. In front is barbed wire and we are not expected to attack here. With a shout to our guru we hurl ourselves forward. The enemy bullets scorch our heroes, while machine guns and cannons spread their shot upon us. We leap the wire entanglements and overwhelm the enemy, killing some and capturing the rest.”<sup>93</sup> With the victory at Neuve Chapelle the Indian Army reclaimed the city it failed to defend in its first action of the war.

The impact of this battle on the Indian soldiers who fought there cannot be overstated. One sepoy described the carnage in a letter written after the battle. ”So many men were killed and wounded that they could not be counted and of the Germans the number of casualties is beyond calculation. When we reached their trenches we used the bayonet and the *kukri*, and blood was shed so freely that we could not recognize each other’s faces; the whole ground was covered with blood. There were heaps of men’s heads, and some soldiers were without legs, others had been cut in two, some without hands and others without eyes. The scene was indescribable.”<sup>94</sup> For the Indian Army, this brutality marked their first experience of modern industrial war, and would remain a reality on the Western Front until the end of the war. Neuve Chapelle also came to define the Indian experience in Europe and the IWGC built its memorial to the Indian war dead on the Western Front near to the site of the battle.

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<sup>92</sup> J. E. Edmonds and G. C. Wynne, *Military Operations France and Belgium, 1915: Winter 1914–15 Battle of Neuve Chapelle: Battles of Ypres*. History of the Great War Based on Official Documents by Direction of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence (London: Macmillan, 1995) 91.

<sup>93</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 50-51.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

The Meerut Division went on the offensive again during the Second Battle of Artois when its soldiers took part in the British attack at Festubert in late March. A combined attack by British, Canadian, and Indian infantry, Festubert provides just one example of the Imperial effort on the Western Front. It also inflicted heavy casualties on the Indians who fought there. Luddar Singh, serving with the 41st Dogras, described the battle in a letter home. “My brother, on the 9th of May, there was an attack by the whole of the English and the French, and the whole line of the Indians....So, my friend, when my regiment went up to the trenches for the attack, it had a strength of 850 men. When the attack began, in the course of one hour 411 men were wounded, and 80 were killed, and 341 [sic] remained unhurt. On the 13th again there was a small attack, and severe losses...”<sup>95</sup> In only one hour of fighting over half of Luddar Singh’s regiment were killed or wounded with many more joining them over the course of the battle. During the Third Battle of Artois the Indians witnessed the first use of gas by the British at the subsidiary Battle of Loos. A sepoy serving with the 2nd Lancers described gas attacks at Arras in 1916. “A new kind of smoke has been invented which is let loose in the trenches and if you get a sniff of it you lose consciousness at once. It does not matter if you are armed or not, as you lose all your senses.”<sup>96</sup> Gas attacks joined artillery, machine guns, and countless other modern weapons to make the Western Front unforgettably violent for those who served there. As the war progressed the Indian divisions in France eventually transferred to other theaters, mostly to reinforce a stalled campaign in Mesopotamia. The infantry that remained held their lines while the cavalry, largely unsuited to the war in Mesopotamia, patiently waited for the breakthrough behind enemy lines that never came.

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<sup>95</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 73-74.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

On July 1 of 1916 the British launched the first attack of the Battle of the Somme, a battle that defined the British war experience more than any other and produce death on an incredible scale. On the first day alone over 20,000 British and Imperial soldiers fell in combat, the single bloodiest day in British military history.<sup>97</sup> Shah Mirza, serving with the 20th Deccan Horse, described an advance on High Wood two weeks into the battle: “What I saw in the course of the advance I shall never forget. We had to pass amongst the dead bodies of the men who had fallen during the morning’s attack, and the trenches were full of German dead. The ground was torn and rent to pieces by the shell-fire and there were holes five and six feet deep. On that day, 1,700 prisoners were taken.”<sup>98</sup> Today The Somme is more than just a battle for the British nation, it is an event that defines the very war itself.

While the Indian Army units in France, Expeditionary Force A, took part in the great offensives on the Western Front, Indian Expeditionary Force D deployed to a very different theatre than their counterparts in France. Far from the trenches of the Western Front, Mesopotamia’s importance to the British war effort lay in the sources of oil it contained that fueled the modern war, and as a way to threaten the Ottoman Empire’s southern borders. According to the Commission’s official history of the campaign, British objectives in Mesopotamia sought “to deny enemy access to the head of the Persian Gulf, to safeguard the supply of oil obtained from the Anglo-Persian Company’s oilfields [sic] in Arabistan, and to support the Arabs who were believed to be disaffected with Turkish rule.” On the 6th of November, 1914, just one day after Britain declared war on the Ottoman Empire, Indian

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<sup>97</sup> G. J. Meyer, *A World Undone: The Story of the Great War 1914 to 1918* (New York: Delta, 2006), 447.

<sup>98</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 208-209.



Expeditionary Force D, comprised of units from the 6th Poona Division combined with units of the British Army, made their initial landings at Fao. Located at the tip of the Fao, or Faw, peninsula, and dominating the entrance to the Shatt al-Arab, the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, Fao controlled the water routes from the Persian Gulf into the Mesopotamian interior. After capturing the fortress protecting the port, and the nearby city of Basra, the combined British and Indian force began advancing inland, eventually forcing the Ottomans to evacuate Basra and retreat north.<sup>99</sup> By the 23rd the British captured Basra and within the week the entire 6th Poona division deployed to support the campaign. Further advances led to the capture of Qurna in early December and the British began to settle in for the winter. Early 1915 saw both sides reinforcing their armies in Mesopotamia with Indian Expeditionary Force D eventually consisting of the 6th and 12th divisions supported by the 6th Cavalry Brigade. After the British repulsed an Ottoman counterattack at Shaiba on 12 April, they began offensives into Arabistan and up the Tigris River to Amara with both operations resulting in a resounding success. By early June the British secured Arabistan and its oil facilities as well as Amara. These victories cost the British and Indian armies a mere 25 casualties.<sup>100</sup>

The conditions the Indian Army encountered in Mesopotamia differed significantly from those endured by Indian soldiers in France. The Indian Army deployed to Mesopotamia aboard converted cruise liners with over 1,200 soldiers packed so tightly below decks that breathing became difficult. Temperatures could reach well over 90 degrees and ocean swells could make it

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<sup>99</sup> Because both British and Indian units operating in Mesopotamia were under overall British command, the combined force will be referred to as “British” while events relating specifically to the Indian Army will be referred to as “Indian.”

<sup>100</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, *The Basra Memorial*, WG 219/19 Pt. 2, 1930.

difficult to even stand at times.<sup>101</sup> Once disembarked, extreme heat and widespread disease became more dangerous to the men than enemy fire. After arriving at Fao in late August of 1915 as reinforcements, nearly 300 men of a battalion from the 6th Hants traveled upriver to Amarah. By the time it arrived in early September, barely 100 of these men were fit for service. Combat deaths accounted for only roughly 50 of these losses with the rest being entirely due to heat and disease. Robert Palmer, a British officer with the 6th Hants recorded that “[t]here has been an enormous amount of sickness during the hot weather, four-fifths of which has been heat-stroke and malaria. There have been a few cases of enteric and a certain number of dysentery; but next to heat and malaria more men have been knocked out by sores and boils than by any disease. It takes ages for the smallest sore to heal.”<sup>102</sup> The soldiers of the British and Indian armies found campaigning under these conditions hard enough, but once in combat the challenges of desert warfare with little to no cover only worked to make matters worse. Robert Palmer noted that “[t]he troops who have come from France say that in this respect this action has been more trying than either Neuve Chapelle or Ypres, because, as they say, it is like advancing over a billiard-table all the way.” The extreme heat could even make it impossible for artillery to accurately target enemy positions due the extreme effect of mirages caused by heat distorting the horizon. The medical services could only provide the most basic care to the wounded and no ambulances were available to carry them to the rear. During an action on January 7th, 1916 along the banks of the Tigris River, only a dozen stretchers could be found to carry over 300 casualties five miles to a dressing station in the rear. Once there the wounded joined another 4,000 casualties being

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<sup>101</sup> Robert Palmer, *Letters From Mesopotamia* (London: Women’s Printing Society, 1919), 23-25.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-43.

treated by only 4 doctors in tents packed with 30 men at a time.<sup>103</sup> These conditions only worsened as the army advanced further and further away from its main base at Basra. Robert Palmer would be killed in action during the Battle of Um Al Hannah on June 21, 1916. He was 27 years old.

With the lower sections of the Tigris secured British attention shifted west to the Euphrates and led to a successful offensive on the town of Nasiriya in mid-July. What followed set off a series of events leading to the greatest tragedy of India's involvement in the war. After the capture of Nasiriya, British forces once again shifted focus to the Tigris and used Amara as a launching point for an advance aimed at capturing Kut al Amara, a city approximately 100 miles south of Baghdad, on September 1. Spearheaded by the 6th Poona Division, the capture of Kut on September 28 cost the British 1,233 dead with an almost equal number of Ottomans taken prisoner. Seeking to take advantage of their momentum and recently reinforced by two Indian Divisions from France, British commanders made the decision to attempt to capture Baghdad. On November 22 British forces reached the ancient city of Ctesiphon where the Ottomans built and occupied defensive positions. Meeting strong opposition and outnumbered by Ottoman reinforcements, The British failed to take the city and began a retreat south closely pursued by the Ottoman forces that repulsed them. Reaching Kut on 3 December, General Townshend, commander of the British forces, made the fateful decision to halt the retreat and fortify Kut and the peninsula it occupies. Just four days later the 11,600 soldiers and 3,500 followers<sup>104</sup> of the British and Indian Armies found themselves under siege by the pursuing Ottomans.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Palmer, *Letters From Mesopotamia*, 104-114.

<sup>104</sup> Followers were civilians, usually native to the area, who traveled with an army and provided support services such as cooking, cleaning, and acting as servants to officers.

<sup>105</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, *The Basra Memorial*, WG 219/19 Pt. 2, 1930.

Already exposed to extreme heat, an epidemic of malaria, and long distance marches during their advance toward Baghdad and the resulting retreat, the soldiers besieged at Kut found themselves already pushed to the limits of their endurance. Cut off from resupply, the British Army at Kut began rationing everything it could. Ammunition, medical supplies, and most importantly food, all became precious commodities. As the siege continued food supplies began to dwindle and in its last month of April British soldiers received only 1,850 calories per day and Indians 1,110. Starvation combined with disease killed many and weakened the rest while widespread diarrhea from contaminated Tigris river water killed 200 men alone. These conditions led to an average of fifteen soldiers dying every day in April. On the final day of the siege only twenty-nine emaciated artillery horses remained as a source of food.<sup>106</sup> Although a relief force sent to lift the siege spent almost four months attempting to reach Kut, it encountered heavy resistance and suffered at least 12,000 casualties in the attempt. After nearly five full months under siege, completely out of food, and with no hope of relief, General Townshend surrendered the city and all British and Indian forces defending it on 29 April, 1916. Out of the 15,100 soldiers and followers who entered the city in December of 1915, approximately 13,000, including General Townshend himself, became POWs.<sup>107</sup>

Although British forces in Mesopotamia, now under the command of Sir Stanley Maude, went on to eventually capture Baghdad on March 11, 1917, the surrender of Townshend's army at Kut marked one of the largest surrenders of British soldiers in history and what could be described as one of the worst Allied defeats of the entire war. Even General Maude did not

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<sup>106</sup> Major-General Sir Patrick Hehir, "Effects of Chronic Starvation During The Siege of Kut," *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 3205 (1922): 865-868.

<sup>107</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, *The Basra Memorial*, WG 219/19 Pt. 2, 1930.

survive the campaign, falling victim to disease on 18 November at Baghdad. Although the British and Ottomans continued to clash in several large actions in early 1918, the Mesopotamian campaign effectively ended by the final months of 1917. A final push towards Mosul designed to put pressure on the Ottomans before the signing of the Armistice began in October. In thirteen days of fighting culminating in the Battle of Sharqat the British and Indian forces captured 11,322 Ottoman soldiers and suffered 1,886 casualties.<sup>108</sup>

The final act of the Mesopotamian campaign could be said to be the return of the thousands of British and Indian POWs captured by the Ottomans. During the course of the campaign over 21,000 soldiers, including those captured at Kut, found themselves in Ottoman POW camps. For those captured at Kut, already suffering from starvation and wounds, the journey to these camps proved to be a brutal, and deadly, experience. The Ottomans first marched these POWs, already starving and not fed for two days after their capture,<sup>109</sup> north to Baghdad, and then transferred them by train to Samarra, before finishing their journey with a 500 mile march into Asia Minor. The Ottomans immediately put anyone lucky enough to survive the journey to work building railways until finally placing them in POW camps once they became too broken down to work. It took a further ten years before the bodies of those who died in Ottoman custody could be exhumed and reburied at the North Gate of Baghdad War Cemetery. Despite these efforts, the graves of 2,146 POWs known to have died in Ottoman custody have never been found.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, *The Basra Memorial*, WG 219/19 Pt. 2, 1930.

<sup>109</sup> Major-General Sir Patrick Hehir, "Effects of Chronic Starvation During The Siege of Kut," *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 3205 (1922): 865-868.

<sup>110</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, *The Basra Memorial*, WG 219/19 Pt. 2, 1930.

Even with the signing of the Armistice and the de facto end of the war, fighting in Mesopotamia continued. In June of 1920 a rebellion broke out against British post-war rule. British and Indian forces, many sent as reinforcements, once again went to war in Mesopotamia to put down the rebellion and effectively subdued it by February of 1921. Even though the belligerents involved signed the various treaties that ended the First World War by 1920, Mesopotamia claimed another 2,250 British and Indian casualties. 850 of these died during the rebellion. In total, 890,000 officers and men of the British and Indian Armies served in Mesopotamia. 50,000 of these died in combat, fell victim to disease, or became Prisoners of War. The British government officially listed 41,074 of these men as dead with nearly 1,000 more, including those killed during the Rebellion of 1920, dying between 1918 and the official end of the war in 1921. Of these men, over 40,000 were laid to rest in unmarked graves. The Commission's official history describes the Mesopotamian campaign as "more difficult and more full of hardship than any other except the East African; and in it the British soldiers equaled, and the Indian soldiers surpassed, their record of achievement in the other campaigns of the World War."<sup>111</sup>

No matter what theater of the war India's soldiers fought in, they experienced death on a scale they could not imagine. The loss of their fellow soldiers and the images of death they encountered made permanent impressions on most of these soldiers and become a defining factor in their memory of the war. Santa Singh, serving in France, wrote to his mother in 1915 to describe the sheer scale of death caused by the war. "Many sons of mothers, brothers of sisters, and brothers of mothers have been lying dead for a whole year on the field of battle. A year has

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<sup>111</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, *The Basra Memorial*, WG 219/19 Pt. 2, 1930.

passed and there they lie. He who sees them for the first time says that there is no place left empty. All the ground is covered with corpses.”<sup>112</sup> Far from a few scattered remains, these bodies turned the battlefields of the war into a landscape of death where the living and the dead shared the same ground for years on end. Asim Ullah, serving with the 19th Lancers in France described the experience of living with such death in a letter home. “May god keep your eyes from beholding the state of things here. There are heaps and heaps of dead bodies, the sight of which upsets me. The stench is so overwhelming that one can, with difficulty, endure it for ten or fifteen minutes. Fine, stalwart young men are stricken down into the dust, and others are struggling in the combat like fish pulled out of the water and thrown down on the sand, with their handsome faces dimmed by the grime of war.”<sup>113</sup> But in this death the soldiers could still find some beauty, at least in those lucky soldiers whose remains received proper burials, a beauty that came to be reflected in the cemeteries and memorials the Commission built after the war. Jemedar Man Singh of the 6th Cavalry wrote home that “[h]ere and there are the graves of gallant youths who have died for their country, and god has covered their graves with wild flowers. These are the heroes who gave their lives to drive out the tyrant German.”<sup>114</sup> For the majority of the dead though, it took years before their remains would be put to rest.

The stagnant nature of the war in France led to these scenes of mass death and even with the improved conditions under the IWGC and its Graves Registration Units, the British still found it necessary to conduct quick burials near to the site of death following battle when possible. Soldiers killed near their own lines could be retrieved and buried without considerable

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<sup>112</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 80.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 245-246.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

risk. The large numbers of soldiers who fell in no-man's-land in the course of large-scale attacks and smaller raids, or whose remains simply became lost in the chaos of the war, posed a more serious challenge. Where the most intense fighting occurred bodies simply had to be left where they fell, unreachable until the front lines moved or the war finally ended. In 1916 Daya Ra, serving with the 2nd Lancers in France noted that “[a]t some places corpses are found of men killed in 1914, with uniform and accoutrements still on. Large flies, which have become poisonous through feasting on dead bodies, infest the trenches, and huge fat rats run about there. By the blessing of god the climate of this country is cold, and for that reason corpses do not decompose quickly.”<sup>115</sup> After more than four years of war countless bodies from both sides joined the dead who lay where they fell, becoming less and less identifiable as time and weather brought decomposition, artillery continued to destroy everything it touched, and information not already written into graves registration records became lost. Only after the war ended and its battlefields fell silent could serious efforts begin to rectify this situation. This meant that, at least until the end of the war, large numbers of Indian dead did not receive proper funeral rites from the British government due to the harsh realities of the war. It also meant that the longer the war continued the more difficult, or even impossible in some circumstances, identification and reburial efforts became.

These difficulties in identifying and burying the dead prompted the Commission to create an Indian Graves Committee in March of 1918 to oversee burial and memorialization efforts regarding Indian soldiers and address the issues that emerged during the war. Comprised of Under Secretary of State for India The Lord Islington, High Commissioner for the Union of

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<sup>115</sup> Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 231.



South Africa The Rt. Hon. W. P. Schreiner, Sahibzada Aftab Khan, and Sir. Prabhashankar D. Pattani, this committee brought together men with extensive experience in the Indian and colonial governments.<sup>116</sup> Although the Commission previously included government officials familiar with imperial affairs in its operations, Khan and Pattani represent interesting additions that added new depth to the Commission's attempts to address the legal and religious issues of commemoration. Sahibzada Aftab Khan, a Muslim and lawyer by trade, served as Vice Chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University following the war and advocated heavily for higher education for Indians.<sup>117</sup> Sir Prabhashankar D. Pattani, a Hindu and former Prime Minister of Bhavnagar state in Gujarat, also advocated for education. Together they acted as the Commission's primary consultants on matters concerning their respective religions for the duration of its memorialization efforts. The elite status of these men also shows a discrepancy in the parts of Indian society that had a say in memorialization efforts. Men like Khan and Pattani were highly educated and born into the very highest levels of Indian society. Throughout the history of the Raj Britain had allied itself with such men and afforded them a level of access and respect not available to the common Indian. Although it would be impractical for the Commission to survey the Indian public on their own views about memorialization efforts, it should still be remembered that these elite men essentially spoke for all Indians in regards to Commission policy. In regards to the Indian Graves Committee itself their recommendations focused on the major and immediate issues at hand. In the case of Muslim burials they recommended that "except in cases where there was the slightest apprehension of the grave being

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<sup>116</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, *Meeting of the Indian Graves Committee held at the India Office, on the 20th March 1918, at 12 noon*, WG 909/9.

<sup>117</sup> "Aftab Hall: An Introduction," *Aligarh Muslim University*, Accessed 9 December, 2017, <https://www.amu.ac.in/pdf/halls/aftab/aftab.pdf>.

moved, Mohammedan graves should be left undisturbed.” If reinterment became necessary then it should take place at a central cemetery.<sup>118</sup> For Hindu burials the Committee decided that all efforts should be made to exhume and cremate the bodies, with the ashes being consigned back to the elements. If cremations could not be carried out, then headstones should be placed over the graves.

The numerous religious backgrounds of Indian soldiers made it crucial for the IWGC to identify remains before taking any further action. While nearly all British and Dominion soldiers required Christian burials, the sepoy of the Indian Army and their numerous religious backgrounds with unique burial rites required positive identification before burials or cremations could take place. Accidentally cremating the remains of a Muslim soldier or leaving a Hindu soldier’s remains buried when cremation was possible represented a profound violation of burial rites for both religions. This made identifying Indian remains a top priority for the Commission. By 1921, Lt. General Sir Alexander Cobbe, a senior officer in the India office and veteran soldier with the Indian Army, wrote a letter to the Commission stating that “the great majority of the graves of Indian fighting men were unmarked and lost” and asked for a Major Blacker to compile guidelines for identifying remains.<sup>119</sup> The Commission took great care in identifying these remains and provided workers with detailed guides and materials based on Major Blacker’s report for determining the unit, religion, and racial background of unidentified soldiers. The most basic of these tools included maps of the areas where Indian units saw action, tables showing

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<sup>118</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, *Meeting of the Indian Graves Committee held at the India Office, on the 20th March 1918, at 12 noon*, WG 909/9.

<sup>119</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, Letter to Lieutenant-General Sir. Alexander Cobbe, 24 September 1921. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 263, Item WG 909/7.

casualty numbers for each area by battalion, and photographs of all relevant buttons, badges, and uniform insignia. Even more detailed information could be provided in certain circumstances and one note informed workers that “the sepoy in France seldom wore pagris, that Gurkhas usually wore hats and kukins, [and] that the only infantry who wore the old 1903 pattern bandolier equipment was that of the Lahore and Meerut divisions.” Signet rings could also indicate that remains belonged to a sepoy. The officer who wrote this report even advocated for the use of phrenology, “with all diffidence,” to help identify remains. The skulls of “[t]he more mongoloid Gurkhas, Magars and Gurungs” could be distinguished from those of Aryans through measurements. Also “the Seythian, that is the Jat, who, whether Musalman, Sikh, or Hindu, forms such an overwhelming proportion of the Punjab Army is renowned for the size of his thigh bones.”<sup>120</sup> Phrenology later took on a more sinister character in future racist ideologies, and the “diffidence” of the officer who made this suggestion shows that the Commission was already aware of the controversy surrounding these methods.

Once the Commission identified these soldiers it needed to reinter the remains in an appropriate cemetery, or cremate them in accordance with Hindu and Sikh burial practices. Although the Commission respected these rites and worked to proceed with cremations, many obstacles stood in the way of accomplishing this. In Europe, French law complicated these efforts. In late 1921, Lord Arthur Browne raised a concern that under French law, many of “the graves will be opened in course of time and the remains thrown into ossuaries” by the French government during its own reburial efforts following the war. This same letter also mentions that

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<sup>120</sup> Major Blacker, Report to the IWGC on Identification of Punjabi and Gurkha Soldiers in France and Belgium, Late 1921. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 263, Item WG 909/7.

French law often made the exhumation and cremation of these remains “impracticable.”<sup>121</sup> While French law complicated cremation efforts, it also provided the Commission with a way to sidestep the issue and instead focus its efforts on reinterment instead.

Less than a week after Lord Browne expressed his concerns, a Colonel Chitty wrote to Major A. L. Ingpen highlighting the fact that when cremation is not possible, the Hindu faith has “no objection to reinterment.” For this reason, the Principal Assistant Secretary of the Commission requested that a protective note be created stating that cremation “was impossible.” In order to accomplish this, the Commission requested that Ingpen make “leading” inquiries to the French government in order to obtain a statement that “it is generally against their laws of hygiene and decency” for cremations to take place.<sup>122</sup> Once the French Ministry of the Interior reviewed these inquiries, it informed the Commission that French law forbade cremation except when performed in crematoriums certified by the government. It also warned the Commission that any unsanctioned attempt to cremate a body outside of these facilities would be stopped by the police and legal action taken against those responsible. Any exemption for these laws in the case of Indian soldiers required an official, written request.<sup>123</sup> Rather than push the French government on the issue, it seems the Commission sought to limit the use of cremations in favor of reinterment. With the desired response in hand, Major Ingpen asked the Principal Assistant Secretary of the IWGC if such a written request should be presented to the French government. It appears that Ingpen received no response and made no such request of the French. Given the

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<sup>121</sup> Lord Arthur Browne, Letter to Colonel W. W. Chitty, 9th December 1921. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 263, Item WG 909/7.

<sup>122</sup> H. F. Chettle, Letter to Major A. L. Ingpen, 19th December 1921. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 263, Item WG 909/7.

<sup>123</sup> M. Adams, Letter to Principal Assistant Secretary IWGC, April 22, 1922. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 263, Item WG 909/7.

lengths the Commission went to in order to positively identify and correctly reburial Indian soldiers, it is likely that it took this course of action, at least in part, out of practical considerations. Although recovering and respectfully putting to rest the remains of India's fallen soldiers already required massive effort on the part of the Commission, it represented only one part of a larger Commission effort that covered every theater of the war and the war dead of every member of the Empire. This may have simply been one battle the Commission saw as unnecessary when it could make use of a religiously acceptable alternative. Work had also begun on thousands of cemeteries by this point as well as the design and construction of numerous memorials with a limited budget and only so many workers to devote to these efforts. Despite this, failing to ensure the proper cremation of Indian soldiers who had fought and died for the British Empire shows a significant failing on the part of the Commission.

In Mesopotamia, far more practical reasons limited cremations efforts. Even during the war, the British and Indian armies found firewood so scarce in this theatre that it needed to be supplied directly from India.<sup>124</sup> After the end of the war firewood remained scarce, and the Commission even considered fuel oil as a replacement.<sup>125</sup> As noted by the Commission in its discussions of French laws in Europe, reinterment is acceptable to Hindus when necessary, but is far from the preferred way to dispose of their remains. It is also obvious that if the British Empire wanted to provide enough fuel to cremate Indian remains in Mesopotamia, it possessed the ability to do so.

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<sup>124</sup> Robert Palmer, *Letters From Mesopotamia* (London: Women's Printing Society, 1919), 104.

<sup>125</sup> Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, Letter to Major Hilson, Indian Army, 17th June 1919. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5.

While the Commission finalized its policies in France, it also began reviewing its burial policies regarding the Middle Eastern theaters of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Palestine. Far from the relatively stable and organized conditions on the Western Front, these theaters saw far more mobile offensives and retreats. This led to the dead being buried along long routes of advance and retreat with many soldiers resting in isolated, unmarked, or even unrecorded graves. By April of 1918, the General Officer Commanding in Chief Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force met with The Honorable Sir Umar Hayat Khan Malik during his visit to Mesopotamia. A Muslim Rajput, distinguished military officer, powerful landowner in Punjab, and Honorary aide-de-camp to George V, Malik's opinions carried considerable weight with the military, monarch, and both the British and Indian governments.<sup>126</sup> Following a discussion regarding registering Indian Graves, the General Staff, Army Headquarters, India, Simla, received a memorandum containing policy recommendations based on Malik's input. This memorandum contained an order that the Graves Registration Units should confine their efforts to British graves only. It also noted that "the great majority" of Indian graves remained unmarked, the lack of attempts to register cremated sepoys, and the fact that erecting headstones on unmarked graves proved impossible to accomplish. It even deemed the erection of headstones on registered graves as unnecessary. It then recommended that building a central memorial, preferably at Baghdad, as the best option to represent Indian religious and caste "sensibilities."<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> MALIK MOHAMMED UMAR HAYAT KHAN (TIWANA), *Maj.-Gen. Hon. Sir in Who Was Who 1941–1950* (London: A & C Black, 1980).

<sup>127</sup> General Officer Commanding-in-Chief Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, Memorandum to the Chief of the General Staff, Army Headquarters, India, Simla, 6th April 1918. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5.

Following these recommendations, the Commission began a review process to finalize policies regarding Indian graves. It designated Major R. J. Hilson of the Indian Army as the man responsible for leading this review and compiling reports on the matter. As early as 1908 then Captain Hilson served with the 91st Punjab Light Infantry<sup>128</sup> and by 1916 he became a Double Company Commander<sup>129</sup> holding the rank of Major.<sup>130</sup> With a long career in the Indian Army and personal combat experience in Mesopotamia and Palestine, Major Hilson possessed an intimate perspective on the issues at hand. In a report dated 7 July, 1919, Hilson detailed the policies adopted by the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force. It revealed that all Indian deceased in the theatre had been buried save for those who died at the main British base at Basra. The availability of firewood here made it the only location in the entire theater where cremations could be carried out. The very nature of the terrain that Indian Expeditionary Force D fought in made the most basic of Hindu burial rites nearly impossible. The Commission hoped though that in the future when firewood and fuel oil became more available, that more cremations could be conducted. It also noted that although no demand for the return of ashes to soldier's families in India existed at the time, if this became more desirable in the future then efforts could be made to make this possible. While the Indian and British Armies buried many sepoy in isolated graves, numerous cemeteries of varying sizes in Mesopotamia contained the remains of Indian soldiers. Surrounded by barbed wire, these cemeteries contained separate plots for Muslims and Hindus with graves being marked with wooden boards showing the deceased's name and regiment. Both

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<sup>128</sup> Great Britain Ministry of Defense, *The Army List* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1908), 1372.

<sup>129</sup> The British military often combined two normal size companies into one "Double Company."

<sup>130</sup> Army Headquarters India, *Indian Army List for January 1916* (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1916), 550.

armies buried Christian dead in separate Christian cemeteries. This report made it very clear that exhumation and reinterment of Indian remains “is not taking place and is not contemplated.”<sup>131</sup>

The decision to concentrate all oversight of graves in Mesopotamia with individual Post Commandants also produced a significant effect upon the memories of India’s dead in the theater. The Commission gave these commandants responsibility for the maintenance of all graves and cemeteries within their districts as well as their registration. In line with Sir Umar Hayat Khan Malik’s recommendation that the Graves Registration Units confine their activities to British graves, these post commandants never forwarded the casualty and burial reports they compiled to the Graves Registration Units. This meant that these units never possessed any records of Indian burials in Mesopotamia. The impact of this decision upon the design of future memorials to the theater’s war dead proved to be significant. A report from the Inspector of Works in Iraq from 1922 shows just how bad the problem with records became; it noted that only in Baghdad could the names of the occupants of Indian graves be found. Out of 25,000 dead, the Commission planned only 5,000 marked graves in Iraq. Recovering the names of the dead required the Commission to search through hospital registers, mostly missing following the war, or by requesting these records from India.<sup>132</sup> This decision not to forward records to the Graves Registration Units is made particularly problematic because Hilson’s report supports Malik’s recommendation for a central memorial as well as a suggestion that in certain tracts isolated and grouped graves should be obliterated and no trace left. The reasons behind this

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<sup>131</sup> Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, Letter to Major Hilson, Indian Army, 17th June 1919. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5.

<sup>132</sup> Inspector of Works Iraq, Extract from report dated 1 January, 1922. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5.



suggestion is not made clear, but it is directly stated that this action should be taken “irrespective of whether the graves were British or Indian and whether the bodies had been identified or not.”<sup>133</sup> Eventually, the War Department approved a policy of leaving these graves alone “under existing local circumstances,”<sup>134</sup> but the suggestion for their obliteration shows just how complicated the management of graves in Mesopotamia became. The fact that the Commission made both British and Indian graves subject to this policy also shows that, at least in this instance, it made no distinctions when it came to the importance of one group over the other.

Although the physical treatment of remains dominated the Commission’s efforts, it also took the language of memorialization very seriously. This language revolved around the numerous inscriptions that adorn cemetery gates, memorials, and the headstones of individual soldiers. The Commission viewed the creation of these inscriptions as a crucial element in its vision for the cemeteries and monuments it planned. For this reason the Commission turned to Rudyard Kipling, one of Britain’s most famous writers and proponents of Empire, to write these inscriptions. Born in Bombay and splitting his childhood between India and Britain, Kipling possessed a uniquely imperial, and an Anglo-Indian, worldview that was reflected in his literature. In the decades leading up to the First World War works such as *The Jungle Book*, *Kim*, and “Gunga Din” became iconic works of imperial literature and led to Kipling being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1907.<sup>135</sup> Although his professional accomplishments and Anglo-

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<sup>133</sup> Letter from Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force to Major Hilson, Indian Army, 17th June 1919. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5

<sup>134</sup> Major R. J. Hilson, Letter to General Headquarters, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, July, 1920. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5.

<sup>135</sup> H. L. Varely, “Imperialism and Rudyard Kipling,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14, no. 1 (January 1953): 124-135.

Indian background made him an obvious choice for this work, something even more personal made him the perfect writer to form the language for the Commission's memorialization efforts. When the British military rejected Kipling's son John for service in the war, Kipling used his personal connections to have him accepted into the Irish Guards. Two days into the Battle of Loos, John went Missing in Action and his grave has never been identified with certainty. The loss of his son not only inspired Kipling to work with the IWGC, but also made his work very personal.<sup>136</sup>

When the Commission began designing its memorials and headstones for the British and Indian dead of the Mesopotamian Campaign, Kipling's background became even more relevant. When approached for an inscription to be used for the Commission's cemeteries and memorials in Iraq, Kipling returned an eloquent submission. It read: "To the memory of brave men: Here have been reverently (returned) given to the earth or the fire as their creeds enjoined, the mortal remains of Indian soldiers who fell during operations in 19 - 19 ." While at first seeming to be a sensitive dedication for the final resting place of India's soldiers, the Commission still expressed reservations about its use. While it agreed that the inscription could be suitable in cemeteries that only contained the remains of Hindus and Sikhs, in cemeteries that also contained Muslim graves it found this inscription to be problematic. The phrase "here have been" incorrectly suggested that Hindu cremations and Muslim burials occurred in the same place. The Commission noted that this language created the appearance of a "very undesirable arrangement."<sup>137</sup> In the end it chose a more secular and basic inscription: "Here are honored men of the Indian Army who gave

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<sup>136</sup> Crane, *Empires of the Dead*, 178-179.

<sup>137</sup> Henry Francis Chettle, Assistant Secretary IWGC, Letter to Rudyard Kipling, 17 December 1931. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5.

their lives in the Great War for their King and Country. Iraq 1914-1921.”<sup>138</sup> Kipling himself noted that this inscription “eliminate[d] all references to creed and caste and I can think of no other way around.”<sup>139</sup>

The effect of India’s complex combination of religions and castes created a significant impact upon the Commission’s work. The almost universal Christian faith of British and Dominion war dead left the Commission free to be as poetic as it wished within the traditional Christian themes of death and commemoration. As long as inscriptions and designs remained respectful and fit into the Commission’s vision of a monument to the Empire and its war dead, there existed no major concerns over causing offense. The various religions and castes of India’s war dead worked to complicate this process and risked causing offense with nearly every aspect of the commemoration process if not handled correctly. Kipling’s original inscription sought to address this issue by directly stating that “Here have been reverently (returned) given to the earth or the fire as their creeds enjoined.” Far from ignorant of Indian religions, Kipling likely sought to highlight the diversity of Indian soldiers in this inscription, but the Commission immediately saw a risk of causing offense. In order to avoid this at all costs, Kipling simplified his inscription down into its most basic form. The poetic references to cremation, burial, and the creeds they represented disappeared. Instead, the creed of “King and Country” took their place. In changing Kipling’s inscriptions to avoid offense, the Commission also brought them more in line with their vision of monuments to Empire. The Commission even questioned this wording, though,

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<sup>138</sup> Director of Works IWGC, Letter to Vice-Chairman IWGC, 12 November 1932.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5.

<sup>139</sup> Rudyard Kipling, Letter to Henry Francis Chettle Assistant Secretary IWGC, 19th December 1931. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5.

and the Director of Works asked if the term “King” was even applicable to Indians in a letter proposing a simple change to the inscription.<sup>140</sup> As George V technically held the title King of the United Kingdom and Emperor of India, this proved to be a valid criticism, but “King and Country” was far too ingrained into the British psyche to be changed. This resulted in the Commission making these inscriptions far more British in character than Indian. Even though the Commission demonstrated a great respect for the Empire’s war dead, the Empire still belonged to Britain.

Although the shifting sands of Mesopotamia threatened to bury isolated and neglected graves, in France and Belgium a very different concern presented itself to the Commission. Although the war ravaged large stretches of French and Belgian countryside, once it ended farmers were certain to return to their fields and begin work to reclaim the land that the war destroyed. As early as February of 1918, Sahibzada Aftab Ahmad Khan and the Commission began discussing plans to exhume the remains of soldiers in scattered graves and reconcentrate them into the vast cemeteries that became the most visible part of its memorialization efforts. While Christianity posed no real obstacle to this plan, the graves of Muslim soldiers who served with the Indian Army caused concern at the Commission. As Islam forbids the exhumation of remains, the Commission considered allowing Muslim graves with little risk of being disturbed to be improved with pucca mounds and tablets and left in place. Sir Frederic Kenyon suggested that “the time will come when this area will be given back to cultivation” and that “if there be any risk of these graves being removed or ploughed up at any time in the future it is better that

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<sup>140</sup> Henry Francis Chettle, Assistant Secretary IWGC, Letter to Director of Works, Imperial War Graves Commission, January 13, 1931. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5.

the remains buried therein may be removed now to the proposed Muslim cemetery” and reburied under the supervision of an Imam from a local mosque.<sup>141</sup>

The idea of separate cemeteries for Muslims seems to be counter to the Commission's vision of unified monuments to the Empire and its war dead. As with the inscriptions for headstones and graveyards, the diverse religious backgrounds of Indian soldiers only worked to complicate matters. A conference between the Indian Graves Committee and the India Office in July of 1920 decided that “the Indian fallen should be commemorated on the same level and in the same way...as the British and those from the Dominions.” Equality of commemoration seemed to not mean unified commemoration though, and the same meeting decided that at any place “where 30 or more Indian soldiers are buried in one cemetery their graves should lie in a separate plot within the cemetery wall marked off by a low hedge from the rest.” The further complexity of Indian languages added to the separations between how the Commission commemorated Indian soldiers. The minutes from the July meeting noted that “the chances of error accompanying the recording of a large number of different Arabic or Urdu inscriptions, are almost endless.” Because of this, it suggested that a separate “Stone of Remembrance” with Arabic inscriptions be included in plots with Muslim graves, and that this allowed for Muslim headstones to be inscribed in English. English inscriptions also solved another problem for the Commission. Although the Commission strove to build monuments to the Empire and its war dead, this did not mean that it viewed the entire Empire as its audience. It viewed English as

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<sup>141</sup> Sahibzada Aftab Khan, Letter to the Imperial War Graves Commission, 16th February 1918. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 263, Item WG 909/7.

preferable because of the fact that “the vast majority of visitors to the cemeteries are unlikely to be able to read anything else.”<sup>142</sup>

In 1921, The Commission laid out guidelines for the treatment of Muslim and Hindu graves in Egypt and Mesopotamia under the direction of General Percy Cox, a distinguished British Indian Army officer who served during the Mesopotamian Campaign and future High Commissioner of Iraq. While some of these guidelines were general in nature, such as forbidding the removal of bodies from Muslim graves, most concerned the placement of remains within cemeteries. Plots with Muslim graves should have the names of all those buried there inscribed on a plaque, or, if no names are known, then a simple inscription reading “NUMBER Mussulman Soldiers of the Indian Army are buried here.” Even though only applying to Indian Muslims, the Commission still inscribed this message in English. The Commission also required that Muslim plots have their own entrance that did not require visitors to pass through Christian or Hindu plots. Almost the opposite of policies for Muslims, the guidelines for Hindu graves required that when positively identified, these remains should be exhumed, cremated, and buried at sea. These guidelines also stated that when possible, units returning to India should be given the chance to take the ashes of the fallen back with them. The cremation site would then be commemorated with a plaque reading “The following soldiers of the Indian Army fell near this spot” followed by a list of names. If no known names existed, then the number of cremations should be listed instead. The Commission also planned for these inscriptions to be inscribed

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<sup>142</sup> G. M. Young, Memorandum detailing the conference between the Indian War Graves Commission and the India Office, 27th July 1920. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 263, Item WG 909/7.

solely in English. With the fragmented nature of casualty rolls in Mesopotamia, it is likely that most of these plaques completely lacked names.<sup>143</sup>

The Commission also discussed the matter of burials at sea during this period. The approval for burials at sea represented a rare case of the soldiers of the Indian Army themselves influencing Commission policy. In August of 1921 a group of Hindu officers serving in Constantinople requested that the ashes of Hindus buried at the Osmaniah and Mashlak cemeteries in Iraq “be cast into the sea.”<sup>144</sup> After receiving letters of support from the Indian Army and finding that such action incurred no additional costs, the Commission approved the proposal with Hindu officers overseeing the ceremony.<sup>145</sup> The Commission then extended this policy to other theaters where Hindus served. At Gallipoli, the Commission exhumed 147 Hindu soldiers, cremated them, and reburied the ashes at sea.<sup>146</sup> Problems maintaining accurate records persisted as well and when the Commission found the isolated graves of Sepoys Bhagwan Singh and Narayan Singh to be empty, it concluded that they had in fact been reburied at sea and the records never corrected to reflect this.<sup>147</sup> Although the Commission resolved this discrepancy, it is still representative of a widespread issue of obtaining accurate casualty and burial records

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<sup>143</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Hughes, Deputy Director of Works IWGC, Memorandum to Vice Chairman IWGC, 11 April 1921. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5.

<sup>144</sup> Deputy Director of Works Imperial War Graves Commission, Letter to Vice Chairman, Imperial War Graves Commission, 31 August 1921. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5.

<sup>145</sup> Sir Herbert Baker, Telegram, 24th September 1921. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5.

<sup>146</sup> Registrar, Imperial War Graves Commission, Letter to Director of Records, Imperial War Graves Commission, 12 March, 1925. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5

<sup>147</sup> E. E. Kerr, Letter to Director of Records, Imperial War Graves Commission, 3rd April, 1925. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5.

following the war. This issue eventually had a profound effect on the Commission's memorials to India's war dead.

Although the soldiers of the Indian Army fought in nearly every theatre of the war, the Western Front in Europe and the sands of Mesopotamia overshadowed all others in their scale and cost. These theatres also created a division in this experience. Indian soldiers in Europe could not help but express their admiration for England and France while at the same time lamenting the stagnant nature of trench warfare and the utter brutality that defined the offensives it created. Their only reprieves came with the freezing winters that halted major offensives and pushed the sepoys to the limits of their endurance. Those who served in Mesopotamia found themselves in a largely barren environment where heat and disease combined to kill more soldiers than the war itself. Far from the stagnation of the trenches, they found themselves constantly on the offensive with nothing between them and the enemy but mirages and faith. Despite this, they largely won their own victories, shared with the units of the British Army who fought alongside them. In Europe, the Indian Army existed as just one part of a massive war effort alongside the British, French, and units from almost every British Dominion. As part of this massive force they obtained only partial victories at Neuve Chapelle, Festubert, and The Somme. In Mesopotamia the Indian Army secured the Anglo-Persian Company's oilfields, gained control of both the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and finally captured Baghdad. It also suffered one of the greatest Allied defeats of the war at Kut al Amara. Despite the victories and defeats of the Mesopotamian campaign, it is still overshadowed by the memory of the Western Front.

A division also appeared in the way the IWGC commemorated these soldiers. In Europe, the British and French governments closely controlled the war effort with the Commission and



its Graves Registration Units keeping detailed records of all burials. These units regularly located isolated graves and detailed efforts went into identifying the remains of any unknown soldier they found. The Commission directly supervised the meticulous planning of cemeteries and the intricacies of French Law became the most controversial issue encountered. In Mesopotamia, far from their governments and under the control of an Expeditionary Army, poorly kept records soon became even more fragmented. The vast majority of Indian soldiers who died in this theater remained buried in isolated and unmarked graves that could be impossible to find without detailed records. The fragmented control of post commandants often left burials in cemeteries poorly maintained and surrounded by barbed wire.

This division between the treatment of Indian graves in Europe and Mesopotamia can best be illustrated by their status in the post-war years. When it began its memorialization efforts in the 1920s, the Commission began inspection tours of known grave sites in all theaters in order to document the condition of graves and gather information used for planning larger cemeteries and memorials. The reports these tours produced shows a significant difference between how the Commission and local populations treated the graves of these two groups of soldiers and the respect shown to them in the years following the war. In Europe one inspection report written by Colonel B. C. Penton noted that “The cemeteries are most beautifully laid out and maintained” and that “I have no doubt in saying that the parents of these Indian soldiers, who gave their lives in the Great War in France and Belgium, may rest assured that nothing has been left undone to ensure that their sons [sic] rest in a manner commensurate with the sacrifice they made in the

cause of the Empire.”<sup>148</sup> Not only did these reports praise the condition of these cemeteries, they also noted that only the issues of simple upkeep on headstones and correcting inscriptions of soldier’s names needed to be resolved.<sup>149</sup> These cemeteries are still meticulously maintained by the Commission.

Inspection tours of cemeteries in Mesopotamia during the 1950’s show a far different fate for the graves of Indian soldiers who died during the war. The reports of these tours show that an act of desecration, following the end of the occupation and the withdrawal of British troops, at the Osmanieh Cemetery left headstones broken on the top edge, and that “[t]he marble panels [of the monument] had been sprayed point blank with a shot gun [sic] in the same act of desecration in which the headstones were damaged.” Far from being isolated events, an inspection of the cemetery at Mashlak also found smashed headstones and shotgun damage to the cemetery memorial. A local brickworks also encroached on the cemetery grounds and used land near graves to dry bricks in the sun. These reports also mentioned that the local caretaker for the cemetery was “far from satisfactory.”<sup>150</sup>

The global nature of the First World War and the diversity of the British Imperial soldiers who served in it worked to create a clear division between the Indian experiences on the Western Front and in Mesopotamia. It also planted the seeds that led to a division in the commemoration

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<sup>148</sup> Colonel B. C. Penton, Report of Graves Inspection Tour to Vice-Chairman, Imperial War Graves Commission, June 1931. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 263, Item WG 909/7.

<sup>149</sup> Report of Graves Inspection Tour to Vice-Chairman, Imperial War Graves Commission, 16 June 1931. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 263, Item WG 909/7.

<sup>150</sup> W. Wynne Mason, Report of Graves Inspection Tour to Secretary, Imperial War Graves Commission, 6 September, 1956. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 416, Item WG 909/5.

of India's war dead and the curation of their final resting places. The Commission's cemeteries represented only one part of its commemoration efforts though and in the post war years it also planned, designed, and constructed large memorials as well. Many of these memorials included Indian soldiers, but only a select few focused entirely on their memory.

## THE BUILDING OF MEMORY: THE COST OF DISTANCE AND DISORDER

“He who dies on the field of battle,  
His name never dies, but lives in history”  
- Dafadar Nathan Singh, 2nd Lancers, France, 1916<sup>151</sup>

While the Commission struggled to make order out of the aftermath of the war, it also began planning the grand memorials it envisioned as the centerpiece of its memorialization efforts. While the cemeteries that contained the individual graves of the Empire’s war dead followed an orderly and practical design, these monuments allowed the Commission to carefully design the true monuments to Empire it always envisioned. Often inscribed with the names of thousands of the Empire’s missing soldiers, these memorials are often less about the individual soldier and more about fulfilling the Commission’s vision to symbolize the strength and unity of the British Empire. Although India’s war dead are represented at many of these sites, the memorials at Neuve Chapelle and Basra are the primary memorials to India’s contribution to the war. The location of Neuve Chapelle in France and Basra in Mesopotamia also directly represented the division in Indian war experiences between the two theaters. By analyzing the Commission’s planning and design process for these memorials, the ultimate impact of the division between Europe and Mesopotamia on the physical memory of India’s war experience can be revealed.

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<sup>151</sup> David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 177.

The memorials built by the Imperial War Graves Commission following the war served not only as visual representations of the unity of the British Empire, but also as the primary memorials for all of the British and Imperial soldiers with no known graves. For those soldiers whose remains could be found and identified, extensive efforts went into making sure they received proper burials or cremations. Memorializing the missing of war, however, especially on such a massive scale as created by the First World War, represented a completely new challenge to the governments involved in the conflict. More than any other conflict before it, the sheer number of soldiers who disappeared into the chaos of war defined World War I, and the Imperial War Graves Commission needed to decide how these missing soldiers should be commemorated. With no remains available for burial, only the names of the missing could be used for these memorialization efforts. These names, listed in the thousands on memorials and cemetery walls, became the lasting legacy of the Empire's missing soldiers.

The Commission's discussions of memorials to Indian soldiers began as early as 1918 when the Indian Graves Committee passed Resolution No. 4 during a meeting on March 20 at the India Office. Attended by Under Secretary of State for India, The Lord Islington, High Commissioner for the Union of South Africa W. P. Schreiner, Sahibzada Aftab Khan, and Sir Prabhashankar D. Pattani, this meeting focused on the treatment of Indian graves and cremations. Concerned about the lack of progress towards the creation of Indian memorials, the Indian Graves Committee passed Resolution No. 4 at this meeting, recommending that Sir Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker be instructed "to draw up a design for both a Mosque and Temple, with due regard to the requirements of the respective faiths ... and that these buildings should

serve as central memorials to all Indians who had fallen in France and Belgium.”<sup>152</sup> Not only did Lutyens and Baker have an existing relationship with the Commission, they remain today as icons of Imperial architecture. Sir Edwin Lutyens became a highly successful English architect before becoming the central figure in designing the new capital of the British Raj at New Delhi. Not only did he design many of the monumental government buildings in New Delhi, he also went on to design the IWGC’s Thiepval Memorial for the Somme as well as the India Gate memorial for the Indian government. He also designed The Cenotaph, London’s most notable memorial to the war - a design that was replicated across the Empire. Herbert Baker also began as a prominent English architect before becoming involved in extensive building projects in South Africa. He then joined Lutyens in a contentious partnership to design New Delhi as well as designing the Delville Wood and Loos memorials for the Commission.<sup>153</sup> Lutyens and Baker not only became icons of Imperial architecture, together they defined the contemporary style of Indian government buildings.

Although Resolution No. 4 represented an important step towards the memorialization of India’s fallen soldiers, nearly five months after its passing no progress had been made in actually beginning work on these plans. Hoping to reassure the Indian representatives of the Imperial War Conference that these plans had not been forgotten, Director Ware sent a representative to discuss the matter with General Sir Percy Cox at the India Office. A distinguished British Indian Army officer who served during the Mesopotamian Campaign and as the High Commissioner of

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<sup>152</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel G. H. Stobart, Minutes for the Meeting of the Indian Graves Committee, 20th March, 1918, 12 noon. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 162, Item WG 909/9.

<sup>153</sup> David Crane, *Empires of the Dead: How One Man’s Vision Led to the Creation of WWI’s War Graves* (London: William Collins, 2013), 96-118.

Iraq, General Cox held immense influence within the India Office. This representative explained to General Cox that Director Ware and the Commission were working on the issue of Indian memorials and that their consent needed be obtained before any serious action could be taken. As an intermediate measure, the Commission suggested that Resolution No. 4 be enacted with Lutyens and Baker placed under the supervision of Sir Frederic Kenyon, former director of the British Museum and official Advisor to the IWGC on matters of memorial and cemetery design.<sup>154</sup> General Cox strongly suggested that the memorial Temple and Mosque be built near Estaires and that rough sketches should be drawn up as soon as possible. Once received, these sketches then returned to India with the representatives from the Imperial War Conference for further approval.<sup>155</sup>

This suggestion began a lengthy discussion within the Commission over the practical and religious difficulties of using places of worship as war memorials. The Commission considered its memorialization efforts for British and Dominion soldiers as essentially Christian in nature since their earliest conception. One significant argument that highlights this is the competition between Lutyens and Baker for the central memorial to be placed in the Commission's cemeteries. While Baker proposed a "Cross of Lorraine" to symbolize both France and Christianity, Lutyens designed a non-religious "Stone of Remembrance" with an appropriate inscription carved onto it.<sup>156</sup> Commenting on the notion that some type of cross may not be chosen, Sir Frederic Kenyon argued that "I have no doubt that great distress would be felt if our cemeteries lacked the recognition of the fact that we are a Christian Empire, and this symbol of

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<sup>154</sup> David Crane, *Empires of the Dead*, 116-121.

<sup>155</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel A. A. G., letter to the War Office, July 9, 1918. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 162, Item WG 909/9.

<sup>156</sup> David Crane, *Empires of the Dead*, 96-118.

self-sacrifice made by those who lie in them.”<sup>157</sup> Although the Commission stated a commitment to equality in its memorialization efforts, Kenyon’s view of a “Christian Empire” again shows a British preference for Christianity. In this respect it is not unusual that religious designs dominated the first concepts the Commission proposed for Indian memorials. Just as with Rudyard Kipling’s inscriptions for Indian graves, however, the longer the Commission discussed these ideas, the more apparent it became that Indian religions caused complications both practical and religious. Even from the beginning J. E. Talbot, a Principal Assistant Secretary at the Commission, took these difficulties under consideration and wrote to Sir Edwin Lutyens suggesting he consult an “Indian expert” for help designing the memorial Mosque. He recommended none other than Sahibzada Aftab Ahmed Khan, the long serving Muslim representative on the Indian Graves Committee and one of the primary proponents behind Resolution No. 4.<sup>158</sup>

For his design of a memorial Hindu Temple the Commission paired Herbert Baker with Sir Prabhashankar Pattani, the Indian Graves Committee’s Hindu representative and fellow proponent of Resolution No. 4. Pattani almost immediately cautioned Baker that a Memorial Shrine should be designed and not an actual Temple. This shrine’s design copied those of Chaityas, traditional structures erected over the cremation grounds of Rajahs and later used as prayer halls and shrines. He also highlighted the design difficulties caused by the large number of Hindu sects that exist and the unique images and symbols used by each. Although cautionary about the use of a Hindu Temple, Pattani showed enthusiasm about the inclusion of Buddhist

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<sup>157</sup> David Crane, *Empires of the Dead*, 127-128.

<sup>158</sup> J. E. Talbot, Letter to Sir Edwin Lutyens, 14th August, 1918. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 162, Item WG 909/9.



architectural styles due to their absorption into Hindu designs over the years and even suggested the use of an “Ashoka Column” bearing the memorial’s inscription. For the interior of the Shrine he recommended that sculptures or a frieze showing the various types of Indian soldiers who fought in the war should be included while the names of the fallen should be inscribed upon the interior walls. Pattani also recommended smaller shrines for use in large, central cemeteries containing Indian graves because Muslim graves could not be moved and memorial Shrines and Mosques should always appear “side by side.” Despite the depth of Pattani’s suggestions, Baker noted that no further progress on the design could be made until the Commission chose a location and the designs of the Muslim and Christian memorials could be coordinated with his own work.<sup>159</sup>

Although preliminary plans for the memorial Shrine and Mosque existed since 1918, the IWGC only made a formal presentation of these plans to the Indian government through General Sir Herbert Cox in late 1919.<sup>160</sup> The next February, General Cox, Sir Edwin Lutyens, Sir Herbert Baker, and Major General Sir A. H. Bingley, the Secretary to the Government of India, Army Department, discussed these plans at a meeting in New Delhi. Following this meeting, Major General Bingley compiled a memorandum discussing its conclusions and recommendations. He noted that the attendees of the meeting unanimously agreed that the plans for the memorial Mosque and Temple were lavish in scale and likely to be overly costly to erect. These concerns over cost proved to be so significant the attendees determined that if the British government or public financed these plans, then they were at least feasible, but if the burden of finance fell upon

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<sup>159</sup> Sir Herbert Baker, Letter to Sir Frederic Kenyon, August 15th, 1918. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 162, Item WG 909/9.

<sup>160</sup> Sir Herbert Vaughn Cox was no relation to Sir Percy Cox, though both served in the Indian Army.

the Indian government they deemed it unlikely that the necessary funds could be found.<sup>161</sup> The fact that the colonial government in India made contributions to the war effort valued at over 479 million Pounds, a sum greater than all foreign investment in India from 1850 to 1910, meant that it did not have sufficient funds available for these projects. In order to support the war India essentially halted a significant portion of its own economic development.<sup>162</sup> The British Dominions found themselves in a far stronger economic position following the war and could afford significant expenditures for war memorials. Following the war Canada allocated nearly \$1 million for these projects and Australia spent £100,000 on the memorial at Villers-Bretonneux alone. For the monument at Neuve Chapelle the Indian government could only contribute £10,000.<sup>163</sup> Simply trying to make up for this economic loss following the war, little money could be spared for war memorials thousands of miles away.

As the process of trying to approve these plans continued, a meeting between the Imperial War Graves Commission and the India Office occurred on July 27, 1920 which discussed the subject of the memorial Temple and Mosque. The difficulties already brought to light in the construction of these memorials dominated this discussion. Not only did both parties agree that these plans should be abandoned on the basis of cost, they also insisted that “the Indian fallen should be commemorated on the same level and in the same way, *Mutatis Mutandis*,<sup>164</sup> as the British and those from the Dominions.” This meant using “Stones of

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<sup>161</sup> Major General Sir A. H. Bingley, Memorandum on Indian War Memorials in France, July 1920. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 263, Item WG 909/7.

<sup>162</sup> Ellinwood, Dewitt C. and S. D. Pradhan, eds. *India and World War I* (Columbia, Mon.: South Asia Books, 1978), 173.

<sup>163</sup> Crane, *Empires of the Dead*, 192-193.

<sup>164</sup> “*Mutatis Mutandis*” is a Latin phrase meaning “The necessary changes having been made.”

Remembrance,” cenotaphs, or obelisks in the place occupied by the Cross of Sacrifice in Christian cemeteries. The Commission also directed that all Indian soldiers who fell in France should be entered into cemetery registers and that all cremated Hindus should have their names inscribed on cemetery walls or other locations “in the same way as British and other soldiers whose bodies are not recovered.” It is unclear if the Commission intended this as an actual attempt to uphold equality or simply as a way of justifying canceling the plans for these memorials, but the result represented a significant reduction in cost and an almost complete elimination of religious complications.<sup>165</sup> Although the Commission considered respect for all of the Empire’s war dead and their religions as its ultimate priority, the reality of paying for these memorialization efforts eventually limited what it could actually accomplish.

As the Commission’s plans for these memorials became widely known, the Indian government and communities from across the Empire began voicing their opinions. During this time Sikhs living in the Saragodha<sup>166</sup> district of India sent a letter to Khalsa Diwan, Secretary Chief of the Sikh Deputation in London. This letter requested that if plans for a memorial Temple and Mosque went ahead, then a Sikh Gurdwara should also be constructed.<sup>167</sup> The Sikh Deputation in London took this letter seriously enough that they forwarded it directly to the office of the Secretary of State for India and then on to the IWGC in the hope that “no invidious

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<sup>165</sup> G. M. Young, Memorandum on a conference between the Indian War Graves Commission and the India Office on 27th July 1920, 29th July 1920. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 263, Item WG 909/7.

<sup>166</sup> This region of India is now correctly spelled “Sargodha.”

<sup>167</sup> Sikhs of Saragodha District, Letter to Khalsa Diwan, Secretary Chief of the Sikh Deputation in London, 1st July, 1920. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 263, Item WG 909/7.

distinction to the prejudice of the Sikh community is made in this matter.”<sup>168</sup> Other communities from the Empire joined the Sikhs in requesting a separate memorial during this period and soon the Gurkha community made a similar request. Although primarily followers of the Hindu religion, Gurkhas are a distinct group of soldiers recruited from Nepal and serving in the Indian Army. For this reason, they requested their own unique memorial “which would disassociate them from their Indian co-religionists.” With the plans for the Temple and Mosque already being criticized for their cost, the addition of two more temples to the plan made it almost impossible to justify the expenditure. The Commission also found it unlikely that the French government would authorize the construction of religious memorials in the shape of a Mosque and Shrine. It instead recommended that a Cenotaph of an appropriate design be erected as a central memorial in cemeteries containing Indian graves to compliment the “Cross of Remembrance” used in Christian cemeteries. The Cenotaphs would then be supplemented where appropriate by “Stones of Remembrance” bearing inscriptions in the language of those troops buried in the cemetery.<sup>169</sup>

The Commission’s plans for memorial places of worship also received at least some criticism from within the British government itself. Lord Hugh Cecil, a Member of Parliament for Oxford University, son of former Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, and a strong advocate for Anglican values in the British government, objected to these plans.<sup>170</sup> During the war, Cecil also served as a member of the Mesopotamia Commission of Inquiry, a government body charged

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<sup>168</sup> Seworam Sind, Secretary of the Sikh Deputation in London, Letter to The Rt. Hon. Edwin Samuel Mantagu, Secretary of State for India, 13th August, 1920. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 263, Item WG 909/7.

<sup>169</sup> Major General Sir A. H. Bingley, Memorandum on Indian War Memorials in France, July 1920. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 263, Item WG 909/7.

<sup>170</sup> Richard A. Rempel, “Lord Hugh Cecil’s Parliamentary Career, 1900-1914: Promise Unfulfilled,” *Journal of British Studies* 11, no. 2 (May, 1972): 104-130.

with investigating the troubled campaigns at Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia itself.<sup>171</sup> When Cecil became aware of the Commission's plans for a memorial Temple and Mosque he began a correspondence with Sir Frederic Kenyon in which he strongly voiced his criticisms of these plans. Not only did Cecil object to the fact that these memorials would be places of worship, he also objected to their funding by British Christians through subscription. Although his personal faith undoubtedly contributed to these objections, his time on the Mesopotamia Commission of Inquiry left him intimately familiar with the sacrifices of the Indian Army in Mesopotamia. This makes his objection to voluntary subscription of these memorials by British citizens less understandable. Whether reasonable or not, the IWGC almost immediately repudiated these objections. In a letter to Lieutenant-Colonel Lord Arthur Browne, Principal Assistant Secretary for the Commission in March of 1920, G. M. Young relayed the opinions of General Cobbe on Cecil's criticisms. General Cobbe pointed out that Sir Frederic Kenyon had already confirmed that the Indian government agreed to "paying their share of the expenses of the whole scheme." He also rejected the claim that either the Mosque or Temple memorials served as actual places of worship due to the fact that "[n]either of them is to be dedicated, the Hindu building is specifically to contain no idol or shrine, and of course there is no question of the Muhammadan [sic] building containing either of these things. Neither building will have a priest or Mullah attached to it." In fact, General Cobbe argued that these buildings merely made use of architectural styles drawn from Hindu and Muslim religious buildings and melded them into the form of a war memorial. He also pointed out the hypocrisy of such criticism. "[I]t would be as

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<sup>171</sup> Anonymous, "Office-Holders in Modern Britain: Appendix 1," British History Online, Accessed February 23, 2018, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/office-holders/vol10/pp85-88#h3-0025>.

reasonable to object to the use of Gothic architecture in a secular building, and far more reasonable to demur on religious grounds to the pagan style of half the churches in London, as to grudge the Hindu and Muhammadan soldiers of the crown a memorial in consonance with their architectural traditions.” General Cobbe also suggested that his views be relayed to Kenyon himself “in case Lord H. Cecil renews his correspondence with him on the subject.”<sup>172</sup> Even though the Commission and Indian government criticized these memorials on practical grounds, they quickly defended them from religious bias and came to the defense of the architects designing them

The longer the Commission discussed the plans for memorial places of worship, the more complicated and expensive they became. With the Sikh and Gurkha communities also requesting their own unique memorials the Commission realized that these plans were simply impractical. By September of 1920, the Commission passed a resolution ending all plans for the memorial Shrine and Mosque and made the use of obelisks and “Stones of Remembrance” in cemeteries the official policy of the IWGC. This policy solved almost all of the complications of the larger memorials including cost and religious considerations. Once again, the IWGC began memorialization efforts with a plan that put India’s religious diversity at the forefront, this time in the form of a Temple and Mosque. Yet once again, the complexity of these religions and the countless ways that oversights could cause offense forced the Commission to water down its plans to simpler, smaller monuments. Only inscriptions for Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs on the

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<sup>172</sup> G. M. Young, letter to Lord Arthur Browne, 5th March, 1920. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 148, Item WG 135.

Stones of Remembrance remained as acknowledgements of diversity. The inscriptions on obelisks remained in English only.<sup>173</sup>

While the Commission debated its plans for a memorial Temple and Mosque in France, the Indian government planned to create its own memorials for the nation's war dead. The centerpiece of these plans was a large central memorial in Delhi with commemorative tablets placed in villages across India that supplied large numbers of recruits to the war effort, an estimated 500 such villages received these tablets.<sup>174</sup> Obelisks listing the Indian and British units who served in the Indian Army would then be placed in the five theaters of the war: France and Belgium, Egypt and Palestine, Mesopotamia, Gallipoli, and East Africa. The Indian government planned to fully fund these memorials with an estimated cost of £2,500-£3,000 each.<sup>175</sup> The plans for Indian memorials following the war even attracted the attention of Buckingham Palace and Clive Wigram, 1st Baron Wigram and Private Secretary to King George V, wrote to the India Office in early 1920 asking that he be kept apprised of any such plans so that they might be passed along to the King.<sup>176</sup> The most significant of these memorials built by the Indian government is the All-India War Memorial, later known as the India Gate, a massive arch meant to commemorate all of the Indian soldiers who died during the war. Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and standing 138 feet tall, this monument took nearly nine years to build.<sup>177</sup> Originally

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<sup>173</sup> Financial Advisor, Imperial War Graves Commission, Letter to Lord Arthur Browne, September 23rd, 1920. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 263, Item WG 909/7.

<sup>174</sup> Reuters, "India's War Losses, Memorial Arch at Delhi," 8 December, 1921.

<sup>175</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, Report on "The Erection of Memorials to the Indian Army, 8 November, 1919. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 649, Item WG 861.

<sup>176</sup> Clive Wigram, Buckingham Palace, letter to A. L. R. Parsons, India Office, 9 February 1920. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 649, Item WG 861.

<sup>177</sup> Staff Writers, "The All-India War Memorial," *The Times* (London, England), 10 April, 1930.

conceived to honor the dead from a war of Empire, the Gate eventually became a symbol of India itself and played central roles in Republic Day celebrations following independence.<sup>178</sup>

Although the Indian government wanted to build its own memorials in each theater of the war, the form of these memorials caused a conflict that eventually ended these plans. They originally intended for these memorials to take the form of “Battle Exploit Memorials” (BEMs) to commemorate the units who fought in certain locations and the victories they achieved. Instead of directly honoring the dead and missing of the war, these memorials marked the military victories of every Indian soldier who fought in the theater. Within Britain itself, plans for a large number of Battle Exploit Memorials caused their own conflict. Under the control of the National Battlefields Memorial Committee, these plans envisioned a string of such memorials along the lines held by the British during the war. When it became known that the IWGC also planned its own “Memorials to the Missing,” however, the two organizations began discussions on how to coordinate their efforts. Not wanting to dilute the importance of these efforts by building duplicate memorials across the Western Front, the NBMC scrapped its plans in favor of those of the IWGC. With this decision, almost all of Britain’s Great War memorials came completely under the control of the IWGC.<sup>179</sup> For the time being, however, the Dominions and the Indian government still retained final say over their own memorialization efforts.

Despite retaining this final say, India’s own plans for BEMs eventually caused a conflict that solidified IWGC control over most Indian memorials outside of the subcontinent as well.

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<sup>178</sup> Staff Writers, “Republic Day Scenes in New Delhi,” *India News* (New Delhi, India), 12 February 1972.

<sup>179</sup> The Secretary, Imperial War Graves Commission, Letter to the India Office, March 14th, 1922. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 649, Item WG 861.



Although the Menin Gate Memorial commemorated the Indian dead and missing from Ypres and The Salient, over 4,500 missing Indian soldiers from across the Western Front still needed a memorial. The Commission considered this a sufficient number to justify the building of an entire memorial devoted solely to their memory and offered to dedicate one of its already planned memorials on the Western Front entirely to India's missing soldiers. If the Indian government agreed to this course of action, then the Commission could fully fund the project with India's contribution to the IWGC budget already covering its share. If the Indian government continued with its plans for Battle Exploit Memorials, then the names of India's missing could be included on appropriate British memorials with no distinct Indian memorial made in order to avoid duplicate memorials. As the Commission's charter did not allow it to fund or build Battle Exploit Memorials, India would have to fully fund these projects itself. Although the final decision lay with the Indian government, its financial difficulties following the war led the Commission to believe that it could not support its own memorial plans and could be convinced to drop these in favor of the Commission's proposed Indian memorial.<sup>180</sup> After some deliberation on the part of the Indian Government, it finally decided to amalgamate its own plans into those of the Commission and to accept the Commission's offer of a distinct memorial to India's missing on the Western Front. Located near the lines held by the Indian Army at Neuve Chapelle, the Commission planned for this site to act in spirit as a BEM as well as a memorial to the missing.<sup>181</sup> Although the Indian Government eventually built a handful of BEMs

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<sup>180</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, "Report of Interview with Mr. Stewart," 8 March, 1922. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 649, Item WG 861.

<sup>181</sup> E. Burdson, Officiating Secretary to the Government of India, Letter to the Secretary, Military Department, India Office, June 22nd, 1922. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 649, Item WG 861.

in places like Port Tewfik in Mesopotamia, this decision made the IWGC the primary curator of the memory of India's war dead.

The dedication of an entire memorial on the Western Front to India's missing also helped to elevate their standing within the memorialization process. This elevation of standing mainly concerned how the Commission listed the names of the Empire's missing on memorials such as the Menin Gate that included names from across the Empire. It took a surprisingly long time for the Commission to consider how to organize such long and varied lists of missing soldiers. Only on July 3, 1923 did Herbert Pelisun write to Director Ware regarding how to organize the Order of Precedence for units listed on memorials. The traditional Order of Precedence for the British Military was overly complicated at the time and caused many Territorial and Reserve Units to be listed separately from their Regiments.<sup>182</sup> Based on the Army List of 1917, a register of all units in the British and Imperial Forces, the suggested revised Order of Precedence placed the Indian Army at the very bottom below all the Dominions and even the British West Indies Regiment and the 1st Cape Coloured Labour Battalion. The Commission did note, however, that "the position of the Indian Army would need to be considered."<sup>183</sup> By July 10 the Director of Records consulted with Sir George McDonogh, former Director of Military Intelligence and a Commissioner at the IWGC. Their revised Order of Precedence placed the Indian Army second

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<sup>182</sup> Herbert Pelisun, Letter to Sir Fabian Ware regarding Official Order of Precedence, 3 July, 1923. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 542, Item WG 219/6.

<sup>183</sup> Printing Advisor, Imperial War Graves Commission, Letter to the Director of Records, 5 July, 1923. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 542, Item WG 219/6.

only to the units of the British Army itself and above all of the Dominions.<sup>184</sup> Far from blindly sticking to established military tradition, the Commission readily recognized India's significant contribution to the war effort and gave its missing soldiers a prominent place on its memorials. Even with this recognition, India's missing still existed as merely one part of these mixed memorials and the monument at Neuve Chapelle therefore acted to highlight India's contribution to the war on the Western Front.

The conflict over Battle Exploit Memorials ended by 1923. By this time the IWGC fully resolved the issues of control over India's memorial to the Missing on the Western Front and began the process of its design and construction. The Commission first needed to find an architect to design the memorial and once again turned to Sir Herbert Baker who quickly accepted the offer in March of 1923. In order to avoid the design difficulties connected to the abortive plans for the memorial Temple and Mosque, the Director of Works recommended that he once again work closely with the India Office in order to work out any religious complications that might arise.<sup>185</sup> Baker completed his designs by the end of June 1923 and submitted them to the IWGC for approval. Baker described his design as "based on an open space enclosed by a pierced stone railing in front and a solid wall at the back, on which the names of the missing would be inscribed. The enclosure will be entered by a small domed chatri such is characteristic of the Indian sepulcral [sic] monument, with a similar one opposite the entrance to be used as a shelter." In order to avoid religious complications, Baker sought a

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<sup>184</sup> Director of Records, Imperial War Graves Commission, "Memorials to the 'Missing'," Letter to Vice-Chairman, Imperial War Graves Commission, July 1923. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 542, Item WG 219/6.

<sup>185</sup> Colonel Durham, Director of Works, "Indian Memorial - Neuve Chapelle," Letter to Lord Arthur Browne, 9 March 1923. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 653, Item WG 861/2 Pt. 1.

symbol that could represent all Indians and decided on a column in the form used by the Emperor Ashoka throughout India and topped by a Lotus and a glass bowl filled with water from the river Ganges, described as “the most sacred symbolic element in India.” He also planned for the railings surrounding the site to have the Coats of Arms of the provinces and native states of India carved into them and an existing ditch on the site expanded into a moat around the monument to represent the trenches that defined the war experience on the Western Front.<sup>186</sup>

Little more than a week after Baker submitted his design, the IWGC already found reason for concern. Writing to General Cobbe at the India Office, Lord Arthur Brown noted Baker’s hesitantancy to pursue his design further until he could complete a consultation with the India Office, even going so far as to request the presence of J. H. Marshall, Director General of Archaeology in India. In the meantime, Browne voiced concerns that the design, although intended to honor both Muslims and Hindus, “had a tendency to be more Hindu than Mohammedan in character” with the Ashoka column and bowl of water from the Ganges singled out as the most prominently Hindu elements.<sup>187</sup> Following the planned meeting with the India Office the next week, Lord Arthur Browne, Rudyard Kipling, General Sir Alexander Cobbe, and the Vice-Chairman of the Commission attended a meeting at the IWGC to discuss Baker’s design. Although the Commission approved Baker’s design, it rejected his idea for a glass bowl filled with water from the Ganges and replaced it with a simple carved crown taking its place at

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<sup>186</sup> Sir Herbert Baker, “Indian Memorial, Neuve Chapelle,” Letter to Secretary of Works, 29 June, 1923. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 653, Item WG 861/2 Pt. 1.

<sup>187</sup> Lord Arthur Browne, Letter to Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Cobbe, 10 July, 1923. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 653, Item WG 861/2 Pt. 1.

the top of the column.<sup>188</sup> Compared to the plans for a memorial Temple and Mosque, The Commission encountered relatively few controversies in the design process for the memorial at Neuve Chapelle and approved the designs in only two weeks versus the almost two full years spent on the Temple and Mosque.

With the design for the Neuve Chapelle memorial approved, the Commission began preparing for its construction, but by October of 1923 a new problem presented itself. Monsieur Sengez, who promised part of his property located at a crossroads in the Commune of Richebourg-l'Avoué near Neuve Chapelle for the memorial since as early as 1921, retracted his offer due to issues of inheritance. A Portuguese cemetery already located on land he previously owned limited his holdings while another suitable site already contained a small monument to a British Officer erected by the family who owned the property. Other sites proved to be either too small, owned by more than person, or priced as high as F70,000.<sup>189</sup> By December, the Commission was still unable to find a suitable site for the memorial and although numerous plots of open land were available, the Commission desired a very specific type of land. This land should be located within the limits of the Battle of Neuve Chapelle and its subsidiary Battle of Loos, sit on a main road or crossroads if possible, and allow the memorial to face towards the location of the German lines during the war. Although four sites on crossroads fit this criteria within the Communes of Richebourg L'Avoué' and Neuve Chapelle, not one of the owners

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<sup>188</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, "Extract from 57th Meeting of I.W.G.C. Held 18.7.1923," July, 1923. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 653, Item WG 861/2 Pt. 1.

<sup>189</sup> Secrétaire Général du Comité Mixte Franco-Britannique Commission Impériale des Sépultures Militaires, Letter to Lord Arthur Browne, 27 October, 1923. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 653, Item WG 861/2 Pt. 1.

agreed to sell their land.<sup>190</sup> Although the Commission eventually purchased suitable land, the process of simply finding a place to build their memorial to Indians on the Western Front took considerable time and effort.

Finally, one of the most important design decisions left to be made for the memorial concerned how to list the names of the Indian Army's missing soldiers. Although not as large as other memorials such as the Menin Gate, the 5,350<sup>191</sup> names the Commission planned to commemorate on the Neuve Chapelle Memorial still represented a daunting task of organization and inscription. By mid-1923 the Secretary of State for India reached an agreement with the Commission on how these names should be organized. All names should be listed by unit with British officers listed alongside their men. Officers in general then headed each list followed by NCOs and finally the general ranks. The suggested inscription for the memorial read: "To the glorious memory of the British Officers, Indian Officers and Men of the Indian Army who died in France and Belgium during the Great War 1914-1918. The names of those whose resting place is unknown are recorded below." In order to represent all the soldiers memorialized at Neuve Chapelle, and allow any relatives who visited to read the inscription, the Commission planned for its presentation in English, Urdu, Hindi, and Gurmukhi.<sup>192</sup> During this entire process the

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<sup>190</sup> Secrétaire Général du Comité Mixte Franco-Britannique Commission Impériale des Sépultures Militaires, Letter to Lord Arthur Browne, 17 December, 1923. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 653, Item WG 861/2 Pt. 1.

<sup>191</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, "Imperial War Graves Commission: 54th Meeting, Tuesday, 20th. March, 1923," March, 1923. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 653, Item WG 861/2 Pt. 1.

<sup>192</sup> S. T. Stewart, Joint Secretary, Military Department, India Office, Letter to the Secretary, Imperial War Graves Commission, 10 April, 1923. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 653, Item WG 861/2 Pt. 1.

Commission encountered no serious issues in obtaining accurate lists of the Indian missing and no controversies arose in connection with how they should be listed.

On October 7, 1927, after almost four years of construction, the IWGC unveiled the Neuve Chapelle memorial. Representatives from the British, Indian, Dominion, and French governments attended the ceremony as well as high-ranking military officers from each nation. Before the ceremony began the Indian contingent inspected the memorial before taking their assigned positions. The ceremony then began with an opening address by Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Anderson, a veteran commander in the Indian Army. In this address, Anderson described the soldiers of the Indian Army as “[m]en of many different races, speaking different languages and holding different religious beliefs but one and all British and Indian alike bound together by the tie of loyalty to their King Emperor and determined to uphold the honour and the ideals of His Empire.”<sup>193</sup> Further speeches by Colonel H. H. the Maharaja of Kapurthala and Maréchal de France Ferdinand Foch, one of the most celebrated French generals of the war and eventual Commander-in-Chief of Allied Forces in Europe, then followed. After the address by Maréchal Foch, British Field Marshall and former Commander-in-Chief for India Sir Claud Jacob invited The Rt. Hon. the Earl of Birkenhead, Secretary of State for India to make his address followed by the formal unveiling of the memorial. The honor guard then played The Last Post, the formal bugle call used during British military funerals, followed by a minute’s silence. The ceremony concluded with the Commissioners of the IWGC placing wreaths at the memorial and the

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<sup>193</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, “Neuve Chapelle Ceremony 7.9.27 Opening Address by Sir Charles Anderson,” July, 1927. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 660, Item Add 1/1/99.

playing of the French and British national anthems.<sup>194</sup> Far from a small and discreet ceremony, the unveiling of the Neuve Chapelle memorial was a celebrated event attended by men from the highest levels of the British, French, and Indian governments and militaries. The attendance by Maréchal Foch, perhaps the most notable and celebrated officer of the entire war, showed the high esteem in which the French military held India's contribution to the defense of France. The British government itself went even further to show its appreciation. Asked to be made aware of the progress of the memorials to India's fallen since their earliest stages, King George V personally received the twenty-six Indian soldiers and two British Officers who made up the Indian contingent at the unveiling, each of whom fought during the Battle of Neuve Chapelle. During a reception at Buckingham Palace on the morning of Saturday, November 7, the King personally spoke with these soldiers, asking about their service during the war and expressing his gratitude for their attendance at the unveiling before inviting them to personally inspect the Royal Palaces at St. James.<sup>195</sup> Although the Memorial at Neuve Chapelle received prominent attention, not everyone viewed it as a fitting tribute to India's contribution to the war. In a Letter to the Editor published in the October 1st, 1927 edition of the *The Times*, Stanley Rice expressed concern that the memorial "will mean little or nothing to the Indian Army." He argued that to many Indians the war in Europe represented "but a dim memory and to some only an episode of history" and that "[t]o India the war meant very largely the Mesopotamian campaign." In light "of the fact that the Memorial will never be seen by those whom it most nearly concerns," he

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<sup>194</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, "Order of Ceremonial at the Unveiling of the Memorial at Neuve-Chapelle, Pas-De-Calais, France" (London: Henderson and Spalding, 7 October, 1927), 1-3. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 660, Item Add 1/1/99.

<sup>195</sup> Staff Writers, "Indian Soldiers' Visit To The King," *The Times* (London, England), 7 November, 1927.



suggested sending photographs and accounts of the memorial's significance to the regiments commemorated on the memorial.<sup>196</sup>

Despite Mr. Rice's concerns, the Commission started considering a memorial for India's missing in Mesopotamia at the end of the war with serious planning beginning in 1922. Wanting to find a meaningful location for this memorial the Commission decided that it should be constructed at Basra, the site of the initial landings of the Mesopotamian Campaign in 1914. To design this memorial, meant to commemorate India's most significant contribution to the war and the largest number of its dead and missing soldiers, the Commission turned to Edward Prioleau Warren, a British architect who specialized in designing churches and country homes.<sup>197</sup> Not nearly as successful or influential as Herbert Baker, Warren seems an underwhelming choice by the Commission to build the most important memorial to India's sacrifice in the war, even when his previous experience working on other Commission projects in the region is considered. Despite lacking the background of Lutyens or Baker, Warren began the design process with vigor, but became frustrated by the lack of communication from the Commission about what form the memorial should take. In a letter to Colonel H. F. Robinson of the IWGC in May of 1923, Warren voiced his frustration. "[I]t is regrettable that no indication whatsoever of the type or form of the building in question was provided me, beyond the request for a design for a "Building" to commemorate about 13,000 names of the missing in Mesopotamia, with no particulars of religions or sects to be commemorated, without definition of the position or nature of the site in view." Working from his previous experience designing cemeteries and memorials

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<sup>196</sup> Stanley Rice, "The Indian Memorial At Neuve Chapelle: To The Editor of The Times," *The Times* (London, England), October 1st, 1927.

<sup>197</sup> Anonymous, "Obituary for Edward Prioleau Warren," *Architectural Journal* 85 (1937): 861.

to Indian soldiers, Warren designed the memorial “without the slightest intention of conveying symbolism in any way” and organized it in a cruciform pattern with Christians, Hindus, and Muslims having equal sections around a central domed structure. Very cognizant of the lack of direction he received in the design process, Warren eagerly requested a consultation with the Commission to approve the design before final planning began.<sup>198</sup>

This meeting took place in June of 1923 at the India Office and was attended by Lord Arthur Browne, former Military Secretary to the India Office and member of the Council of India Sir Edmund Barrow, Colonel Chitty from the IWGC, and Warren himself. Despite being the first Commission architect to design a memorial to Indian soldiers without including any of the religious elements that caused such serious complications elsewhere, this meeting proved that Warren held valid concerns and those in attendance immediately rejected his design for being a closed structure. They also found the design to be incredibly unattractive with Barrow describing it as “a fortified caravanserai” and Colonel Chitty noting its “striking resemblance to the local jail.” Surprisingly, one of the main objections to this design concerned the way that it encouraged vandalism. Both Colonel Chitty and Lord Arthur Browne voiced concerns “that the design of the building gave every opportunity for the rival religious sects to desecrate the portions of the memorial set aside for other religions and that this would undoubtedly happen in a memorial which was not open to general view.” For the first time in its discussion of memorials to India’s missing, the Commission addressed the possibility of religious desecration. Certain that such desecration would eventually occur, the attendees demanded a new, open-form

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<sup>198</sup> Edward Prioleau Warren, Letter to Colonel H. F. Robinson, Imperial War Graves Commission, May 18th, 1923. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 627, Item WG 219/19 Pt. 1.

design be prepared, but left the details to Warren.<sup>199</sup> In the end, Warren returned an open-formed design featuring a central obelisk with the names of the missing inscribed on rectangular walls surrounding the site. Although the Commission approved this design, there still remained one final issue to be resolved that caused a lasting effect on the memory of the missing of the Mesopotamian Campaign.

Nearly four years after the Commission made its decisions to decentralize Graves Registration and record keeping efforts in Mesopotamia, the consequences of this action became apparent. The Commission estimated that the Basra memorial would list the names of 13,000 British missing and between 25,000 and 40,000 Indians. With the casualty lists for the British missing mostly complete, the fractured state of Indian records meant that the Commission required a considerable amount of time to prepare provisional lists of Indian missing. Even if it completed this process, the Commission estimated that the lists would still “contain only 60-70% of the names of the dead.” The Commission found the difficulties in compiling accurate lists of Indian missing so severe that it considered making Basra a memorial only to British missing and to construct a separate Indian memorial once the issue could be settled.<sup>200</sup>

These difficulties in compiling accurate lists of India’s missing in Mesopotamia, so central to the memorialization process, prompted a discussion within the Commission on how to handle the issue. Although given enough time, accurate and complete casualty lists may have been recreated, the Commission wanted to finish work on the memorial as soon as possible. The

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<sup>199</sup> Lord Arthur Browne, “Memorial to the Missing at Basra: Discussion at the India Office,” (Imperial War Graves Commission: London), June 7th, 1923. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 627, Item WG 219/19 Pt. 1.

<sup>200</sup> Lord Arthur Browne, “Memorial to Missing Iraq” Memorandum to Controller and Financial Advisor Imperial War Graves Commission, February 6th, 1924. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 627, Item WG 219/19 Pt. 1.

eminent withdrawal of British forces from the region, along with the stability and security they provided, meant that the Commission felt it could not afford to take months correcting these lists. Working against this deadline, the Commission made the momentous decision to sidestep the issue entirely and forgo memorializing most of the Indian Missing by name.<sup>201</sup> In early March of 1924 Lord Arthur Browne wrote to the Under-Secretary of State, Military Department, at the India Office seeking approval to these changes. This letter suggested the most striking policy change to the memorialization of India's Missing. Due to the fact "that the memorials themselves will in all probability not be seen by any of the relatives of the rank and file, the memorials in question outside Europe will contain only the names of the regiments concerned, followed in each case by the names of the British officers (and non-commissioned officers if any), the names of the Indian officers and the number of the native non-commissioned officers and men." Faced with inaccurate records and little time to correct them, the Commission decided to simply remove the names of India's missing rank and file from the memorialization process outside of Europe. This decision was not universal, however, and "[i]n Europe, where the memorials will be seen by many visitors, and where the numbers of Indian names concerned are not so great, the British and Indian officers and the Indian rank and file will be commemorated by name." The Indian government only demanded that the names of the Indian rank-and-file outside of Europe should be included in cemetery and memorial registers.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> Imperial War Graves Commission, Minutes of the 66th Meeting of the Imperial War Graves Commission, May 14th, 1924. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 627, Item WG 219/19 Pt. 1.

<sup>202</sup> Lord Arthur Browne, Letter to the Under-Secretary of State, Military Department, India Office, March 14, 1924. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 627, Item WG 219/19 Pt. 1.

Although practical reasons existed for this decision, it cannot be ignored that the British government had shown the highest respect for white and British soldiers, while allowing compromises when it came to the Indian rank and file. Those Indian officers who were lucky enough to be listed by name undoubtedly belonged to the upper classes and castes of Indian society so favored by the British. While the difficulty of recreating accurate casualty lists in a short amount of time was a legitimate concern, deciding not to list Indian soldiers by name simply because their families would not be able to visit the memorial seems a shallow excuse to justify sidestepping the issue. Deciding not to list enlisted Indian soldiers by name also directly contradicted the Commission's commitment to equality and profoundly impacted the lasting memory of those Indians who fought and died in Mesopotamia, many forever left in scattered and undocumented graves. Out of an original estimate of almost 40,000 names from the Indian Army to be commemorated on the Basra Memorial, only 249 white officers, 50 white NCOs and enlisted, and 419 Indian officers remained. These 718 names represented less than 2% of the Indian Army's missing in Mesopotamia.<sup>203</sup>

Despite these changes, the Commission finally unveiled the Basra Memorial at 10 am on March 27, 1929.<sup>204</sup> Sir Gilbert Clayton, High Commissioner for the British Mandate of Mesopotamia, presided over the ceremony. The British Consul for Basra Gerald Selous, a Mr. Peek from the IWGC,<sup>205</sup> Commander Sir John Alleyne of the Royal Navy, and the Mutasarrif of

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<sup>203</sup> H. Dennis, "Basra Memorial to the "Missing". Indian Army." (Imperial War Graves Commission: London), April 3rd, 1925. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 627, Item WG 219/19 Pt. 1.

<sup>204</sup> Staff Writers, "Basra War Memorial," *The Times* (London, England), March 25th, 1929.

<sup>205</sup> Staff Writers, "Iraq War Memorial Unveiled: Sir G. Clayton's First Visit to Basra," *Madras Mail*, April 3, 1929.

the Basra Liwa representing King Faisal of Iraq, also attended the ceremony.<sup>206</sup> A significant part of the local British and Indian communities also attended the ceremony with the Indian community represented by Sardar Khan, Secretary of the local Indian Association.<sup>207</sup> The ceremony opened with Clayton being received by Sir Robert Brooke Popham, the Air Officer Commanding<sup>208</sup> followed by the Royal Salute and an inspection of the Honor Guard provided by the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy.<sup>209</sup> H.M.S. Lupin also traveled up the Tigris River, moored near the memorial for the ceremony, and provided sailors for the honor guard. After the inspection, Sir Gilbert Clayton made a short address in part stating that: “We are here to unveil a memorial to those whose graves are unknown. It is fitting that this memorial should stand at the entrance to Iraq where the first expeditionary force entered the country. As we work for the peace and prosperity of Iraq it is fitting that we should have a reminder of those who gave their lives for the liberation of the country.” The formal unveiling followed this address accompanied by a nineteen gun salute from H.M.S. Lupin, a fly over<sup>210</sup> by aircraft from 84 Squadron RAF,<sup>211</sup> and the playing of The Last Post by a formation of RAF buglers.<sup>212</sup> A minute of silence then followed before the laying of wreaths by Clayton and representatives of the Indian, Australian,

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<sup>206</sup> G. Peek, Letter to Lord Arthur Browne, March 28th, 1929. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 628, Item WG 219/19 Pt. 2.

<sup>207</sup> Staff Writers, “Iraq War Memorial Unveiled: Sir G. Clayton’s First Visit to Basra,” *Madras Mail*, April 3, 1929.

<sup>208</sup> G. Peek, Letter to Lord Arthur Browne, March 28th, 1929. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 628, Item WG 219/19 Pt. 2.

<sup>209</sup> Staff Writers, “Iraq War Memorial Unveiled: Sir G. Clayton’s First Visit to Basra,” *Madras Mail*, April 3, 1929.

<sup>210</sup> Staff Writers, “Iraq War Memorial Unveiled: Sir G. Clayton’s First Visit to Basra,” *Madras Mail*, April 3, 1929.

<sup>211</sup> G. Peek, Letter to Lord Arthur Browne, March 28th, 1929. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 628, Item WG 219/19 Pt. 2.

<sup>212</sup> Staff Writers, “Iraq War Memorial Unveiled: Sir G. Clayton’s First Visit to Basra,” *Madras Mail*, April 3, 1929.

and New Zealand governments<sup>213</sup> as well as representatives of Iraq, the Royal Navy, seven Divisions of the British and Indian Armies that served in the Mesopotamian Campaign,<sup>214</sup> and the Merchant Navy.<sup>215</sup> After the ceremony ended, Clayton made official visits to H.M.S. Lupin and Viceroy's Pier at Basra where he met with city officials. The day finally ended with a garden party at the British Consulate attended by nearly 300 guests.<sup>216</sup>

Although not attended by nearly as prestigious representatives as the unveiling of the Neuve Chapelle Memorial, the unveiling at Basra was an almost extravagant affair with its naval salutes, flyovers, and social events. The ceremony only lacked one important element, a contingent of soldiers from the Indian Army itself. By the time of the unveiling, all Indian Army units withdrew from Mesopotamia with no arrangements made for their attendance. After nearly five years spent planning and constructing the memorial at Basra, the memorial to India's most important contribution to the war and the over 53,000 missing of the campaign, the Indian Army was not even present at the unveiling. Neither were the legendary Field Marshals of the war or the Director of the IWGC, and no one in attendance was received by King George V himself. Many of these differences are simply due to practical logistics. The end of the war necessitated the withdrawal of the Indian Army from Mesopotamia and the attendance of prominent representatives from Europe required weeks of travel.

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<sup>213</sup> Staff Writers, "Iraq War Memorial Unveiled: Sir G. Clayton's First Visit to Basra," *Madras Mail*, April 3, 1929.

<sup>214</sup> The Imperial War Graves Commission, "Extract from Minutes of Proceedings of the 119th Meeting of the Commission held on 17.4.29," April, 1929. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 628, Item WG 219/19 Pt. 2.

<sup>215</sup> G. Peek, Letter to Lord Arthur Browne, March 28th, 1929. Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives, Catalogue Number 628, Item WG 219/19 Pt. 2.

<sup>216</sup> Staff Writers, "Iraq War Memorial Unveiled: Sir G. Clayton's First Visit to Basra," *Madras Mail*, April 3, 1929.

While understandable, these differences show the significant ways that wartime policies, time, and geography can affect the process of memorialization. The British nation viewed the Western Front as the only theater of the war that truly mattered,<sup>217</sup> and memorialization efforts elsewhere never received the level of care and consideration of those in France and Belgium. In Mesopotamia, the wartime policy decision by the Commission not to turn over records of Indian burials and missing to Graves Registration Units lead directly to the fragmented and inaccurate state of those records during the memorialization process. A limited time for construction after a troubled planning process made the correction of these records, scattered amongst Indian Army units already returned to their home garrisons, impractical. Finally, the fact that Mesopotamia is so distant from both Europe and India meant that very few relatives of the fallen could actually visit the memorial. Without large numbers of visitors making the journey to view the memorial, the Commission felt justified in abandoning efforts to include the names of India's missing rank and file on the memorial. This resulted in these missing soldiers being reduced to a statistic. No longer individuals with their own unique experiences, they have instead become simply part of the greater tragedy of the war.

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<sup>217</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3-38.



## THE LEGACY OF INDIA'S MEMORIALS: A CONTINUED DIVERGENCE

“Each one that is born into this world must drink the cup of death, and all I ask of God is such a death as will bring honour to my name in the world.” - Risaldar Sadik Muhammad Khan, 36th Jacob's Horse, France, 1917.<sup>218</sup>

On April 6, 2003, the British 7th Armoured Brigade and 3 Commando Brigade began an assault on the city of Basra during the 2003 United States lead invasion of Iraq.<sup>219</sup> By April 6 the city was in British hands. Nearly 90 years after the British and Indian landings at Fao in the opening months of the First World War, Britain once again opened an invasion of Iraq with an assault on Basra. The men of the Indian Army, now serving an independent nation with no remaining imperial ties to Britain, took no part in this assault. On November 9, 2003, nearly eight months after the capture of Basra, British forces held a Remembrance Day service at the Basra Memorial. Nearly 400 service members representing each British unit in Iraq attended the ceremony and read aloud the names of the 53 British killed to that point in the campaign. This ceremony marked the first British Remembrance Day service in Iraq since 1989 and the first at the Basra Memorial since 1954.<sup>220</sup> Six years later, on April 30, 2009, the British held a ceremony in Basra marking the end of their combat operations in Iraq. In those six years 179 British

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<sup>218</sup> David Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 265.

<sup>219</sup> Sarah Crown, “British troops move into Basra,” *The Guardian*, Published April 6, 2003, Accessed March 10, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/apr/07/iraq.sarahcrown>.

<sup>220</sup> Kim Ghattas, “Fallen Brits in Iraq Remembered,” *BBC News*, Published November 9, 2003, Accessed March 10, 2018. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3255727.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3255727.stm).

soldiers lost their lives.<sup>221</sup> Far from the nearly one million dead of the British Empire in the First World War, the dead of the modern war in Iraq no longer warranted large-scale government memorials and cemeteries. Instead, Britain repatriated its war dead home to their families for private burials. No British soldiers went missing in action during the entire campaign.

The low intensity of modern warfare and the relatively limited number of casualties it produced in Iraq no longer justified a nationalization of Britain's war dead or their memorialization in carefully planned cemeteries and memorials. This meant that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, having changed its name following the dissolution of the British Empire, no longer played a central role in commemorating Britain's war dead. In fact, the Commission did not undertake any large scale memorialization or building projects following the end of the Second World War. The dissolution of the British Empire and the shrinking scale of the wars fought by Britain in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries rendered the massive commemoration efforts of the Commission obsolete. Once again British war memorialization returned to a private effort, conducted by families and small communities independent of the government.

Although the Commission's oversight of memorializing the war dead of the British Empire lasted a mere 50 years, its efforts can only be viewed as a massive success. The memorials and cemeteries it constructed following the First and Second World Wars still stand as some of the most visible symbols of the cost of twentieth-century warfare. They also continue to fulfil the Commission's vision of a memorial to Empire. Although the British Empire no longer exists, the soldiers from across the world who found their final resting place in the

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<sup>221</sup> Anonymous, "UK combat operations end in Iraq," BBC News, Published April 30, 2009. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/8026136.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8026136.stm).

Commission's cemeteries and memorials are forever unified in its memory. The ground these sites occupy can be viewed as the last surviving territory of the Empire, paid for with the blood of those soldiers who fought and died in its service. The Commission still oversees most of these sites, carefully maintaining these grounds and the memories they represent.

For India's dead of the First World War these sites represent a notion of Empire their nation successfully strove to gain independence from. The independence movements led by such notable Indians as Mahatma Gandhi continually gained momentum during both world wars until India finally gained its independence in 1947 and became a republic in 1950. But during the First World War at least, there existed a semblance of a unified British Empire coming together to fight and win the largest European war to that point. The 1.3 million soldiers India sent to fight overseas represented the single largest contribution of manpower to the Imperial war effort and these soldiers served with distinction from the earliest days of the war until well after its end. The most significant monuments to their service are found at Neuve Chapelle in France and at Basra in Iraq.

The fates of these two memorials could not be more different. Today France is a nation that has been at peace since the end of the Second World War, yet still scared by the two world wars that raged through its cities and countryside. The First World War took the lives of over 1.4 million French soldiers and civilians and has become a central element of French national identity.<sup>222</sup> The sites that commemorate the soldiers of all nations who fought to defend France during that war, including those built by the IWGC, are viewed with reverence by the French nation. The memorial at Neuve Chapelle is still maintained by the CWGC, its horticulture and

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<sup>222</sup> Guillaume Vandebroucke "Fertility and Wars: The Case of World War I in France," *American Economic Journal: Macroeconomics* 6, no. 2 (April 2014): 108-136.

structure carefully kept in pristine condition. Every year thousands of people visit the memorial either to pay their respects or out of a fascination with the war and its significance. The memorial also hosts numerous events commemorating the war, including a visit by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in April of 2015. It has also been updated over time and in 1964 the Commission added to the monument the names of six Indian soldiers exhumed from the Sarrebourg French Military Extension and cremated.<sup>223</sup> Still treated with the same care and reverence the Commission put into its planning and construction, the memorial at Neuve Chapelle stands as a fitting tribute to the sacrifices of those Indian soldiers who died on the Western Front and who have no known grave.

In modern day Iraq, the Basra Memorial has suffered an unfortunate fate. The nation of Iraq is still facing the consequences of the First World War to this day. Historians have noted the direct connection between British led efforts to draw national borders in the Middle East following the war and current day instability and conflict in the region. This instability and conflict created a profound effect on the current condition of the Basra Memorial. Following the collapse of the British Empire and the end of British influence in Iraq, the Basra Memorial was left to the mercy of the Iraqi government and the local population. Despite this, the Iraqi government under Saddam Hussein showed a great amount of respect to the memorial. When its original site on the west bank of the Shatt-Al-Arab became threatened, the Iraqi government moved the monument in 1997 to a more suitable location 32 kilometers west of Basra on the road to Nasiriyah. The US led invasion of 2003, however, ended any kind of stability that existed

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<sup>223</sup> Commonwealth War Graves Commission, "Neuve Chapelle: History," Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Accessed March 10, 2018. <https://www.cwgc.org/find/find-cemeteries-and-memorials/144000/neuve-chapelle-memorial/history>.

in the country. Years of occupation and the later conflict against the Islamic State left the Iraqi government with little resources to spend on maintaining war memorials and the Commission itself has largely been denied access to its memorials and cemeteries in the country. Today, the Commission simply waits until local conditions improve and it can return to Iraq and undertake rehabilitation projects of its memorials and cemeteries. Until then, the temporary Basra Memorial is contained in a two volume Roll of Honor containing the names of all those soldiers commemorated on the memorial. Kept locked in a glass display case at the Commission's headquarters in Maidenhead, United Kingdom, these books are available to the public on request through an archivist. These books also contain the names of every Indian soldier left off of the memorial itself.<sup>224</sup> Though not inscribed in stone, the names and individual memories of these soldiers have finally in some small way returned to their rightful place in the Commission's memorialization efforts of the Mesopotamian Campaign.

The memorials at Neuve Chapelle and Basra illustrate the profound effect geography and official policy can have on the creation and fate of war memorials. In a war as large and widespread as World War I graves registration and record keeping efforts diverged between theaters and adapted to the local conditions. Near to Britain and the center of the entire war, the Commission meticulously planned and executed these efforts on the Western Front. Thousands of miles away and taking place in the middle of an expeditionary campaign, these efforts in Mesopotamia remained unorganized and inefficient. The significance of this divergence in policy for India's war dead comes down to record keeping. The detailed and accurate records of India's

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<sup>224</sup> Commonwealth War Graves Commission, "Basra Memorial," Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Accessed March 10, 2018. <https://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/88400/basra-memorial/>.

missing war dead in Europe enabled the Commission to memorialize all of these soldiers by name on its memorials in France and Belgium. In Mesopotamia, working with fragmented and inaccurate records, the Commission reduced these names to a statistic. With no known graves or physical remains, the missing of war have only their names to act as their final monument. Although the British government and the Commission put in every effort to give these missing soldiers the monuments they deserved, they could not overcome the simple restriction of not having the information needed to do so.

To look at the cemeteries and memorials built by the Imperial War Graves Commission following the First World War is to view a physical expression of grief as well as a monument to an Empire that no longer exists. The names recorded on the headstones and walls of these sites each represent a unique individual with their own stories and their own tragic ends. The memory of war is often one of victories and defeats, politics and strategy; but it is the dead of war who represent the true tragedy of these conflicts. For India, the tragedy of the First World War is represented by the 60,000 soldiers it sent overseas to fight for the British Empire who never returned home. Those Indians who died on the Western Front have their names forever enshrined in meticulously maintained cemeteries and on the walls of carefully planned memorials. For those who died in the sands of Mesopotamia, the site of India's greatest victories and defeats, their memory exists in isolated graves and as a number on a crumbling monument, each slowly being consumed by the desert and the continuing chaos of war.

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